

The Afterlives of Shakespeare's Tragedies

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latrocinio patrocinium.

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Dedication

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Dedication	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One	
“Perswasion must be joyn’d to Force”: Sir William Davenant’s <i>Macbeth</i>	16
Chapter Two	
“This language, Sir, adds yet to our Affliction”: Nahum Tate’s <i>King Lear</i>	52
Chapter Three	
“Proved most royal”: Cutting <i>Hamlet</i>	88
Chapter Four	
“Usurpation, tho’ it thrive a while, will at last be punish’d”: <i>Othello</i> as a Villain Play	125
Conclusion	163
Bibliography.....	165

Introduction

Several years ago, I was attending a production of *Macbeth* at the Guthrie Theater with some friends and colleagues. We were socializing before the show, casually discussing Shakespeare, and they turned to me asking, “So, we can’t remember: are the witches responsible for Duncan’s death or was Macbeth?” Shakespeare’s play is, of course, ambiguous about this issue. These kinds of interpretive questions have plagued audiences since the seventeenth century. This level of ambiguity has become something scholars revere about Shakespeare: his brilliant metaphors, his endless versatility. At the same time, scholars of adaptation theory recognize that each production of Shakespeare is an interpretation. Not every ambiguity can survive; some decisions must be made in order to bring Shakespeare’s plays to life. How a producer or an adapter chooses to answer those questions ultimately has bearing on whether we consider an adaptation to be *Shakespeare*. Margaret Jane Kidnie addresses this problem using two examples: one performance which is received as Shakespeare, and one which is not:

The Doran *All’s Well* projected an illusion of work stability as the reassuring effect of performance by seeming deliberately to turn away from a very specific form of adaptive practice at a heightened moment in the RSC’s institutional history. By contrast, the self-consciously innovative Warchus *Hamlet* challenged in key ways expectations of the work, so prompting a debate about the essence of *Hamlet* that serves no less effectively than the Doran instance to highlight how critical assessment of the particular instance *produces*, rather than meets or fails to meet, the criteria of identity by which the work is defined.”¹

¹ Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2009), 34.

Her point is that the cultural moment of the adaptation has a great deal to do with whether it is received as Shakespeare; that is, whether or not that particular production or version of the play has made appropriate interpretive decisions regarding the ambiguities in the playtext.

This seems like a modern problem, given the development of entertainment and new mediums, film, television, etc., over time. But it is not. Sir William Davenant's adaptation of *Macbeth* (1664), for instance, locates the origins of evil strictly within the world of men. There is no space for powerful witches in his version and that fact had little to do with the belief in the existence of supernatural figures. His peers had lived through the English Civil Wars. They knew the horror of political ambition all too well. Like today's audiences, these late-seventeenth century adapters of Shakespeare's tragedies, such as Davenant, did everything they could to present clear interpretations of Shakespeare's plays. They did so not in an attempt to fix something that was broken, but in a quest to present Shakespeare's original intent to their audiences.² This desire,

² The interpretation of Davenant's patent is debated. First, it is questioned whether or not Davenant was legally required to alter Shakespeare. This issue is initially discussed by John Freehafer who argues that Davenant was under obligation to revise the plays ("The Formation of the London Patent Companies in 1660," *Theatre Notebook* 20.6 (1965), 27). Gunnar Sorelius later questions this claim, though he comes to accept it (see *The Giant Race Before the Flood: Pre-Restoration Drama on the Stage and in the Criticism of the Restoration* (Uppsala, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 41; "The Early History of the Restoration Theatre: Some Problems Reconsidered," *Theatre Notebook*, 33 (1979): 52–61). Hume accepts Freehafer's position in *Development of English Drama* (Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 20-1). Jean I. Marsden suggests that "making fit" did not always involve major revision (*The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 160, n. 1). Barbara Murray suggests that because the patent does not require that Davenant remove obscenities and like matter, it means that Davenant only needed to rework the plays for his particular company (*Restoration Shakespeare: Viewing the Voice* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2001), 16-17).

demonstrated in the adaptations I examine, is quite contrary to what many readers might expect from the critical history of Restoration Shakespeare.

The question of how to analyze these adaptations often ends in a dismissal of these works as “not Shakespeare.” Scholars have dealt with the phenomenon of early Shakespearean adaptation in two key ways. Some of the first critics, such as George C. D. Odell and Hazelton Spencer, have argued that Restoration playwrights adapted Shakespeare in order to improve him, that the Restoration found his works lacking both in modern language and in formal elements like the unities. Their opinion, that Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare are a travesty, rests primarily in the altering of Shakespeare’s language. Spencer, for instance, writes of Davenant’s *Hamlet*, “What makes this *Hamlet* an alteration, and reprehensible, is the mutilation of Shakespeare’s diction.”³ In the past couple of decades, critics have worked both to explore the adaptations as plays in the own right and to examine Shakespeare’s rise to popularity in more detail; adaptations of Shakespeare in the Restoration are built into this narrative. Examining Shakespeare’s rise as the national poet during the eighteenth century, Michael Dobson shows how adaptations often worked in conjunction with his canonization by employing the study of cultural materials. Jean I. Marsden’s work on Restoration Shakespeare studies the plays in the context of eighteenth-century literary theory in order to determine how the theoretical context of the adaptations

Mongi Raddadi takes a similar position to Murray (*Davenant’s Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1979)).

³ Hazelton Spencer, “*Hamlet* Under the Restoration,” *PMLA*. 38.4 (1923): 770-791.

influenced them. Barbara A. Murray studies the linguistic changes in Shakespearean adaptations to demonstrate how adapters reworked Shakespeare's poetry to fit their own theoretical concerns: to make metaphors and morals more consistent and coherent; and to use music and scenery to continue their thematic coherency. Katherine Scheil, focusing on the comedies in particular, argues that we look at adaptations individually, and that in doing so we might come to a more nuanced understanding of Shakespeare's rise as a national poet. Don-John Dugas examines Shakespearean adaptations as both performance and textual commodities in order to demonstrate how the adaptations combined with the revival of Shakespeare in print fueled his popularity.⁴

Despite recent works both in adaptation studies, as well as studies of Restoration Shakespeare, which work against that which Linda Hutcheon calls "fidelity theory," these sentiment that these Restoration adaptations are somehow lesser plays than Shakespeare's have persisted.⁵ This problem is one of temporality. Likewise, Stephen Orgel's book, *The Authentic Shakespeare, and Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage*, demonstrates how questions of

⁴ Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print, 1660-1740* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2006); Marsden, *Re-Imagined Text*; Murray, esp. 35; George C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1920); Katherine West Scheil, *The Taste of the Town: Shakespearean Comedy and the Early Eighteenth-Century Theater* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2003); and Hazelton Spencer, *Shakespeare Improved: the Restoration versions in quarto and on the stage* (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co, 1963).

⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), especially 6-7.

authenticity and evidence are “profoundly time bound.”⁶ My argument is two-fold. I focus on the tragedies because they were considered to be the highest form of literary art. In a period that gets characterized primarily by bawdy comedy, it is important to look at another side of the story. They are also largely ignored, considered to be left untouched. I demonstrate, firstly, that Shakespeare’s tragedies are adaptations, just as much as the comedies. I choose to use the term adaptation because I want to focus on these texts as in constant flux, as changed from the Shakespearean playtext enough as to warrant some kind of interpretation. I do not use the term appropriation, because I do not mean to suggest that they had a primarily political or social agenda, as opposed to a literary one.⁷ The social agenda was, in many ways, a literary one. Marsden, for instance, only considers adapted Shakespeare to be plays “which change Shakespeare more substantively than by making cuts to reduce the playing time [...] or adding a few scattered new lines or phrases.”⁸ In the wake of most recent

⁶ Stephen Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare, and Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2002). For more on the authenticity issue, see also, C. F. Tucker Brooke, “Introduction,” *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), esp. vi-lvi; Richard Burt, “Shakespeare, ‘Glo-Cali-Zation,’ Race, and the Small Screens of Post-Popular Culture,” *Shakespeare, the Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, eds. Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (Routledge: London, 2003), 14-36; Hutcheon; and Douglas Lanier, “Recent Shakespeare Adaptation and the Mutations of Cultural Capital,” *Shakespeare Studies* 38 (2010): 104-13.

⁷ For a discussion of various terms, see Thomas Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013); Ruby Cohn, *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, eds., *Adaptations of Shakespeare: an Anthology of Plays from the 17th Century to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Hutcheon; and Kidnie.

⁸ Marsden, *Re-Imagined Text*, 7.

adaptation theory, however, we must reconsider these performance texts as adaptations and compare them to more dramatically altered plays. Kidnie wrestles with the problem of defining adaptation and production, ultimately demonstrating that each performance is an adaptation: “In effect, adaptation keeps emerging as a ‘problem’ for production since the work itself adapts over time. By classifying just *some* productions as adaptation, as a departure from the thing itself, communities of users generate through a negative logic the effect of conceptual stability.”⁹ Shakespeare’s intent is unrecoverable. Each production or version of his works is an interpretation on the part of the writer, the producer, the actor, the reader, the viewer. Secondly, I show that as opposed to fixing Shakespeare, these adapters and producers believed that they were uncovering Shakespeare’s intent and messages by clarifying his messages. In doing so, I examine the intersection of theatrical and practical concerns. While economic concerns are certainly a driving force, I argue that these adapters spent time unearthing Shakespeare because they believed his tragedies had valuable messages to offer their audiences.

In part, the desire to interpret Shakespeare correctly comes from a long frustration between those creating theater and their audiences. Restoration adapters of Shakespeare worked in a particularly tumultuous environment.¹⁰ We

⁹ Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), esp. 9.

¹⁰ See John E. Cunningham, *Restoration Drama* (London: Evans Bros., 1966); Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928); Alfred Harbage, *Cavalier Drama: an Historical and Critical Supplement to the Study of Elizabethan and Restoration Stage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936); Derek Hughes, *English Drama, 1660-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon

see this problem not only in the political events and responses on the stage, but also in details like the the initiation of the Free Act, a practice allowing theatergoers to attend a play for one act without paying, or they could use credit if they did not have sufficient funds.¹¹ For example, some verses in the preface to Henry Higden's *The Wary Widow* (1693), mention gallants who at the "Playhouse judge on tick [credit]."¹² Another instance comes from the Epilogue to Sir William Davenant's *The Man's the Master*: "And some (a duce take 'em) pretend / they come but to speak with a friend; / Then wickedly rob us of a whole Play / By stealing five times an Act in a day."¹³ Another common practice was to collect the extra money for a box seat after the performance had begun; only a general admission charge was taken at the doors. Thus one could avoid paying by jumping from pit to box and back and forth. John Lacy's *Sir Hercules Buffoon* (1684) refers to immoral acts both within and outside of the playhouse, equating those acts with cheating the house of money: "[F]or to be witty now, is to be more

Press, 1996); Hume, *Development*; Richard W. Kroll, *Restoration Drama and the 'Circle of Commerce': Tragicomedy, Politics, and Trade in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Nancy Klein Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1600-1671* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Geoffrey Marshall, *Restoration Serious Drama* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975); Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of Restoration Drama 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923); Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Susan J. Owen, *Perspectives on Restoration Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); and Eric Rothstein, *Restoration Tragedy: Form and the Process of Change* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967).

¹¹ Nicoll, 12-13.

¹² Henry Higden, *The Wary Widow* (London: 1693).

¹³ Sir William Davenant, *The Man's the Master, A Comedy* (London: 1669), 76.

troublesome in a playhouse, than a Butcher at a Beargarden: that's wit to tear womens clothes and linen off in the house: that's wit to see a Play for nothing, one Act in the Pit, another in a box, a third in the Gallery, that's wit."¹⁴ Not only were audiences perhaps judging a play on the basis of the free act, they were also inattentive, there to pay as little as possible and with a mind to socialize.

Shadwell's play *The Virtuoso* (1676) criticizes patrons who "come drunk and screaming into a Play-House, and stand upon the benches, and toss their full Periwigs, and empty heads, and with their shrill unbroken pipes, cry *Damn Me, this is a damn'd play; Prithee let's to a whore, Jack.*"¹⁵ In an environment when the respect and attention of theater patrons is perhaps at a minimum, playwrights had to work extra hard in order to present their message and to convince audience members that it was worth *paying* and *paying attention*, that they were indeed getting a value for their money.

Anti-theatrical writings persisted throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁶ These authors critiqued drama on charges of immorality; plays drew crowds, which included thieves and prostitutes. They were performed in the afternoon in open-air theaters and drew people away from work and study. These denigrators worried that the theaters were hotspots for sedition and homosexuality. In *Histriomastix: the Player's Scourge* (1633), William Prynne

¹⁴ John Lacy, *Sir Hercules Buffoon* (London: 1684), sig. B1r.

¹⁵ Thomas Shadwell, *The Virtuoso, a Comedy* (London: 1676), 2-3.

¹⁶ See Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

proclaims he will show the hellish origin of the theaters as “nurseries of all villainy and wickedness; the bane and overthrow of all grace and goodness; the very poison and corruption of men’s minds and manners; the very fatal plagues and overture of the those states and kingdoms where they are tolerated.”¹⁷ Still, Stephen Gosson’s tract *The School of Abuse* (1579) does not begin by condemning theater, but lists a variety of abuses which should be reformed. The point is: theater has potential to benefit society.

Only with the English Civil Wars do these charges of immorality come to fruition. When the non-conformists gain control of Parliament, the theaters are closed in 1642. Thus, with the Restoration, theaters have an increased need to prove their existence necessary and beneficial beyond any doubt if they wanted to attract audiences and remain financially viable.¹⁸ Obviously any theater operating during the early modern period had a need to attract audiences in order to make money. And, certainly, the patent holders during the Restoration had the support of Charles II. When Killigrew’s company is in a terrible state in the 1670s, due largely to mismanagement, the profits were so negligible that Killigrew was in danger of losing his principal actors; several of them gave notice in January 1676/7 that they were going to desist from acting. In February 1675/6, Charles

¹⁷ See William Prynne, “Histriomastix: The Player’s Scourge” in *Shakespeare’s Theater: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 283.

¹⁸ As Hume points out in a discussion about late seventeenth century audience composition, “[i]f there was any time at which the Court circle dominated the theatres, it was during the 1660s, when strenuous Puritan objections to the playhouses reopening would have discouraged many merchants from attending” (25).

orders the company to begin performing again.¹⁹ But the King's Company still fails even with support and an order to perform and closes its doors in April of 1682, with a proposition that the patents be merged.²⁰ Understandably, many scholars of adaptations of Shakespeare have made the important point that, given this environment, being commercially successful was crucial for both the King's Company and the Duke's Company during the 1660s and throughout the late seventeenth century; some have suggested that particular playwrights make changes to pre-1642 plays for entertainment value only.²¹ Certainly being commercially successful was important, and this study does not aim to diminish that consideration.

The four plays I use as case studies were all successful on the stage.²² I begin with some of the more infamously adapted tragedies, Sir William Davenant's *Macbeth* (1664) and Nahum Tate's *King Lear* (1681). Both are treated as ridiculous in their own ways; Davenant's *Macbeth* for his spectacular treatment of the witches, and Tate's *Lear* for its infamous happy ending. These authors adapted Shakespeare by putting their dramatic theory into practice on the stage.²³

¹⁹ Hotson, 258-89.

²⁰ Hotson, 270.

²¹ A few examples include, but are not limited to, Dugas, *Marketing the Bard*; Nancy Klein Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Raddadi; Scheil.

²² Though the successes of the individual plays will be discussed in each chapter, please see the Calendar of Known Performances of Shakespeare Plays in Dugas (*Marketing the Bard*, 13-16).

²³ Hume, for instance, finds that theory and practice often do not coincide in this period and that the drama is "vastly varied and complex in type" (viii). See also Dugas, *Marketing the Bard*, 47.

The linguistic and structural changes to the plays not only illustrate an increased sense of topicality in adaptation, but also show that playwrights increasingly felt the need to reveal their authorial intention and the usefulness of their works through their prefatory material and in the content of the plays themselves. In the case of Davenant's *Macbeth*, I argue that he used new theater technology, such as changeable scenery, new music, and flying machines, in addition to the female body, to focus his audiences on a more concise interpretation of *Macbeth*. These elements enhanced his audience's experience by focusing their attention and thus clarifying the play's message. I show that Davenant's changes, including his expanded female roles, the changes he made to the witches, and the removal of the apparitions, to direct the attention of theatergoers to a lesson about the dangers of political ambition. In studying *Lear*, I argue that the Tate addresses moral problems in the text, such as an aging and incompetent king, by depicting Lear as a king who made the best decisions he could given the information that he had; in this version, Lear excludes Cordelia because he believes she has betrayed him. Tate's changes transform Shakespeare's tragedy into an assessment of right political loyalty, the dangers of betrayal, and the importance of succession.

The second half of my project turns to two tragedies that were previously considered unadapted: *Hamlet* and *Othello*.²⁴ In order to determine what these plays looked like on the Restoration stage, I reconstruct these productions by examining performance cuts made to the plays as evidenced by the Smock Alley

²⁴ See, for examples of scholars with this position, Dugas; Dobson; and Marsden. I discuss their positions at length in Chapter Three.

Promptbooks. In the case of *Hamlet*, likely altered for performance by Davenant, I look at how the performance cuts affect the interpretation of the play.

Specifically, I suggest that productions of *Hamlet* during the Restoration used the play for a political message regarding succession, but that message was dependent on answering questions of Hamlet's moral status and his supposed inactivity, Gertrude's complicity, and the role of Fortinbras.

Finally, the inclusion of *Othello* in my argument is significant because it functions as a veritable "wild card" in that, casually examined, it seems to undermine many of our assumptions about successful productions of Shakespeare on the late seventeenth-century stage. In a time when adapters are adding new songs and dances, expanding women's roles, and changing the genres of plays, late seventeenth-century producers of *Othello* cut Desdemona's "Willow Song," in addition to many of her lines. Whereas Cordelia is rescued from her cruel fate, Desdemona is still murdered by Othello. The play is also not overtly political, characterized now most frequently as a "domestic" tragedy. I argue that the excised portions of *Othello* can be attributed to issues of moral clarity. *Othello* was received as a villain play; in that vein, any passage that brought up the culpability of Othello or Desdemona was removed.²⁵ The Willow Song, for instance, also contains a conversation between Emilia and Desdemona about Lodovico's attractiveness, thus undermining her claim to have never considered men other than her husband. Although musical additions were popular with

²⁵ See especially J. P. Vander Motten, "Iago and Lincoln's Inn Fields: Thomas Porter's *The Villain* on the Early Restoration Stage," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24.3 (1984): 415-428.

Restoration audiences, songs were not kept at the expense of the clarity of a play's message.

The treatment of these plays points to a strong desire amongst Restoration writers to get back to the authentic Shakespeare. For instance, early productions of Hamlet even claimed that Betterton learned his interpretation from Taylor and Taylor was taught by Shakespeare himself.²⁶ While certainly untrue, the goal is to craft a direct link back to Shakespeare. The implication hidden in this desire is that interpreting literature, and interpreting it correctly, mattered. The audience was inattentive, to be sure, but authors bore some responsibility for making an interpretation of a literary work clear. Interpreting Shakespeare "correctly," for an audience would have something valuable to them. The project of adaptation in the seventeenth century then becomes a project about showing audiences how best to interpret literature.

This claim is underscored when one considers the difference between a viewing and a reading audience. Lukas Erne argues for such a difference with Shakespeare.²⁷ The audience members reading these adapted texts, like Pepys, would have access to the prefatory material and thus the dramatic criticism of the author. Those watching the text would have proof in the pudding: a tightly woven, simplified, in the most positive sense, and effective dramatic product.

²⁶ See James G. McManaway and William B. Van Lennep, "A 'Hamlet' Emendation," *The Modern Language Review* 34.1 (1939): 68-90; and Hazelton Spencer, "Seventeenth-Century Cuts in Hamlet's Soliloquies," *The Review of English Studies* 9.35 (1933): 257-265.

²⁷ Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as a Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

What becomes clear in studying the tragedies as adaptations that put dramatic theory into practice is that the much-degraded simplicity of these adaptations is stunningly effective and clear in their interpretations of Shakespeare. Simplicity, particularly on the page, can strike readers as dull, but it can also bring focus on what is important in the design. On the stage, it is, in many ways, vital. The RSC's 1976 *Macbeth*, directed by Trevor Nunn and starring Ian McKellen and Judi Dench, is an exquisite example. Critically hailed as a masterpiece, this production presented Shakespeare on a bare stage, painted black, with minimal costumes and lighting. The psychological trauma instantly became the focus. In some senses, the simplicity of these older adaptations prefigures the tenants of modern design. Dieter Rams, the German industrial designer, famous for the advent of Functionalism and the work he did with Braun, first made a name for himself with what was called Snow White's Coffin, a combination record player and radio that featured a clear plastic lid that allowed for uncontaminated acoustics. The workings of the player were on display for all to see: "Instead of being hidden away in a piece of furniture, the controls and functional aspects of the device were not only on display, but they were the predominant feature of the design."²⁸ Nothing is extraneous: "Braun was never interested in making pretty boxes for its products, or in decoration for its own sake. Theirs was a much deeper approach, prioritizing the needs of the user (whether the user was aware of them or not)."²⁹ In the world of theater, its

²⁸ Sophie Lovell, *Dieter Rams: As Little Design as Possible*, (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2011), 46.

²⁹ Lovell, 83.

functionality, its message becomes the focus. Cutting out extraneous characters, simplifying metaphors, adding in music directly related to the main theme of the play, all of these moves allow adapters, as well as audiences, to focus on what was most important: the bigger picture. As opposed to detracting from the play, their ability to focus or distill the material allows them to highlight what is most important. Think, for example, of the established hierarchy of warning lights or traffic lights. This established code allows what needs to be immediately recognized to shine through uncluttered and undistracted. Likewise, these tragedies are Shakespeare at his most distilled. As scholars, it allows us to focus on what was most important to these adapters and see what they thought Shakespeare “really” intended, despite his various “problems.” This reading is not Shakespeare made “fit.” This is Shakespeare uncovered. These authors believed that they were part of a critical pre-war heritage that allowed them to be able to reveal Shakespeare to the world—while simultaneously showing that world what the English stage could and should be.

Chapter One

“Perswasion must be joyn’d to Force”: Sir William Davenant’s *Macbeth*

The production history and scholarly criticism surrounding Sir William Davenant’s *Macbeth* seem to tell different stories. It was a popular adaptation in the Restoration; we have an impressive 15 recorded performances between 1666-1682.¹ This popularity implicit in the production history of Sir William Davenant’s *Macbeth* may be surprising to modern readers in several ways. It makes more logical sense, for instance, that a play like *Macbeth* would *not* be popular on stage during a period immediately following regicide. It also is surprising to many readers that a play, which some critics have called a morality play, would feature an emphasis on spectacle.² In this chapter, I will explore this apparent contradiction between the play’s reception during the Restoration and its reception in modern scholarship by illustrating how this adaptation is a product of contemporary tragic theory. When comparing Davenant’s *Macbeth* to his own

¹ We have recorded performances for December 17 and 28, 1666; April 19, 1667; October 16, 1667; November 6, 1667; August 12, 1668; December 21, 1668; January 15, 1669; November 5, 1670; February 18, 1673; August 28, 1675; October 2 and 18, 1676; June 2, 1680; and February 16, 1682. See Table 1.1 in Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print, 1660-1740* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 13-16.

² See Simon Williams, “Taking Macbeth Out of Himself: Davenant, Garrick, Schiller, and Verdi,” *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 57 (2004): 54-68; Gunnar Sorelius, *The Giant Race Before the Flood: Pre-Restoration Drama on the Stage and in the Criticism of the Restoration* (Uppsala, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966); Mongi Raddadi, *Davenant’s Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1979).

theories of drama, as well as contemporary theories of the early and developing Restoration stage, it becomes clear that his changes and emendations move beyond entertainment for entertainment's sake. Some of the characteristics discussed included the drive towards neoclassical "rules," an emphasis on simplified plots and language for the sake of clarity, a desire (and legal requirement) for decorum, and, most importantly, a drive towards poetic justice with a heightened emotional payoff. Davenant's *Macbeth* is certainly in accord with these theories, especially when one compares these concepts with Davenant's own theories of tragedy and its didactic ability.

It is crucial to consider the historical context of this adaptation. This chapter and the one following it discuss adaptations that seem to be worlds apart: Davenant's *Macbeth* and Tate's *King Lear*, one appearing in 1664 and one nearly twenty years later in 1681. Tate's *Lear* is famously revised to have a happy ending, whereas the mood of Davenant's *Macbeth* is serious. The state of theater at the end of the seventeenth century is particularly varied.³ One common link between these two plays, however, is the especially uncertain state of the theaters at the time of both adaptations. In the early 1660s, the theaters were just beginning to establish themselves after 18 years of official closure; in the early 1680s, the state of theater is impacted by the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis.⁴ The importance of adaptations in such a time is underscored by the fact

³ See Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

⁴ See Hume, *Development*, 8.

that the King's Company was willing to stage more adaptations in the late 1670s than they did in the 1660s. When the theaters reopen, this is not the case, as the King's Company had the majority of the repertory available to them and were able to stage the plays with little or no revisions. In contrast, Davenant's Duke's Company staged the majority of Shakespearean adaptations in the period.⁵ The King's Company apparently learned from Davenant's success and turned to adapting Shakespeare, staging four out of the ten new adaptations during the Exclusion Crisis, the period in which the company is on the brink of failure.⁶

In the case of Davenant's *Macbeth*, the recent political events of the Restoration inspired both the adaptation and the aesthetic theory behind it. Rather than being an exploration of evil, as Shakespeare's own *Macbeth* is usually characterized, Davenant's version is a concise statement against political ambition and a thoroughly serious play, void of any comic elements. Davenant's vision is best understood through the various cuts and additions he makes to the play, especially the exclusion of the Porter scene, the dating of the play, the treatment of the witches and their various entertainments. These alterations suggest that the play was functioning in accordance with theories of tragedy in the Restoration and with Davenant's own theories about the seriousness of tragedy and its moral import. Davenant's version, based on these cuts and additions, can easily be

⁵ Davenant petitioned for, and was granted, the rights to the following plays of Shakespeare: *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Henry the Eighth*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*. He also got the rights to Denham's *The Sophy* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (Raddadi, 10).

⁶ Dugas, *Marketing the Bard*, 44.

interpreted as a retelling of the Restoration. Macbeth receives poetic justice, and Macduff, a man with the true sense of political ambition, restores the rightful king. The popularity of the play then makes sense, reinforcing the argument that Davenant's version was in accord with both the tastes and theories of the day.

Davenant's Theory of Tragedy

Some of the most important evidence for Davenant's thoughts on tragedy, as well as his version of *Macbeth*, can be found in his prefatory writing. I am not the first scholar to use prefatory writing as the foundation for literary theory in a period when criticism as we know it is just developing.⁷ Generally speaking, I follow Paul Cannan's model of how we can re-understand what constitutes literary criticism. In his book *The Emergence of Dramatic Criticism in England*, he makes extensive use of this body of material in arguing that how modern scholars understand criticism needs to be flexible for the late seventeenth century and that writers were making attempts in this material "to define the rules and practices of critical discourse."⁸ Upon close examination, the reasons that each playwright professes are his aims for the craft of important literature are directly reflected in the work itself. We can then use this body of material as an important reconstruction of how each playwright was thinking about particular literary

⁷ Paul D. Cannan, *The Emergence of Dramatic Criticism in England: From Jonson to Pope* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); J. R. Jacob and Timothy Rayler, "Opera and Obedience: Thomas Hobbes and *A Proposition for Advancement of Moralite* by Sir William Davenant," *The Seventeenth Century* 6 (1991): 205-50.

⁸ Cannan, *Emergence*, 12.

questions including the function of literature, what makes good and/or effective literature, and why and how adaptation is a useful practice.

In *Discourse Upon Gondibert* (1650), Davenant writes not only to explain his choices made in crafting his heroic poem *Gondibert* to Thomas Hobbes, but also to illustrate his own literary theory behind the craft of poetry or literature.⁹ His work argues that poets have a responsibility to represent the human world and that they must represent that world morally. Furthermore, much like Sidney, Davenant too argues that poets are not bound to tell the truth as historians are, but that they can help mend the problems of the past by retelling them.¹⁰

I was likewise more willing to derive my theme from elder times, as thinking it no little mark of skilfulnesse to comply with the common Infirmitie; for men (even of the best education) discover their eyes to be weak, when they look upon the glory of Virtue (which is great actions) and rather endure it at distance then near; being more apt to believe, and love the renown of Predecessours, then of Contemporaries, whose deeds excelling theirs in their own sigh.¹¹

History, then, can be retold as a moral example. The best way to display such a moral example is through the telling of a tragedy. Davenant writes that tragedies “would set forth greatnesse and excellent virtue (which is the Theam of *Tragedy*) publickly to the people.”¹² There are two most appropriate subjects for terror:

“Now (Sir) I again ask you pardon, for I have again digress'd; my immediate

⁹ Sir William Davenant, *A Discourse upon Gondibert an Heroick Poem* (Paris: Chez Matthieu Guillemot, 1650).

¹⁰ Davenant, *Discourse*, 22-23.

¹¹ Davenant, *Discourse*, 23.

¹² Davenant, *Discourse*, 25.

businesses being to tell you that the distempers of Love and Ambition are the onely characters I design'd to expose as objects of terrour."¹³ In this preface, Davenant details his understanding of what constitutes appropriate subjects for literature, especially tragedy (ambition and love), as well as his argument that the retelling of the past can be an educational experience for one's audience. In essence, he finds that literature has an important educational and moral function (to represent virtuous lessons) and that certain subjects and adaptations of the past are more effective at fulfilling this purpose than others.¹⁴

From Davenant's writings we can then infer that *Macbeth's* themes are the most appropriate for tragedy and that the witches are more appropriately described as objects of terror because they are the characters that first spark ambition in Macbeth. Just as in Shakespeare's play, Macbeth has a moment of introspection immediately after meeting them. He ends an important aside expressing the same doubts as Shakespeare's Macbeth:

[...] I'm *Thane of Cawdor*;
 If good? why am I then preplex't with doubt?
 My future bliss causes my present fears,
 Fortune, methinks, which rains down Honour on me,
 Seems to rain down bloud too: *Duncan* does appear
 Clouded by my increasing Glories: but

¹³ Davenant, *Discourse*, 35.

¹⁴ In his edition of Davenant's *Gondibert*, David F. Gladish makes the following argument about how the poem can be read, judging it as a sincere statement of Davenant's personal feelings: "Moreover, it is a unique effort to apply the structural principles of drama to the plotting of a romantic story." Although the introduction is brief, his reading of the poem aligns with my findings that Davenant was a poet who was willing to put his theories into practice in his own writing. See Sir William Davenant, *Sir William Davenant's Gondibert*, ed. David F. Gladish (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), xix, xxiii.

These are but dreams.¹⁵

Although Davenant's *Macbeth* has the same moment of doubt, Davenant here uses the witches to prompt foreshadowing of Macbeth's future. The same creatures which had the ability to predict the fortune that gives Macbeth honor also suggest to him that he will soon be covered in blood and lead him immediately to perceive Duncan as someone standing in his way. There is no sense here that what the witches have said to Macbeth is easily dismissed or is not serious. Although Macbeth attempts to discredit his emotions and the encounter as only a dream or a fancy, the fact that he senses the horror of his future and immediately connects that fate to eliminating Duncan is significant. In Shakespeare's version, Macbeth does not mention Duncan's name, although he contemplates a murder he cannot quite reconcile: "My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical, / Shakes so my single state of man that function / Is smother'd in surmise."¹⁶ According to Davenant's own theory, the witches function as terrifying creatures present in a tragedy—the best sort of vehicle for conveying a moral lesson.

Davenant's moral theory was also developed in his pamphlet, published anonymously, *A Proposition for Advancement of Moralite, By a new way of*

¹⁵ Sir William Davenant, *Macbeth a Tragaedy: With all the Alterations, Amendments, Additions and New Songs: As it's Now Acted at the Duke's Theatre* (London: Printed for P. Chetwin, and are to be Sold by most Booksellers, 1674), I.iii.44. This version is cited by act, scene and page number, as no standard line numbers are provided in the text.

¹⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, eds. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), I.iv.139-141. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Shakespeare's works use *The Riverside Shakespeare* and cite by act, scene and line number.

Entertainment of the People (1654), where he sets forth the argument that if all forms of control for the people have failed (i.e. laws, arms, and religion), then the government should consider using the stage.¹⁷ He offers a variety of reasons that these other methods are not effective at conveying a moral example, namely that people cannot easily digest religion, arms and laws, that they are not open to these forms of intellectual models.¹⁸ Religion is not easy to understand, arms involve compulsion, and people have a fear of new laws.¹⁹ The benefit of the stage is that it is voluntary and more easily understood. It touches the senses in ways that more traditional forms of education cannot. Davenant explains that novelty on the stage has the potential to draw in a crowd, just like a new building or painting might. Once the crowd has been enticed into attendance, the stage can teach them something new: “that Perswasion must be joynd to Force, it can be compas’d no other way than by surprisall of their Eyes and Ears.”²⁰ He further explains that the theatrical entertainment must not inspire aversion, but rather entertainment should

¹⁷ James R. Jacob and Timothy Raylor provide evidence for Davenant’s authorship of this pamphlet. They cite the papers of Samuel Hartlib as mentioning a John Pell bringing in “a little discourse supposed to bee Sir William Davenant’s the Laureat Poet [...] called *A Proposition for Advancement of Morality*” qtd. In Jacob and Raylor, *Opera and Obedience. Thomas Hobbes and A Proposition for Advancement of Morality by Sir William Davenant*, 205; B. S. Capp, *England’s Culture Wars: Puritan Reformation and its Enemies in the Interregnum, 1649-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Katherine Rowe, “Humoral Knowledge and Liberal Cognition in Davenant’s *Macbeth*,” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, eds. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 169-191.

¹⁸ Sir William Davenant, *A Proposition for Advancement of Morality by a New Way of Entertainment of the People* (London: 1654), 3.

¹⁹ Davenant, *Proposition*, 3-7.

²⁰ Davenant, *Proposition*, 11.

be more convincing. Truth should be mixed with “verbal painting,” much like Christ did in his parables, which renders it more convincing.²¹ Stagecraft is “not only for delight but instruction.”²² The pamphlet did not gain support or reopen the theaters, but it likely helped Davenant in his productions of private entertainments.²³ This pamphlet then demonstrates that Davenant had clear goals in mind for drama during this period and his theory can go a long way towards explaining his revisions of *Macbeth*. Although didacticism, moral example and theory could be considered as perhaps high art values, impractical concerns that cannot function on an unstable, uncertain Restoration stage, Davenant here connects “practical” entertainment value to these higher order concerns. The overarching social concern here is the practical need for theater. For him, spectacle is not just a quick and easy audience draw; it is a gloss, which works not against, but with, an overarching lesson or message.

Macbeth and the Unities

One aspect of tragic theory that Davenant does not spend much time writing about is the unities.²⁴ In the case of *Macbeth*, Davenant does make

²¹ Davenant, *Proposition*, 17.

²² Davenant, *Proposition*, 19.

²³ Jacob and Rayler discuss the extent to which Davenant was actually supported by the Commonwealth in their article. See also Rowe, 173.

²⁴ Raddadi classifies Davenant’s changes to Shakespeare’s works as falling under three categories of influence: theatrical conditions, features of his company, and audience taste. That being said, he still classifies Davenant’s *Macbeth* as a “neoclassical tragedy,” despite feeling that Davenant was not too preoccupied with the unities, since he does not discuss them in a *Preface to Gondibert*, for instance (Raddadi, 107, 112).

changes related to the unities, and these changes actually impact the moral lesson of the play. What I would like to emphasize about Davenant's adaptations, then, is how closely the form of his plays relates to and affects the moral meaning. The changes he makes in order to bring Shakespeare's work closer to the unities impact matters of perspicuity, poetic justice, and the emotional payoff resulting from that representation of justice.

Although it was not a hard and fast rule, many adaptations of Shakespeare in the Restoration do make the drive to follow the unities more closely, as many Restoration playwrights were influenced by French neoclassical theory. Although Rymer's translation of René Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie* did not appear until 1674, some playwrights in the period, including Davenant, spent time in France and thus would have been exposed to trends in French theater. Indeed, the most popular playwrights in the early 1660s, carried over from pre-1642 theater, were Beaumont, Fletcher, and Jonson, all of whom follow the unities more strictly than Shakespeare. This is particularly the case with Jonson. It took a number of years for drama to establish itself as Carolean, or as distinct from the Caroline or Cavalier tradition.²⁵ While Davenant does not seem to have explicitly advocated the unities, he does write of the rules in his *Preface to Gondibert* in that he cautions judging other writers based on rules they have rejected.²⁶

²⁵ Hume, *Development*, 6-7.

²⁶ See Davenant, *Discourse*, 43; Raddadi, 112.

An additional representation of contemporary theory that would have bearing on Davenant's work is Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*. Although it is not published until 1668, in his preface, Dryden describes it as a project that he had been developing for some time and had only recently reconsidered: "As I was lately reviewing my loose Papers, amongst the rest I found this Essay, the writing of which in this rude and indigested manner wherein your Lordship now sees it, serv'd as an amusement to me in the Country, when the violence of the last Plague had driven me from town."²⁷ Dryden is then first writing his *Essay* during the plague of 1665, making it not unreasonable to consider the work a fair representation of what Dryden considered to be important critical debates concerning drama in the 1660s. Davenant himself is said to be represented by the figure of Eugenius, who argues against the ancients on behalf of the moderns to demonstrate that the moderns have surpassed the ancients in terms of drama.²⁸ Notably, the unities are a large part of this discussion. The figure of Crites, argued to be Sir Robert Howard, Dryden's brother-in-law, claims that the ancients and the French write the best drama because they are able to follow the unities most strictly.²⁹ Eugenius responds that contemporary writers have followed the lessons

²⁷ John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesie, an Essay* (London: 1668), sig. A2v.

²⁸ David Haley, *Dryden and the Problem of Freedom: the Republican Aftermath, 1649-1680* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 166.

²⁹ See analyses of the representations of characters in John Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), esp. vii; John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays* (London and New York: J. M. Dent; Dutton, 1962), esp. xiv-xvi; Hayley, *Dryden*, esp. 165.

of the ancients in learning the unities, but did not strictly follow them in order to make something better:

I have observed in your speech that the former part of it is convincing as to what the Moderns have profited by the rules of the Ancients; but in the latter you are careful to conceal how much they have excelled them. We own all the helps we have from them, and want neither veneration nor gratitude while we acknowledge that to overcome them we must make use of the advantages we have received from them: but to these assistances we have joined our own industry.³⁰

Davenant's work reflects exactly this kind of relationship with neoclassical models and rules.

Although much has been made about how Shakespeare's tragedies, and adaptations of them, do or do not follow the unities in practice, they do in some cases, at least to a greater degree than the original plays, and the theoretical emphasis on the rules of the unities are related more to older theoretical concepts, namely issues of fable and effect.³¹ Rothstein, for instance, argues that early modern plays place a greater emphasis on fable, or the overall plot structure of the play, whereas the Restoration still emphasized fable but much more so on the effect of that fable.³² Hume writes that contemporary recorded definitions of tragedy "are typical in several respects—the complacent citation of authority in

³⁰ Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy, and other Critical Essays*, 32.

³¹ See, for instance, a few different discussions about how the unities are used or not used: Jean I. Marsden, "Tragedies and Varieties of Serious Drama," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 230; Barbara A. Murray, *Restoration Shakespeare: Viewing the Voice* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 18-19; Raddadi, 107; Christopher Spencer, *Nahum Tate* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 71.

³² Eric Rothstein, *Restoration Tragedy: Form and the Process of Change* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967).

the second, the assumption of an essential didactic function, the idea of an exalted subject matter, and especially the concern with the response evoked in the spectator.”³³ In short, the plot, as Aristotle states, is primary, but the reaction, or the “moral impression” to be derived from that plot is crucial.³⁴

The ending of a play is one of the critical moments for such a moral impression. The practice of attending the theater does not allow the audience the opportunity for retrospective reading through a text, even if one attends the same play more than once. Thus, the ending of a play is the last piece of information that the audience or reader has received and as such it carries particular weight and is more crucial in performance than in print. If the goal is then to craft a play that will direct an audience to notice a particular virtue or observe a special lesson, then this moment should not only summarize and neatly conclude the fable, but also leave a lasting impression with viewers and readers alike. Although Rymer was one such critic who “represents the fabulist tradition at its least yielding,” he also illustrates the close connection between the fable and its moral affect.³⁵ He was writing works like *Tragedies of the Last Age* (1677) in the context of the aforementioned drawn out controversies concerning the relationship between Ancient and Modern drama. In *Tragedies*, he uses neoclassical rules as criteria for evaluating modern drama. Part of Rymer’s development of the term “poetic justice” in this text responded to his critiques of

³³ Hume, *Development*, 151.

³⁴ Hume, *Development*, 151.

³⁵ Rothstein, *Restoration Tragedy*, 7.

plot and character of various dramas (e.g. Rymer's discussion of *The Tragedy of Rollo Duke of Normandy*, a collaboration between Fletcher, Jonson, Massinger, and Chapman).³⁶ Given the connection of the unities to issues of fable and character, we have a very good theoretical reason to re-examine the effect of tightening the unities in the case of these adaptations.³⁷

In the case of *Macbeth*, Davenant indeed does make changes which have bearing on the unities. The play does not follow unity of time, and the unity of action is more closely followed only in that Davenant reduces the cast list to an already tightly wrought play, so the majority of my comments will be reflections and observations about the unity of place and the consequences of such changes. Shakespeare is, of course, famous for having violated the unity of place in most plays except for *The Tempest* (1611). His *Macbeth* has scenes in both Scotland and England, which is not the case for Davenant's *Macbeth*. In Davenant's Act IV, scene iii, Macduff comes to speak to Malcolm, but the action takes place not in England, but in Birnam Wood. Macduff argues not that Malcolm should return from England, but that he needs to take arms in defense of his country (49-51).

In addition to conforming more closely to the neoclassical unities, this change has consequences for the development of plot and character. The revised scene does not include a discussion of Macduff's murdered family. That news is

³⁶ Thomas Rymer, *The Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd and Examin'd by the Practice of the Ancients and by the Common Sense of all Ages in a Letter to Fleetwood Shephard, Esq.* (London: 1678), 16-24.

³⁷ For an argument about Rymer's importance and his influence, see Cannan, *Emergence*, esp. 65.

placed in Act IV, scene v, and is delivered by Lennox, as opposed to Rosse. The original scene comprised of both the confrontation between Malcolm and Macduff and the news that Macduff's family had been murdered. Davenant splits those scenes into two and places a largely new scene in between them. The first half of the original scene is then in Scotland and solely focused on the political problems of Scotland and the need for Malcolm's return. The domestic issues have been excised.

In the new scene immediately following, Macbeth is informed that his rule is in danger, and he finds himself torn between the need to defend what he has taken and to attend to his wife: "The Spur of my Ambition prompts me to go / And make my Kingdom safe, but Love which softens / Me to pity her in her distress / Curbs my Resolves" (52). This moment is a foil to the same moment in which Macduff has to choose between working for the kingdom and staying with his wife; but Davenant adds a key difference, which renders Macduff a more sympathetic foil to Macbeth's character. Shakespeare does not provide a parting scene for the Macduffs in his play, only the scene (Act IV, scene ii) with the alone and distraught Lady Macduff cornered by the murderers. In Davenant's version, the problem of Macduff's abandoned family is eradicated because Macduff truly believes that Macbeth will not hurt his wife and that he is the only one who is in danger. He feels that politics are separate from his domestic life. He speaks to his wife, "He will not injure you, he cannot be / Possess with such unmanly cruelty" (42). He also argues that he cannot ride quickly enough to escape if his family is with him (52). Lady Macduff encourages him to leave when he gets word of

Banquo's death, lest he be murdered as well: "Fly, fly, or we may bid farewell for ever" (42). In this version, Macduff, restorer of the true king, is a more sympathetic character. He is still the hero in the sense that he kills Macbeth, as he does in Shakespeare's version, but in Davenant's version he takes the time to discuss a course of action with his wife. Audience members do not feel compelled to blame him for abandoning his family and leaving them unprotected and vulnerable to Macbeth's cruelties because he thought them to be safe. When the audience is presented with a scene a short while later in which Macduff proves his loyalty to Malcolm and accomplishes his goal of raising him to war against Macbeth, the result of that scene is the feeling that Macduff accomplished something good. Malcolm credits his desire to become a virtuous king and save Scotland from a tyrant to Macduff's effective speech: "Macduff this Noble Passion / Child of Integrity hath from my Soul / Wip'd the black scruples, reconcil'd my Thoughts / To thy good truth and honor" (51). At this particular moment in the play, the audience knows that Malcolm thought his family safe and has come in "truth and honor" to save Scotland. Even though the previous scene was a warning that his family is in danger, no murders are staged. There is still the possibility that his family could have escaped because he is not immediately informed of their fate. The benefits to the country and the goal of restoration are placed at the forefront, as opposed to the personal struggles of the Macduffs.

The scene that divides the return of Malcolm and the news of the family's murder depicts the Macbeths arguing and Lady Macbeth's confession that she too is haunted by Duncan's ghost. Unlike the Macduffs, who agree on the appropriate

course of action aimed at restoring the country to its rightful state, the Macbeths are growing apart, and Macbeth himself places direct blame on his wife, after professing his desire to set aside his ambition to help her:

Can you think that a crime, which you did once
Provoke me to commit? had not your breath
Blown my Ambition up into a Flame
Duncan had yet been living. (53)

The focus on ambition, and the blame that Macbeth places on Lady Macbeth, is confirmed by the appearance of the ghost. Its appearance lends credibility to the spousal spat, illustrating that Lady Macbeth is just as guilty as Macbeth. He is haunted by Banquo, she by Duncan. The play gives a reason then for her mental deterioration, madness and sleepwalking brought up by a ghostly haunt, and also delivers a sense of poetic justice because both characters are punished similarly. Macbeth's own evil ambition is then confirmed in the following scene by the announcement of the murder of the Macduff family.

In addition to the equal sentence placed on the Macbeths by the appearance of not one but two ghosts, Davenant balances the plot by developing the characters of the Macduffs to serve as foils to the Macbeths. Part of this development, and the addition of the extra ghost, undoubtedly falls under the category of changes made due to particular company needs.³⁸ As one of the first plays staged after the Restoration and the advent of women on stage, *Macbeth* appropriately features lengthened women's roles and a scene that showcases the ladies alone on stage. This scene, Act I, scene v, includes Davenant's version of

³⁸ In particular, see Raddadi.

the “unsex me” speech, but it also allows Lady Macduff a moment to expound upon the differences between good and bad ambition. Davenant uses a newer theatrical development to emphasize the key issue he is addressing in his play: ambition.

One of the ways Davenant expresses the central issue of ambition in his adaptation is by focusing the viewer’s attention on the theme with the spectacle of the actress. Act I, scene v is a new scene invented by Davenant which showcases Lady Macbeth (played by Mrs. Betterton) and Lady Macduff (played by Jane Long) on stage alone together.³⁹ This scene perfectly exemplifies Davenant’s innovative combination of novelty (or spectacle) with narrower interpretation. Two women on stage alone was a big draw in England for the period, particularly this early after the reopening of the stages and the first productions featuring female actresses.⁴⁰ But the scene is also an opportunity for Davenant to contrast the two women and what they represent; he can use the spectacle of the female body on stage to focus the attention of the audience on the lesson of ambition. Lady Macbeth’s goal in that scene seems to be to get rid of Lady Macduff so she can read her letter in private. She begins by questioning Lady Macduff’s health and provides the opportunity for Lady Macduff to wax on love and honor, in the context of her separation from Macduff during wartime. She moralizes,

³⁹ For more information on the casting available to Davenant, see Raddadi, 39.

⁴⁰ See Jean I. Marsden, “Shakespeare from the Restoration to Garrick,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, eds. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 25. Two excellent examples of this phenomenon would be Thomas Shadwell’s *Timon of Athens* (1678) and Davenant and Dryden’s *The Tempest* (1667).

The world mistakes the glories gain'd in war,
 Thinking their Lustre true: alas, they are
 But Comets, Vapours! by some men exhal'd
 From others bloud, and kindl'd in the Region
 Of popular applause, in which they live
 A-while; then vanish: and the very breath
 Which first inflam'd them, blows them out agen. (I.v.48)

Here, Lady Macduff presents the first extended argument in the play against the vice of ambition. There she warns Lady Macbeth and the audience about the distinction between the virtues of true glory and ambition behind the cover of war before leaving Lady Macbeth to read the letter and succumb to ambition. This statement warning against the false glories of war also seems particularly timely given the recent English Civil Wars and the end of the Commonwealth, which would resonate with a 1664 audience. By some accounts, the supposed victory of the Parliamentarians has proven to be a “vapour” indeed. But it is also a simple lesson about two different sides to one personality trait.

Lady Macduff also delivers the quintessential argument against ambition in an added heath scene, which also features the new dance by the witches. Her reaction to the witches in this scene is clear. Macduff is terrified by the witches, stating that “[i]t was a hellish Song: I cannot dread / Ought that is mortal; but this is something more” (II.v.65). In order to take away the power that Macduff fears the witches have, Lady Macduff recommends remaining steadfast to what they know is true and good: “I would not willingly to fear submit: / None can fear ill, but those that merit it” (II.v.66). She encourages him to stand by his beliefs, pointing out that in order to be evil one must first submit to it. If one refuses to yield, one does not need to fear the possibility of being overcome. Macduff feels

comforted by his wife's innocence, and she further encourages him, as they watch the witches dance, "Why are you alter'd, Sir? be not so thoughtful: / The Messengers of Darkness never spake / To men, but to deceive them" (II.v.66). To Lady Macduff, the witches are "Messengers of Darkness" which can only be fought by standing firm in one's beliefs and taking no heed of their terrible messages—Macbeth's fatal mistake.

Although the unities are not strictly observed or even emphasized, Davenant's *Macbeth* does follow them loosely and he has improved upon them from Shakespeare's version. More importantly, as Christopher Spencer noted in the introduction to his *Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*, is that the moral impact of the play has a great deal to do with its structure and with the changes that Davenant makes.⁴¹ Although Spencer made this point in 1965, it is a point that has been lost or underemphasized in criticism on these adaptations. Lady Macduff effectively models how one can act when confronted with vice—by choosing the virtuous path and not giving in. This type of instruction would be less obvious to the viewing audience without Davenant's structural changes.

Mood and Language

Some of Davenant's revisions to *Macbeth*, also congruent to his criticism, include changes which affect the mood of the play. Much has been made in the scholarship surrounding Davenant's *Macbeth* about the potential for comedic

⁴¹ Christopher Spencer, ed., *Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 11.

affect in the characters of the witches and Davenant's use of spectacle.⁴² I would argue that spectacle and comedy are not intrinsically connected in this period. This association seems to be made from modern critical assumptions about spectacle or perhaps even taste. Judging from Davenant's own writing, the spectacular elements in his works and the changes he makes to *Macbeth* help focus the audience's attention to key moments of figures in order to underscore particular themes or moods, all of which have bearing on the emotional effect of the audience. According to some critics, some of the worst changes in Davenant's *Macbeth* are his versions of the witches; the more negative commentators, notably Hazelton Spencer and Dennis Bartholomeusz, argue that the witches were comedic, based on the use of spectacle and the casting choices in the 1707 production of *Macbeth*.⁴³ One point they belabor, for instance, is Betterton's involvement in the 1707 production, as he was also involved in productions of the play during Davenant's lifetime.⁴⁴ Despite the presence of Betterton in this production, this fact does not prove that Davenant's witches were always comedic, but that they were depicted as such in the 1707 production.⁴⁵ This production occurred 39 years after Davenant's own death and perhaps as much as

⁴² See Dennis Bartholomeusz, *Macbeth and the Players* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. John Wilders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Hazelton Spencer, "D'Avenant's *Macbeth* and Shakespeare's," *PMLA* 40.3 (September 1925): 619-644.

⁴³ See Bartholomeusz, *Macbeth*; Spencer, "Davenant's *Macbeth*."

⁴⁴ Bartholomeusz, *Macbeth*, 29-31.

⁴⁵ Mongi Raddadi also notes that the actor playing Hecate, Samuel Sandford, was known for playing villains (116).

43 years after the original production, which was likely in 1664. Rather, it is my contention that although the witches are in some senses simplified, much like Macbeth's own character, their spectacle and alterations were not necessarily inherently comedic, or a means "of provoking amusement in order to achieve certain ends."⁴⁶ The critiques against the witches also concern charges of flatness and simplistic language, all of which have bearing on my answer to this problem. The spectacular staging effects used for these characters instead helped Davenant emphasize his play's message—one of the clear projects of Restoration tragedy. In short, their musical and visual spectacle was not contrary to but necessary for a morality play at this time. Restoration drama, including some adaptations of Shakespeare and comedies in particular, has long held the reputation of being spectacular, bawdy, and entertainment for entertainment's sake.

Bartholomeusz was one of the first critics to discuss at length the argument that the presentation of the witches in Davenant's *Macbeth* would have seemed comedic to his audiences. His argument is important to consider because it is now pervasive throughout scholarship on Davenant's *Macbeth*.

Bartholomeusz discusses the popularity of the piece and how spectacle factors into that popularity: "Davenant, in an attempt to capture the Restoration imagination, shifted the emphasis to spectacle."⁴⁷ He points out that contemporary critics, including John Dryden and Thomas Davies, were critical of his *Macbeth*,

⁴⁶ Jan Hokenson, *The Idea of Comedy: History, Theory, Critique* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), 20.

⁴⁷ Bartholomeusz, *Macbeth*, 15.

but that audiences, including Pepys, loved it.⁴⁸ He also contends that the depiction of the witches had much to do with the play's popularity and success:

As we read Downes and Davies, it becomes clear that one of the first things Davenant did to Shakespeare's play was to change the function and purpose of the witches. Forman describes the witches at the Globe as 'feiries'; this indicates that they were mysterious, other-worldly figures. There is nothing in Forman's description to suggest that the witches at the Globe were comic. In Shakespeare's play the witches are 'secret, black and midnight' creatures of chaos and evil. Shakespeare takes them seriously as symbols. Davenant did not. He used the witches to achieve operatic and comic effects. Johnson and Bullock in particular were comedians well known for their skill.⁴⁹

It seems then, that for Bartholomeusz, spectacle is intrinsically comedic; once the witches are pushed into an "operatic" symbolic function, something becomes funny about them. Perhaps a chanting witch could be feasibly frightening, but a singing and dancing witch does not invoke fear or convey evil. As mentioned above, in this section of his argument, Bartholomeusz is referencing the casting of two comedic actors in a 1707 production of Davenant's *Macbeth*, which also featured Betterton in the title role. This evidence does indicate that the 1707 production of *Macbeth* featured comedic witches. But, occurring 43 years later, the 1707 production was likely much different than the original was in 1664. We might take the Davenant/Dryden adaptation *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island* (1667) as evidence of the ability of a piece of drama to evolve greatly in a relatively short span of years. Irena Cholić carefully tracks the changes to the adaptation, illustrating how a production in 1667 could hardly have been called

⁴⁸ Bartholomeusz, *Macbeth*, 15-17.

⁴⁹ Bartholomeusz, *Macbeth*, 17-18.

the same production years later.⁵⁰ Choli found that while the Davenant/Dryden *Tempest* was staged throughout the eighteenth century, each new production would substitute new music. The three-act operatic version of *The Tempest* in 1757 featured new music by J. C. Smith; the extremely popular 1777 production by Richard Brinsley Sheridan featured new music by Thomas Lindley Jr. (and additional music no longer extant); and, finally, in 1789 John Philip Kemble picked and chose from the popular musical numbers accumulated over the century of productions.⁵¹ All of this music was different from that of the composers who contributed to the original Davenant/Dryden production.⁵² Choli concludes, “What emerges from this brief survey of the eighteenth-century production history of *The Tempest* is a rather flexible, audience-sensitive attitude towards Shakespeare’s play.”⁵³ The information on the 1707 production of *Macbeth* does not provide enough evidence of Davenant’s original conception of the witches, nor does it solidify the depiction of the witches in the 1664 production.

Another problem with assumptions about Restoration Shakespeare is that they belie the fact that interpreters of these adaptations then use these changes to claim that the subject matter or outcome of the tragedies in question is somehow lesser than the original. In an additional example, Bartholomeusz also contends

⁵⁰ Irena Choli, “‘A Thousand Twangling Instruments’: Music and *Tempest* on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage,” *Shakespeare Survey* 51 (12, 1998): 79-94.

⁵¹ Choli, 86-93.

⁵² Choli, 80.

⁵³ Choli, 94.

that Davenant and his audience were not interested in the depiction of evil in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.⁵⁴ It would be a bold claim to suppose that only four years after the Restoration of the monarchy and the execution of the regicides, including the exhumation and beheading of Oliver Cromwell's body, that the audience would not take the evil of regicide seriously.⁵⁵

There is much evidence to support a serious depiction of the witches, and the play's mood overall, even if the witches were not believed to be plausible or real possibilities in the 1660s.⁵⁶ One of the first is Davenant's removal of the Porter scene. According to Davenant's patent, he was only obligated to remove obscenities.⁵⁷ Certainly, he made such changes, which also follow French tradition of decorum. For instance, Banquo's murder in Act III, scene iv, now takes place off stage. Davenant provides explicit directions for the way this moment is to take place: "*Exeunt after Banquo. Clashing of sword is heard from within. Re-enter Flean pursu'd by one of the Murtherers*" (38). Upon reentering, Fleam exclaims, "Murther, help, help, my Father's kill'd" (38). Additionally, as

⁵⁴ Bartholomeusz, 18.

⁵⁵ Katherine Rowe makes the point that "Scholars have long recognized the conservative bias of this version: adapted in the late 1660s, it offers a royalist allegory of the failures of the government under Cromwell and the restoration of Charles II" (186). Likewise, the work of Richard Kroll, amongst others, aptly illustrates many of the political resonances of the work, including the ties between Malcolm and the restored Charles II. See Rowe, "Humoral Knowledge"; Richard Kroll, "Emblem and Empiricism in Davenant's *Macbeth*," *ELH* 57.4 (Winter 1990): 835-864.

⁵⁶ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth, Shakespeare in Production*, ed. Robert Hapgood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 10.

⁵⁷ Sandra Clark, ed., *Shakespeare made Fit: Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare* (London and Rutland, VT: Everyman, 1997), xlii.

discussed above, in the scene in which Lady Macduff learns that her life is in danger, the murders do not actually occur on stage. The audience is not even informed that they happen until Act IV, scene v, because the actual murders of the Macduff family are not depicted.⁵⁸ The scene which formerly ended with the ambush of the family ends with Lady Macduff's "whither shall I fly?" speech.⁵⁹

The Porter scene might have qualified as a similar breach of decorum, as Shakespeare's Porter enters drunk and makes a variety of naughty jokes (II.iii.23-25). That being said, Davenant was certainly not incapable of changing language, removing or clarifying metaphors, or completely revising scenes. Practically all of his *Macbeth* involves these kinds of linguistic alterations, as I will discuss below. But he chose not to do so in the case of the Porter. In his version, the role of the Porter is relegated to the role of a "Servant" in Act II, scene iii and is given one line: "Labour by day causes rest by night."⁶⁰ *Macbeth* is a relatively short tragedy, so there was no need to cut the Porter's role for time. But Davenant still chose to remove what is basically the only "comic relief" in the play. This decision suggests that Davenant was crafting what he thought to be a pure tragedy, not a mixed genre play.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Davenant, *Macbeth*, 55.

⁵⁹ Davenant, *Macbeth*, 45.

⁶⁰ Davenant, *Macbeth*, 58. All references are to this edition, and cite the play by page number.

⁶¹ Sorelius described him thus: "Davenant in his serious plays was a moralist and a purist." See Sorelius, 149. Raddadi also described Davenant's *Macbeth* as his attempt at writing a neoclassical tragedy (107).

The early dating of Davenant's *Macbeth* is also cause to consider that the play's mood and the treatment of the witches are more serious than some readers assume, because it places the production in closer proximity temporally to the traumatic events of the Restoration and the English Civil Wars. In his essay "The Premiere of Davenant's Adaptation of *Macbeth*," Arthur H. Scouten definitively establishes the premiere of Davenant's *Macbeth* as occurring earlier than critics originally thought, either November 1664 or December 1666.⁶² In the case that it did occur as early as 1664, which seems quite likely, the play is then one of Davenant's earliest adaptations of Shakespeare, being preceded only by *The Law Against Lovers* (1663) and written about the same time as *The Rivals* (1664).⁶³ If this is the case, then Davenant is working on these adaptations within four years of the Restoration. Although Charles II passed the Indemnity and Oblivion Act in August of 1660, those who were directly involved with the trial and execution of his father were not pardoned. Twelve men were condemned to death and executed for their involvement with the regicide, and four others, including Cromwell, were posthumously attainted for their participation and their corpses put on public display.⁶⁴ The aftermath did not end there. In 1661, a group of Fifth Monarchy

⁶² Arthur H. Scouten, "The Premiere of Davenant's Adaptation of *Macbeth*," in *Shakespeare and Dramatic Tradition*, eds. W. R. Elton and William B. Long (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 286-293.

⁶³ Christopher Spencer found that there are allusions to Davenant's *Macbeth* in the first scene of *The Rivals*, which supports the theory that he was working on adapting both plays for the stage as early as 1663. See Christopher Spencer, "Macbeth and Davenant's *The Rivals*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20.2 (1969): 225-229.

⁶⁴ Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England 1485-1714: A Narrative History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 283.

Men, a group active during the Interregnum, attempted to take over London. They failed and were either executed or imprisoned.⁶⁵ The Church of England was not restored officially until 1662 with the Act of Uniformity. All of these events were in recent, living memory for Davenant and his audience.

The fact that the Restoration had occurred three or four years before the play's initial production suggests that the period of the play's composition was probably still an emotional time for Davenant personally, because he remained a Royalist during the Civil Wars, during the Interregnum, and upon the return of Charles II.⁶⁶ In the argument to his *Macbeth*, he changes the timeline of Macbeth's rule slightly, stating that Macbeth "omitted no kind of Libidinous Cruelty for the space of 18 Years."⁶⁷ In both the 1577 and 1587 editions, Holinshed cites Macbeth's reign as being 17 years long.⁶⁸ The reign of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is quite brief. It does not seem accidental that Davenant would then choose the exact period of time during which the theaters were closed. Davenant was out of favor during Cromwell's early regime. After the crushing defeat of Charles's army at the Battle of Naseby in 1645, he fled to Paris where he

⁶⁵ Bucholz and Key, 280-281.

⁶⁶ For biographical information on Davenant, see Philip Bordinat and Sophia B. Blaydes, *Sir William Davenant* (Boston: Twayne, 1981); Howard Stuart Collins, *The Comedy of Sir William Davenant* (Paris: the Hague, 1967); Alfred Harbage, *Sir William Davenant, Poet Venturer, 1606-1668* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935); Raddadi; and, Jacob and Rayler.

⁶⁷ Davenant, *Macbeth*, sig. A2r.

⁶⁸ Raphael Holinshed, *The Firste Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* 2nd vol. (London: Imprinted for John Hunne, 1577), 251; Raphael Holinshed, *The First and Second Volumes of the Chronicles* (London: 1587), 176.

began working on his epic poem *Gondibert*. At one point he was going to found a settlement in Virginia, but was captured and brought back to the Tower of London where he was sentenced to death. He continued to write and work in the Tower and was released and eventually pardoned in 1654.⁶⁹ His royalist views are apparent in many of his writings, including *Gondibert* and his *Discourse Upon Gondibert* (1650). The *Discourse* even begins with two short poems by some of his Royalist friends, Edmund Waller and Abraham Cowley.

If Davenant's goal for tragedy is to then mix entertainment and truth, there can be perhaps no better combination of these elements than in the figures of the witches. They are the characters that receive a good deal of Davenant's changes, including the ability to fly and to sing a variety of songs. As previously mentioned, song and dance are usually associated with comedy.⁷⁰ Davenant writes in the *Discourse* that the goal of tragedy is to display virtue.⁷¹ And the most effective means of displaying that virtue or morality was to draw in a crowd and to present that message in the most accessible means possible. Music serves Davenant's moral theory because it is a means by which to accomplish those

⁶⁹ W. H. D. Adams, *The Merry Monarch, Or, England Under Charles II: Its Art, Literature, and Society* (London: 1885), 116-117.

⁷⁰ For instance, Hume categorizes Davenant's *Macbeth* as an example of early Carolean spectacular: "Song and dance are staple elements in Carolean comedy; fancy staging and scenery are important part of the heroic play. These elements, combining with the Stuart masque tradition, contribute to the origins of opera in England" (205). Judith Milhous categorizes it similarly in her study of "The Multimedia Spectacular on the Restoration Stage." See Hume, *Development*; and Judith Milhous, "The Multimedia Spectacular on the Restoration Stage," in *British Theatre and Other Arts, 1660-1800*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library), 41-66.

⁷¹ Davenant, *Discourse*, 25.

goals. Again, in his *Proposition* he writes, “Musick hath so strong Sympathy with good mindes that (as *Plato* saies) he cannot be virtuous that loves it not.”⁷²

Davenant’s musical additions are frequently categorized as evidence of his preoccupation with adding entertainment value to his adaptations. In his *Discourse Upon Gondibert*, Davenant condemns dancing as one art that is too shallow because it is grace only and has no further purpose.⁷³ Rather, music and poetry must work together to greater ends, “And 'tis injurious not to think Poets the most usefull Moralists; for as Poesie is adorn'd and sublim'd by Musick, which makes it more pleasant and acceptable; so morality is sweetned and made more amiable by Poesie.”⁷⁴ His writing here offers contrary evidence, that the elements he added to entertain his audience were only means to an end. In the case of *Macbeth*, we might infer then that he felt the music he added to the play would move audiences, render it more sympathetic. In short, his theory behind the use of music, or a “spectacular” devise, as an adornment to poetry—an aid to present it in the most “amicable” way possible. Because he was dealing with such potentially explosive material, the music could then serve as a means of giving audience members a more diverse entertainment while delivering his lesson. This is particularly the case with the witches; for what could be more explosive than supernatural creatures that promote regicide and (potentially) have the power to see it enacted? The witches’ songs are the verbal painting of the moral lesson on

⁷² Davenant, *Proposition*, 16.

⁷³ Davenant, *Discourse*, 53.

⁷⁴ Davenant, *Discourse*, 107.

ambition that renders it easier for audiences to absorb. The fact that the musical additions almost all concern the witches is telling, though it does not mean that they are comical. Davenant's feeling that truth and entertainment could be mixed demonstrates that what we consider spectacle (singing and dancing) could be considered to Davenant, and his audience, a legitimate means of conveying a moral lesson.

For instance, in Act II, scene v, arguably one of the most spectacular moments in Davenant's *Macbeth*, the Macduffs encounter the witches singing upon the heath. The third witch sings,

Ill deeds are seldom slow nor single:
Following crimes on former wait.
The worst of creatures fastest propagate.
Many more murders must this one ensue,
As if in death were propagation too. (II.v.64)

And even more terrifyingly, they all sing a Chorus: "We shou'd rejoice when good Kings bleed. /When cattel die, about we go, / What then, when Monarchs perish, should we do?" (II.v.65). I cannot imagine a more terrifying subject matter for witches to sing about post-English Civil War. They dance and take delight in the propagation of evil deeds and the death of not just kings, but *good* kings. The spectacle of song first entices a crowd for Davenant and allows him to demonstrate just how heinous witches and regicide can be.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Barbara Murray also concurs that the witches were probably not treated as comedic. She explains that a simplistic stage setting, combined with the effects of flying and various sounds, would not make the witches seem ridiculous and also argues that actors probably had a lot to do with a sense of tragedy, especially Betterton who was much praised by his contemporaries for his skills to move an audience. I would add that in addition to looking at the little cast information we have in the period, it is important to look for other textual cues and interpretation to aid us in reconstruction of how particular works might have affected audience members. See Murray, 52-53.

Several critics have complained that the characters in Restoration adaptations are shallower or flatter than their Shakespearean counterparts, and Davenant's witches number among them.⁷⁶ First, we must understand that the witches are by no means alone in the so-called simplification of their characters. The same complaint could be made of the majority of characters in Davenant's *Macbeth*, the exceptions being the Macduffs who have expanded roles.⁷⁷ Davenant does make such changes. His innovative combination of elements, particularly the combination of song, dance, and moral instruction, can help us understand why scholars and readers alike might feel this way. In Act I, scene i, for instance, Davenant changes Shakespeare's "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I.i.11) to "To us fair weather's foul, and foul is fair!" (I.i.38).⁷⁸ The fact that the witches are then simplified similarly to other characters does not necessarily suggest that they were intended as comedic; we would not make the same assumptions for the characters of the *Macbeths*, played by the Bettertons.

⁷⁶ For instance, Derek Hughes in discussing some of Tate's adaptations uses the phrase "[a]nother farcical simplification" (318). See also Peter Dyson, "Changes in Dramatic Perspective: From Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to Davenant's," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30.3 (1979): 402-407; Derek Hughes, *English Drama, 1660-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Murray; Raddadi; Rowe, "Humoral Knowledge"; Spencer, "D'Avenant's *Macbeth*"; and Spencer, *Shakespeare Improved*.

⁷⁷ Dyson explores these changes at length in his essay, "Changes in Dramatic Perspective: from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to Davenant's." In essence, he argues that Davenant's play makes Shakespeare's language more explicit: "In mature Shakespeare, language, action, and stage gesture are almost always specific in a way which opens out into the symbolic. With Davenant the process is the opposite" (Dyson, 403). Murray complains that the play's moral is stated poorly (62-63). Raddadi notes the simplification of language and characters and attributes the differences to baroque art, which promotes simplification, idealization, and balance (114).

⁷⁸ For an excellent discussion of this passage see Dyson, 404.

Although the witches are not alone in the flatness, or reduced complexity, Davenant's changes and his dramatic theory suggest that his use of spectacle is necessary for the delivery of his moral. Their simplicity helps him accomplish his didactic goals for the drama. Although some critics would argue that the "over-explicitness" of this simplicity deteriorates the "stature of the moral struggle," the moral struggle is exactly what becomes the focus.⁷⁹ When these kinds of linguistic revisions take place, there is no question about the moral debate that is going on in the play, which could become lost if displayed by more complex characters. For instance, in the passage quoted above from Act I, scene i, when Davenant's witches state, "To us fair weather's foul, and foul is fair" they are not just limiting the conversation to a statement about weather; they are also making a statement about their very natures, reveling in the foulness of the natural world and placing themselves in comparison or in conjunction with the foulness of nature. The statement, while certainly simplified and overly explicit in comparison to Shakespeare, is also a more explicit moral statement about the characters of the witches.

Likewise, in the aforementioned famous song and dance upon the heath, there is no question as to the emotion that the audience should derive from the witches' songs. When they sing, "Let's have a dance upon the Heath; / We gain more life by *Duncan's* death" (II.v.65), the audience cannot help but feel horrified and certain that these creatures are truly evil. If the audience has been waiting for these "Alterations, Amendments, Additions, and New Songs," they are going to

⁷⁹ Dyson, 405.

be excited and interested the moment those songs are staged. Davenant is taking what is potentially the most horrific material, joy in the horrible murder of a good and true monarch, and using that as the basis for these “new songs,” aptly focusing his audience’s attention on the terror.⁸⁰ Davenant’s use of spectacle and music here borders on schema, allowing him to offer a clear moral to his audience more effectively.

Another productive effect of the reduced power of the witches is that they help Davenant shift the focus of *Macbeth* from the supernatural world, to the world of men and monarchs. Much of the gruesome obscenity is removed from the play. Certainly, he has removed the requisite obscenities, such as the murder of the Macduffs’ son and the Porter’s bawdy dialogue. Even Banquo is killed off stage. The witches in and of themselves, however, exhibit a dangerous undercurrent. In Shakespeare’s play, they not only inspire political ambition and regicide, but also seem to be able to set events into motion as they cast powerful spells. This is not the case in Davenant’s version. The evidence that witches are considerably weakened is one of the most overlooked omissions or emendations to Davenant’s work: the removal of the apparitions. In Davenant’s version of *Macbeth*, the witches do not call forth apparitions from their cauldron to give prophecies to Macbeth. If Davenant were a tech-savvy entertainment-driven theater manager obsessed with the presentation of new spectacle alone, the

⁸⁰ As Rowe details, “It is easy in this context to see why *Macbeth* suits Davenant’s project of civic entertainment. Anatomizing affects such as horror and fear, the play provides an ongoing analysis of the uses and perversions of the passions” (183-4).

apparitions would be perfect fodder for his creativity. There is no apparent reason to remove them. The play is not considerably lengthy, and they are not obscene. If wording was the problem, he could have easily fixed it, as he does with most of the rest of the play. But he eliminates them altogether. Hecate accompanies the witches in Davenant's Act IV, scene i, and they still supply predictions, but they don't produce horrible apparitions from the power of their cauldron. For instance, Macbeth's first question is "What Destinie's appointed for my Fate?" (IV.i.85). Instead of an apparition supplying the answer, Hecate answers him: "Thou double *Thane* and King; beware *Macduff*: / Avoiding him, *Macbeth* is safe enough" (IV.i.85). Even in the heath scene, the witches do not really cast any spells; they just delight in Macbeth's evil actions. In the play, the Macbeths are frequently described as having the "disease" of ambition.⁸¹ The sickness is contained inside those characters, who recognize their wrongs and who pay for them in the end. In Davenant's play, men are the problem. Men who are making the wrong decisions. This problem is one more easily fixed with education and the right attitude.

Conclusion

The political context and changing theater conditions of Restoration theater have been extensively analyzed and do account for some of the changes made to pre-1642 plays. In the case of Davenant's *Macbeth*, however, these so-called practical changes for commercial value and changing theater conditions, which have been the focus of the majority of scholarship on Restoration Shakespeare, do not

⁸¹ For a detailed analysis of the "disease" of ambition in Davenant's *Macbeth*, see Kroll, 852-3.

thoroughly explain all of the additions and emendations made to adapted Shakespeare, nor do they explain the long-term success of certain adaptations of Shakespeare. When Davenant's own ideas of what constitutes a serious and effective piece of drama are compared to his own work, it is clear that the playwright was making changes for aesthetic as well as practical reasons. Davenant made changes to the play's language and structure, all of which have direct bearing on the message the play brings to Restoration audiences. They affect the play's moral, making it a tightly wrought piece of drama that presents a clear message about political ambition. Davenant combines his most important passages concerning political ambition with new theater technology (e.g. flying witches, actresses) in order to emphasize the lesson that he wants his audience to leave with. These types of changes are not only in accord with Restoration taste, but also demonstrate that theater could be a valuable form of education.

Chapter Two

“This language, Sir, adds yet to our Affliction”: Simplification in Nahum Tate’s

King Lear

The second adaptation considered in this study is Nahum Tate’s much-critiqued version of *King Lear* (1680). Likely performed for the first time in October or December of 1680 by the Duke’s Company, it went on to dominate the stage from 1681 to 1838.¹ This popularity, which extends well past the early eighteenth century, indicates that there was something about the changes Tate made that were universally appealing beyond any immediate political relevancy to his audience in the early 1680s. It clearly has a wider appeal than even a successful adaptation like Davenant’s *Macbeth*. Davenant’s decision to cut the Porter Scene, for instance, clearly had lasting implications. Although David Garrick worked towards restoring Shakespeare’s text in production in the eighteenth century, he continued to omit the Porter scene, even until 1844.² In the case of *Lear*, because the alterations affect the outcome of the ending of the play so dramatically, I would like to explore an alternative theory of the adaptation’s

¹ For more on the dating of the premiere of Tate’s *King Lear*, see Nancy Klein Maguire, “Nahum Tate’s *King Lear*: ‘the king’s blest restoration’,” *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth*, ed. Jean I. Marsden (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 41; Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, “Dating Play Premiers from Publication Data, 1660-1700,” *Harvard Literary Bulletin* 22 (1974): 374-405; Don-John Dugas, “Elkanah Settle, John Crowne, and Nahum Tate,” in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 391.

² William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. John Wilders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13, 125.

appeal: that these changes indicate that there was something unsettling about the original ending of *King Lear*, likely the absence of any sense of justice and the presence of extreme cruelty. Samuel Johnson famously wrote his opinion of this revision, “Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And, if my sensations could add any thing to the general suffrage, I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia’s death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.”³ Johnson also recognizes the public’s preference for Tate’s work above Shakespeare’s in 1765: “In the present case the publick has decided.”⁴ Tate was able to identify these problems with the ending and adapt them, while providing a neater, more concise and less disturbing version of the play for audiences. As with Davenant’s *Macbeth*, this new, neatly packaged version of the story shows what Restoration adapters believed was the potential of these older plays: the opportunity to rework the past into an educational experience to benefit the future.

I do not seek to undermine the importance of the political and historical context of Tate’s *King Lear*, which aids readers in determining how and why some of the changes were made to Shakespeare’s play, but rather I wish to use the context as a basis of comparison for adaptations which occur in similar moments

³ Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Vol. II (London: 1796), 165.

⁴ Samuel Johnson, *Selections from Johnson on Shakespeare*, eds. Bertrand H. Bronson and Jean M. O’Meara (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 240.

in history.⁵ The historical context also affects the aesthetic theory behind the work, which has not been previously considered in depth in the scholarship on this adaptation. It is important to consider whether there were aesthetic theories at play in these adaptations and to study them seriously in that context in order to determine if these theories can help us understand the enduring popularity of Shakespeare in the Restoration and beyond. When Tate's *Lear* is compared to another successful adaptation of Shakespeare's works, Davenant's *Macbeth*, the context of historical turmoil is remarkably similar. Once again, the state of the theater is uncertain with political crises distracting the king; the king's own company fails in this period. In the previous chapter, I have agreed with evidence for dating *Macbeth* in close proximity to the Restoration.⁶ The context for Tate's *Lear* is similarly colored by both the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, though Tate's play is considerably more explicit than Davenant's *Macbeth* about its political agenda, something that characterizes many adaptations of the period. Although the political topicality of this play (and other Restoration adaptations) has been discussed at length, I feel it is important to summarize the context briefly

⁵ Dugas cites political topicality during the Exclusion Crisis as one of the major innovations of Shakespearean adaptations during this period. He aptly categorizes Shakespearean adaptation in this period in using four characteristics: political topicality, especially allusions to the Exclusion Crisis; willingness of the King's Company to produce adaptations of Shakespeare; a reduced number of successful adaptations; and adaptations all written by talented playwrights popular with audiences. See Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print, 1660-1740* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 49, 44-45.

⁶ See Arthur H. Scouten, "The Premiere of Davenant's Adaptation of *Macbeth*," in *Shakespeare and the Dramatic Tradition*, eds. W. R. Elton and William B. Long (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 286-293; Christopher Spencer, "*Macbeth* and Davenant's *The Rivals*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20.2 (1969): 225-229.

here.⁷ The political turmoil is an important context for the development of Tate's own dramatic theory, as well as for the changes he makes to this particular play.

Although a variety of factors led to the political turmoil in England in the 1670s and 80s, they were compounded in 1673 when James, brother to Charles II, refused the oath of the Test Act, which denies the doctrine of substantiation. Consequently, James had to resign all of his offices.⁸ His refusal, the public knowledge of his conversion to Catholicism, and fierce anti-Catholic sentiment were made worse by the appearance of Titus Oates in 1678, who accused a large number of people of Catholic conspiracy to assassinate Charles. Although Oates did not initially mention James, he suggested some letters be seized that placed James at the center of this plot.⁹ James eventually had to leave the court and hear from a distance about the 1679 Exclusion Bill, seeking to bar him from succession.¹⁰ By 1681, the bill had not made it through the House of Lords or the King, and James was allowed to return.¹¹ In short, during this period when

⁷ Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Richard Strier, *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); C. B. Hardman, "'Our Drooping Country Now Erects Her Head': Nahum Tate's History of King Lear," *Modern Language Review* 95.4 (10, 2000): 913-921; Nancy Klein Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁸ John Miller, *James II: A Study in Kingship* (Hove, UK: Wayland, 1977), 69.

⁹ Miller, 87-88.

¹⁰ Miller, 88-91.

¹¹ Miller, 105-109.

adaptations frequently appear, the country was gripped by fear of another major monarchical crisis.

Tate's three Shakespearean adaptations are all written during this period of turmoil. His first two plays, *Brutus of Alba or, The Enchanted Lovers* (1678) and *The Loyal General* (1679) were written early in the period and both failed.¹² After the initial boom of Shakespearean adaptations, their frequency tapers off in the 1670s. During the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, however, ten new adaptations appear.¹³ It would make sense, then, that Tate would be eager for a success on the stage and would write something germane to current events. He first chose to adapt *The History of King Richard the Second*, but it was banned before it could be performed. It was acted as *The Sicilian Usurper* in 1681, but the Lord Chamberlain silenced the theatre for ten days.¹⁴ *The History of King Lear* appeared shortly thereafter, followed by *The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth* (*Coriolanus*), also in 1681. Despite theatrical flops and a banned play, these adaptations and his following plays solidified his reputation enough for William III to appoint him poet laureate in 1692.¹⁵

The alterations Tate makes to Shakespeare's *Lear* do make sense in the context of political crisis, and the majority of the scholarship written on Tate's

¹² Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne, and Nahum Tate," 391.

¹³ Dugas, *Marketing the Bard*, 15-16, 44.

¹⁴ Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne, and Nahum Tate," 391.

¹⁵ Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne, and Nahum Tate," 393.

Lear addresses these connections. The closing lines of the Prologue, for instance, could be read as a direct reference to these events:

Poets must take the Churches Teaching Trade,
 Since Priests their Province of Intrigue invade;
 But We the worst in this Exchange have got,
 In vain our Poets Preach, whilst Church-men Plot.¹⁶

This allusion is combined with a different beginning to the play, with Edmund, or just “Bastard” entering alone and providing the central threat. These four lines also echo Davenant’s concerns about the audience and poetry’s role in his *Proposition*. The early focus on Edmund, observed by many critics, underscores the play’s political topicality particularly in connection to the Duke of Monmouth, Charles II’s illegitimate son, a candidate supported by the Whigs for the succession.¹⁷ The play’s plot also mirrors the Restoration and, in contrast to Shakespeare’s version, Tate’s ends with Edgar and Cordelia ready to take over the throne and looking forward to the restoration of the monarchy as it should be after the threat of the bastard Edmund: “Our drooping Country now erects her Head, / Peace spread her balmy Wings, and Plenty blooms” (V.vi.155-6). This political statement and the prologue indicate that the play was participating in topical political discussion of the late 1670s, supporting the Tory position during the Exclusion Crisis.

¹⁶ Nahum Tate, *The History of King Lear: Acted at the Duke’s Theatre* (London: 1681a), sig. A4r. This play is cited by act, scene and page number, as the text contains no line numbers.

¹⁷ For a close reading of these connections, see Hardman, ““Our Drooping Country’,” 913-921.

The political context surrounding Tate's *Lear* suggests that this is a moment in history ripe for adaptation of Shakespeare. During the Exclusion Crisis, Whig propaganda worked by emphasizing historical repetition; reprinting pamphlets from the Civil Wars, they aimed to demonstrate historical precedent for exclusion, the most obvious candidate being the Duke of Monmouth. The Tory counter-campaign invoked "'public memories and anxieties' to vilify the Whigs."¹⁸ Adaptation itself works in exactly this way. It is repetition, but repetition improved. By retelling the same stories in new ways, adaptations emphasize the issues at hand, while simultaneously working against them. By adapting pre-1642 plays, playwrights could invoke the public memory of the past while continually showing improvement and potential for the future. This is exactly how Tate's adaptation of *King Lear* functions, and this function contributes to the play's appeal. The topicality of the work cannot account for its domination of the stage from 1681 to 1838, although it obviously was immediately successful during the Restoration.¹⁹ The myth of the divine right of kings and the optimism of the adaptation are more attractive to audiences than Shakespeare's version. Shakespeare's version of *Lear* was staged in 1674 and 1675 before Tate's version outdid it.²⁰ But this argument can account for our

¹⁸ Maguire, "Nahum Tate's," 31.

¹⁹ Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne, and Nahum Tate," 391.

²⁰ Sandra Clark, ed., *Shakespeare Made Fit*, lxxv.

seeing spurts of adaptation and why some of the adaptations were so successful in the period.²¹

Most often, the political context of Tate's *Lear* is discussed to explain structural changes that Tate makes.²² The structural changes that affect the genre of the play are brilliantly mirrored by linguistic ones. It is these changes that this chapter will focus on in order to explain an alternative theory for the adaptation's appeal and longevity. Much like Davenant, Tate also makes linguistic revisions that work to control the interpretation of the play. Michael Dobson writes that

[e]ven if everyone knew that the trial and execution of Charles I and the military successes of the New Model Army had disproved the idea that God protected all legitimate kings and would personally curse usurpers, it was necessary to pretend in 1660 not only that Divine Right was still a viable political principle but that the sordid, contingent negotiations which had permitted Charles II's return had conclusively proved it. [...] The Restoration was itself, from a royalist perspective, a thoroughly Fletcherian event, a half-providential, half-arbitrary awakening from the

²¹ Several critics have explanations for the success of this particular adaptation. Dugas writes, "By regularizing the action, emphasizing the romantic, heightening the pathos and imposing a happy ending, Tate transformed Shakespeare's original into a distributive justice tragicomedy. In this type of play, poetic justice requires that evil characters be punished and good characters rewarded once they have seen the error of their ways" ("Elkanah Settle, John Crowne, and Nahum Tate," 391). Sandra Clark agrees, "Critics like John Dennis and Dr. Johnson, who found Shakespeare's indifference to poetic justice (a term coined by Thomas Rymer in 1678) hard to accept, were happier with a play in which Lear, Cordelia, Gloucester and Kent all survived to see happier times" (lxv). However, Clark also suggest that the changes to the characters of Edgar and Cordelia also had much to do with the play's success, because Tate changed problems of motivation by connecting the characters romantically. Tate's version makes Edgar's disguise an ingenious plan to keep him close to his lover and Cordelia's cold behavior towards her father is merely a ploy to get out of an unwanted marriage (lxvii). See Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne, and Nahum Tate," 378-395; Clarke, *Shakespeare Made Fit*, 544.

²² To clarify, the structural changes are considered by critics to be the following: the Edgar-Cordelia love story; the increased importance of the love triangle between Edmund, Goneril, and Regan; enlarged female roles; the removal of the Fool; and the changed ending. See Maguire, "Nahum Tate's," 29.

tragedy of the Interregnum into the implausible (if not downright unbelievable) poetic justice of the Act of Indemnity and Oblivion.²³

As my analysis below will demonstrate, much like the fiction of the Divine Right was played out in the structure of tragicomedy, and revised serious drama like Tate's *Lear*, the language of the plays also reinforces the moral fiction. The moral problem of *Lear* in the Restoration is that a king's virtue needed to match his station. The Stuart myth, the myth that the martyred Charles I paid for his son's Restoration as well as the legitimate succession of his younger son James, required truth and virtue in order to succeed.²⁴ The politics revisited and explored in this adaptation need a royal triumph in order to work. The most appealing facet of Tate's adaptation is its neat moral triumph and its optimistic conclusion that all will be righted in the end and that the monarchy will continue to succeed; its stubborn optimism is what makes it work.

Tate's Theory

As with Davenant, Tate's theory of dramatic poetry is also found in his cursorily discussed prefatory material. The prefatory material to *Brutus of Alba or, The Enchanted Lovers* (1678), his first play, indicates what kind of authorial identity Tate was crafting for himself. Though, by all accounts, his first plays were not particularly successful, his appointment as Poet Laureate is evidence that his self-

²³ Dobson, 21-22.

²⁴ Maguire, "Nahum Tate's," 38.

construction as a serious dramatic poet worked.²⁵ Tate dedicates his first play to the Earl of Dorset, who was famous for being a patron of letters and a supporter of writers such as Dryden.²⁶ Although riddled unremarkably with the humility topos, the dedication also helps establish him as poet making a serious attempt at drama because he writes for someone who helps “Poetry [flourish] in our Age.”²⁷ It is interesting that he chooses the genre of tragedy for this project because few tragedies prospered in the late 1670s and early 1680s.²⁸ Given this environment, it is striking that a dramatist like Tate would choose to focus so heavily on tragedy, or serious drama, starting his career with five of them. In addition, the Preface defends his use of Virgil’s *Aeneid* as inspiration to his play and establishes complaints against the Restoration audience. It condemns audience members as enemies of the new and inexperienced writer, lamenting that “sometimes Five good Acts have not been able to make amends for One ill Dance.”²⁹ Like Davenant, Tate does not seem to have much faith in the ability of his viewing

²⁵ Maguire also questions Tate’s ability to achieve this position, calling him “merely competent” (“Nahum Tate’s,” 29).

²⁶ In his biography of Tate, Spencer reports that Tate’s educational background with Trinity College gave him the reputation of a learned scholar. Tate also uses Dryden as his model poet as he begins his career. See Christopher Spencer, *Nahum Tate* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 22-23.

²⁷ Nahum Tate, *Brutus of Alba, Or, the Enchanted Lovers, a Tragedy Acted at the Duke’s Theatre* (London: 1678), sig. A2r.

²⁸ Hume summarizes it nicely: “The serious drama, in brief, is in none too healthy a state in the mid-eighties. Comedy is doing better, though not flourishing. [...] Still, the increasingly ‘pure’ tone of several of the adaptations and intrigue plays foreshadows the exemplary trend...” See Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 366.

²⁹ Tate, *Brutus of Alba*, sig. A3r.

audience to interpret the play or assess it as a whole. Not surprisingly, he then places extra emphasis on the ending due to a need to make a final, lasting impression.

More important is Tate's dedication to *The Loyal General* (1679); in it, Tate takes the opportunity not only to argue for Shakespeare's value, but also to lobby for the stage as an educational medium. This dedication to Edward Taylor, writes Tate, is prompted by a "general hard Censure of Poetry."³⁰ Typical of the age, Tate's prefatory material is riddled with Latin quotes and classical references. In this case, he reminds his readers that "'tis forgotten what *Aristotle* himself (even against his own Profession) has declared in behalf of the Muses? *That Poetry (Tragedy in particular) is more effectual to instruct Mankind than Philosophy.*"³¹ Echoing Davenant and Spencer, as well as other famous arguments in defense of poetry and poets, Tate argues that poets need a combination of both natural gifts in wit, invention, soul, etc., and a good education in order to be "accomplished" poets.³² He also argues for the concept of a Universal Poet, citing Virgil's virtuosity and diversity as evidence. Immediately after this defense and his praise of the epic and tragedy as the most distinguished forms of poetry, he writes that Shakespeare is worthy of being compared to these great ancients and quotes Dryden's famous statement about Shakespeare's soul in his *Essay of*

³⁰ Nahum Tate, *The Loyal General, a Tragedy: Acted at the Duke's Theatre* (London: 1680), sig. A2r.

³¹ Tate, *Loyal General*, sig. A2r-A2v.

³² Tate, *Loyal General*, sig. A2v.

Dramatic Poetry.³³ He argues that Shakespeare's learning must be more than is commonly allowed to him and that it is "evident that no man was better studied in Men and Things, the most useful Knowledge for a *Dramatic* Writer. He was a most diligent Spie upon Nature, trac'd her through her darkest Recesses, pictur'd her in her just Proportion and Colours; in which Variety 'tis impossible that all shou'd be equally pleasant."³⁴ His critical opinion of Shakespeare is then consistent with other contemporary opinions, like those of Davenant and Dryden, as he argues that Shakespeare's talent lay in his ability to understand human nature and thus move human emotion. Because at this time one of tragedy's functions is to strike the emotions of audience members, Shakespeare's works are then perfect raw material for the Restoration stage; they are, in Tate's opinion, uniquely situated for adaptation and the project of redeeming poetry throughout England and showing its educational uses.³⁵ It is most striking that in one dedication Tate chooses to combine his defense of Shakespeare's value for the stage and as a writer with arguments for poetry's value as a means of education, for the esteemed education of the poet himself, and for the distinguished nature of tragedy as a genre. Though he admits Shakespeare's errors as carelessness, hurriedness and insipidness, his carefully constructed argument and choice of

³³ Tate, *Loyal General*, sig. A4v.

³⁴ Tate, *Loyal General*, sig. A5r.

³⁵ Spencer writes, "As critic, Tate seems to have appreciated Shakespeare better than almost any other Restoration writer except Dryden" (Spencer, *Nahum Tate*, 15).

genre of adaptation are evidence that Tate took the task of writing tragedy and adaptation as a serious act of high art and public service.

In one of the few and relatively recent serious studies of Tate's adaptation, Nancy Klein Maguire argues that Tate chose to adapt Shakespeare's *Lear* because the play could "easily and safely comment on the 1678-83 Exclusion Crisis" and that it was "part of the Tory counter-propaganda campaign."³⁶ She feels that his motives were "disingenuous" and more politically driven.³⁷ While one certainly cannot discount the play's participation in Tory discourse regarding the Exclusion Crisis, I believe Tate's political concerns are a product of his aesthetic theory. A close reading of Tate's prefatory material reveals Tate's primary concern is to find literature that is worth presenting and that usually the literature worth presenting is something of moral value; in this case, the moral Tate wishes to demonstrate is that of right political loyalty. Furthermore, Tate is someone that contemporaries and biographers found to be quietly modest: "[M]ost of the comments about him, the evidence of his career, and the impression given by his writings agree in suggesting a quiet and overly modest man who, in an aggressive, journalistic age, was inclined to avoid rather than begin or join controversies."³⁸

³⁶ See, for example, in addition to Maguire, "Nahum Tate's," 30; James Black, "The Influence of Hobbes on Nahum Tate's *King Lear*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 7.3 (1967b): 377-385; James Black, "An Augustan Stage-History: Nahum Tate's *King Lear*," *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theatre Research* 6.1 (1967a): 36-54; Christopher Spencer, "A Word for Tate's *King Lear*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 3.2 (1963): 241-251.

³⁷ Maguire, "Nahum Tate's," 29-30.

³⁸ Spencer, *Nahum Tate*, 16.

Tate's writing, genuine or not, also demonstrates a desire to present literature of value on the stage, and he finds that value in Shakespeare. I would argue then, based on his self-professed theories, that he is choosing to adapt these tragedies because he finds them to be important works that allow him to deliver clear interpretations of Shakespeare's plays. In the case of *King Lear*, the moral lesson is about succession, the divine right of kings, and political loyalty. He chose this play and this playwright because he felt them important, worthy of attention. If his main concerns were to circulate political opinions and to produce successful plays, his track record suggests that he would not continue to adapt tragedies after banned plays and theatrical flops. After *Lear*, Tate enjoyed commercial success with the farce *A Duke and No Duke* (1683) and with the tragicomedy *The Island Princess* (1687).³⁹ Instead, Tate's theory and his chosen adaptations, particularly in the case of *King Lear*, show that he is participating in what he believes to be an important social role: the adapting of serious drama in order to present a clear and appealing lesson to audiences. This goal obviously worked in the case of *Lear*; Tate's other second greatest success was his translation of the psalms.⁴⁰ These are works produced by someone who clearly felt the moral importance of literature and saw that there could be like value in the English stage.

This dedication to the *Loyal General*, when combined with a Prologue written by Dryden, also participates in a project to take the stage a little more

³⁹ Dugas, "Elkanah Settle, John Crowne and Nahum Tate," 392.

⁴⁰ See Maguire, "Nahum Tate's," 29.

seriously. Dryden's Prologue attacks audience members for having bad taste and even connects the support of low or tasteless plays to treason:

The Plays that take on our Corrupted Stage,
Methinks resemble the distracted Age;
Noise, madness, all unreasonable Things,
That strike at Sense as Rebels do at Kings!

Instead, Dryden dedicates Tate's tragedy to the "few that take delight / In that which reasonable Men should write / To them Alone we Dedicate this Night."⁴¹

Like the critical writing of Tate and Davenant, this Prologue suggests that reasonable men are able to discern the important lessons in tragedies and to appreciate this high art when it is staged. Given this low opinion of the Restoration audience, it is not surprising that playwrights and adapters of Shakespeare would strive for clarity and explicitness. Tate's critical tone here is also probably a product of an uncongenial environment for tragedy specifically in the late seventies and early eighties, in addition to the critical flop of the play itself.

Also telling is the defense that Tate writes for his banned *Richard II* because he argues for it on the basis of moral value. The play was an odd choice for performance in the early 1680s, given its subject matter, and when it was published Tate writes to defend that choice and his reworking of the material. The play was refused a license for performance in 1680, but Tate tried to sneak a performance in under the title *The Sicilian Usurper* in January of 1681. The punishment was the silencing of the theater for ten days, which Dugas points out

⁴¹ Tate, *Loyal General*, sig. A6r.

is “the longest silencing in the late seventeenth century.”⁴² His persistence as an unsuccessful playwright begs the question as to why he would choose the play and persist with it in the face of so much difficulty. Tate’s defense argues for his play on the basis of moral value. His evidence consists of a long list of linguistic revisions confirming that he did not, in fact, provide an immoral play. In these examples, he puts his own text side by side with Shakespeare’s to show how he has treated the characters appropriately and what kinds of linguistic changes he was able to make. In short, Tate is providing textual evidence to offer proof that his play was unfairly silenced without proper examination or consideration. It would seem that he feels the authorities should read his play more closely to find its true meaning, and if they read the published draft they would marvel at its suppression: “I confess, I expected it wou'd have found Protection from whence it receiv'd Prohibition; and so questionless it wou'd, cou'd I have obtain'd my Petition to have it perus'd and dealt with according as the Contents Deserv'd, but a positive Doom of Suppression *without Examination* was all that I cou'd procure.”⁴³ The opening part of the dedication also states that his intentions with the play would have been clear if anyone had read it “with half an Eye.”⁴⁴ The bulk of his dedication is then devoted to providing textual evidence and

⁴² Dugas, *Marketing the Bard*, 50.

⁴³ Nahum Tate, *The History of Richard the Second, Acted at the Theatre Royal, Under the Name of the Sicilian Usurper, with a Prefatory Epistle in the Vindication of the Author. Occasion'd by the Prohibition of this Play on the Stage* (London: 1681b), sig. A2v.

⁴⁴ Tate, *History of Richard*, sig. A1r.

comparison with Shakespeare's text to show how he has improved the play in terms of language and justice, both of which have bearing on the nature of the characters.

For instance, Tate argues that the language of a character has direct bearing on his moral status and thus he changes Richard's dialogue to "the Language of an Active, Prudent Prince."⁴⁵ In some cases, to make Richard more likeable and more virtuous, he changes his motivation and/or adds dialogue. Instead of taking away Bolingbroke's wealth and lands, Tate's Richard states, "By Heav'n our Judge, we mean him fair, / And shortly will with Interest restore / The Loan our suddain Streights make necessary."⁴⁶ Tate accurately describes the effects of such a change thus: "My Design was to engage the pitty of the Audience for him in his Distresses, which I cou'd never have compas'd had I not before shewn him a Wise, Active, and Just Prince."⁴⁷ Although these types of changes do improve Richard's character, encourage pity, and resolve issues of justice between Bolingbroke and Richard, Tate could do nothing to prevent the resigning of the crown. He says in part that he writes to "Vindicate his Magnanimity in Regard of his Resigning the Crown," by stating that he added a scene to show that Richard was forced to give up the crown due to the

⁴⁵ Tate, *History of Richard*, sig. A2r.

⁴⁶ Tate, *History of Richard*, sig. A2r.

⁴⁷ Tate, *History of Richard*, sig. A2r.

“Malignancy of his Fortune.”⁴⁸ The changes that Tate makes to the language are meant to reconstruct the fiction of the crown.

The songs included in the prefatory material reinforce this point. As he does in other critical writings concerning his own works, Tate emphasizes that his works depict nothing but virtue and loyalty, even going against how history depicts many of the characters in the play: “Every Scene is full of Respect to Majesty and the dignity of the Courts, not one alter’d Page but what breaths Loyalty, yet had this Play the hard fortune to receive its Prohibition from Court.”⁴⁹ Unfortunately for Tate, however, the Civil Wars and execution of Charles I detracted from the concept of divine right, and the drama of Charles’s reign was actively engaged in pretending that it still existed. This is a key difference between his *Lear* and his *Richard II*. He could vilify usurpers and elevate Richard’s character all he wanted, but that did not prevent the biggest injustice of the play: the forced resigning and captivity of Richard. Given this problem, it is not surprising that Tate strenuously objected to the play being suppressed under its true title, the *Sicilian Usurper*, which underscores the majority of the changes he makes to Shakespeare’s play. It is surprising, given his feelings, that he did not use the title the *Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, as he calls the play a “Tragedy” on the first page of the dedication. There was ample publishing precedent to do so, since the play was published as a tragedy in quarto

⁴⁸ Tate, *History of Richard*, sig. A2v.

⁴⁹ Tate, *History of Richard*, sig. A2v.

form but as a history in the First Folio.⁵⁰ Spencer surmises that Tate was using the Third Folio for his *Richard II*, as he did for his version of *Coriolanus*, so it is possible he defaulted to the title of the version he was consulting.⁵¹

The ending of the Epistle Dedicatory features a series of laments on the state of Poetry, or drama, of the period. Tate writes that he attempted to blend some comedy with tragedy in order to lighten the play, per Dryden's assessment, but fears that the state of literature is too dire for good poetry to survive. Coming approximately a century later, the occasion for Tate's defense is not unlike Sidney's. A bit shockingly, Tate writes, "Poetry and Learning, ev'n in Petronius his time, was a barren Province, when Villany of any sort was a thriving Trade."⁵² Immediately after, he quotes Catullus 52, and states, "Aristotle himself confesses Poetry a better School of Vertue than Philosophy."⁵³ Like Davenant prefatory criticism, Tate's work indicates a desire for good poetry, but a fear that it will not be recognized. Their adaptations walk the line between these concerns.

The dedication to *The Loyal General* could have helped Tate set the stage for his adaptation of *Lear* over a year later. It is quite possible, given the short time frame, that Tate was working on them both or thinking ahead to his next project. Given that one of these tragedies was banned, one a failure, and the other

⁵⁰ The play would have been available to the Restoration audience in quarto form (1655) and in folio (1664).

⁵¹ Spencer, *Nahum Tate*, 56.

⁵² Tate, *History of Richard*, sig. A3r.

⁵³ Tate, *History of Richard*, sig. A3v.

two not great, it is surprising that Tate kept going with tragedies and significant that *Lear* was so popular. Only after *The Ingratitude of the Commonwealth* did he eventually turn to farce and romance in the mid to late eighties, but both of his farces, *A Duke and no Duke* (1684) and *Cuckolds-Haven* (1685), are adaptations.⁵⁴ In the dedication to his *Lear*, Tate identifies what he perceived to be several problems with Shakespeare's original, all of which are consistent with common Restoration theoretical concerns, and which he attempts to fix with his alterations. The biggest problems he identifies are issues of "Regularity and Probability," which he has corrected by inventing the love connection between Edgar and Cordelia. In Tate's words, this change

renders *Cordelia's* Indifference and her Father's Passion in the first Scene probable. It likewise gives Countenance to *Edgar's* Disguise, making that a generous Design that was before a poor Shift to save his Life. The Distress of the Story is evidently heightened by it; and it particularly gave Occasion of a New Scene or Two, of more Success (perhaps) than Merit.⁵⁵

He also writes that this change prompted him to adjust the ending so that the innocent victims were saved. Famously, he also cites Dryden as his authority on this type of change, saying that it is "more difficult to Save than 'tis to Kill."⁵⁶

Having fixed these issues of probability and poetic justice, Tate also writes that he worked on the language of the play, having found it unnatural, rough, and

⁵⁴ *A Duke and No Duke* is an adaptation of Cokain's *Trappolin creduto Principe; or, Trappolin Supps'd a Prince*. *Cuckholds-Haven* is a version of *Edward Ho!*, a work by Jonson, Marston and Chapman.

⁵⁵ Tate, *Lear*, sig. A2v.

⁵⁶ Tate, *Lear*, sig. A3r.

“unpolisht” like a “Heap of Jewels.”⁵⁷ He explains that he worked on the language so that it was appropriate to the station of the character, but kept Shakespeare’s language of madness because it was proper and inventive. This quote from the dedication is used frequently by critics, most often to cite changing Restoration taste in language and as evidence of Shakespeare’s status as an antiquated playwright. Neither of these claims are off point; however, an analysis of some examples from the play below reveals that many of Tate’s changes, linguistic and otherwise, like the changes made by Davenant to his *Macbeth*, have to do with clarifying an interpretation of the play for performance and production. For Tate, changing *Lear* comes down to what would make the king’s decisions feasible. The fiction of the Divine Right of Kings cannot exist if Lear and Cordelia perish at the end of the play. The Prologue gives some indication of this direction. Tate actually drops in Shakespeare’s name, which is consistent with many adaptations during this period. Instead of using the jewel metaphor, he praises Shakespeare’s work by comparing it to “Rustick” flowers, which are made more beautiful by composing them into a garland. He writes that he had to work on his revision because of the play’s intrinsic value:

Why shou’d these Scenes lie hid, in which we find
 What may at Once divert and teach the Mind?
 Morals were alwaies proper for the Stage,
 But are ev’n necessary in this Age.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Tate, *Lear*, sig. A2v.

⁵⁸ Tate, *Lear*, sig. A4r.

So what we have, then, is a Prologue, more likely to have been encountered by a wider audience than the Epistle Dedicatory, which links Shakespeare's works in particular to moral concerns. This is evidence that the real issue at hand is taking a piece of literature with value, making that value obvious, and presenting it on the stage was the larger goal. The details, the specific moral or virtue to be presented in the work, is about kingship and succession. This message is unsurprising, even predictable at this time, but what is significant is how Tate and Davenant are using the material and what they think old plays and adapted works should do: they should provide these lessons on virtue and vice as education for the age. They explicitly tell the audience and the government that this is their aim and that their changes bear witness to these goals. This section is immediately followed by the aforementioned reference to the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis. The changes that Tate makes are directly related to this line of thinking.

For instance, the change to Cordelia and Edgar's relationship does clear up the motivation of her character in Act I, scene i. And, in doing so, it effectively answers an interpretive question pondered by years of Shakespearean criticism: why Cordelia might answer her father in such a manner, a question at the heart of the play's central conflict. Now she is simply a woman who wants to get out of a bad marriage being arranged by her father, a motivation effectively explained in a quick aside:

Now comes my Trial, how I am distrest,
That must with cold speech tempt the chol'rick King
Rather to leave me Dowerless, than condemn me
To loath'd Embraces!" (I.i.4)

Tate's last adaptation, *The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth*, appearing in the same year as his *Lear*, contains a dedication that takes care to offer a preemptive defense to the Lord Chamberlain about the play's content. With each adaptation, Tate learns from past mistakes and experiences. He offers a clear thesis and analysis of the play's content for his readers, a step even more explicit than his previous works. Based on *Coriolanus*, his version ends with a bloody mess and the last words being given by a dying Coriolanus, welcoming death as peaceful, but Tate takes care to justify the violence and rebellion depicted in the play by arguing in The Epistle Dedicatory that presenting a play with such a strong political parallel to the recent past is acceptable because audiences can learn from it. In an age saturated with literature of the past, we have here a contemporary author explaining to his reading audience how to deal with the past and how to read it. The title page even features an epigraph from Horace's *Art of Poetry*, which translates as "If you chance again to set before us the enobled Achilles let him be active, wrathful, inexorable, bold and disown all Obligation of Laws, arrogate everything by Force of Arms."⁵⁹ This stance speaks to arguments about presenting characters according to their nature as well as the need to learn from such violent examples. In the Dedicatory, Tate writes,

Nor may it be altogether amiss, to give these Projecters themselves, examples how wretched their dependence is on the uncertain Crowd. Faction is a Monster that often makes the slaughter 'twas designed for; and as often turns its fury on those that hatcht it. The Moral therefore of

⁵⁹ Horace, *The Works of Horace Translated into English Prose* (London: 1753), 377.

these Scenes being to Recommend Submission and Adherence to
 Establish Lawful Power, which in a word, is Loyalty.⁶⁰

After bringing up the fact that he is adapting Shakespeare and choosing to keep the political parallel in the forefront, Tate then provides a clear thesis of the play for readers. This action once again brings concerns about audience taste and their ability to act as critics into the forefront. It is also a move which offers Tate a bit of protection as an author; in providing a thesis detailing how his play is a lesson in loyalty, he also presents an argument for the reason his adaptation is a valuable stage production.

The dedication also underscores the play's connection to the civil war by including a poem describing the wars and praising Henry Somerset, the first Marquess of Worcester and supporter of Charles the I as "Noble" and the "heart of Loyalty."⁶¹ The play is in fact dedicated to Worcester's ancestor, Charles Somerset, son of the current Marquess of Worcester when Tate was crafting the play. Tate praises his ancestor as an example of the kind of loyalty he is describing as virtuous in his adaptation of the play and asks for his protection as someone who is not only loyal and principled, but also knows literature. The Prologue, written by Sir George Raynsford, also indicates the extent of dissatisfaction with the audience members' interpretations of drama. The opening language of the Prologue even blends political loyalty with those loyal to established dramatic theory of the Restoration: "Our Author do's with modesty

⁶⁰ Nahum Tate, *The Ingratitude of a Common-Wealth: Or, the Fall of Caius Martius Coriolanus, as it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal* (London: 1682), sig. A2v.

⁶¹ Tate, *Ingratitude*, sig. A3r.

submit, / To all the Loyal Criticks of the Pit; / Not to the Wit-dissenters of the Age, / Who in a Civil War do still Engage, / The antient fundamental Laws o'th' Stage."⁶² The play is thus declared to be written for loyalists who are faithful to both the political past in terms of monarchy and the critical past. Given such a stance, it is not surprising that the play also takes Shakespeare as a figure in both of these concerns: "Yet he presumes we may be safe to Day, / Since Shakespear gave Foundation to the Play: / 'Tis Alter'd—and his sacred Ghost appears'd."⁶³ Shakespeare's spirit, as with many other adaptations where he is mentioned in the prefatory material or the prologue, is happy with and vindicated by changes to his work which only serve to elevate the raw material he provided for his literary ancestors. Shakespeare thus functions in a similar manner to Tate as "Noble Worcester" in the opening poem to the "Right Honorable Charl's Lord Herbert"; the dramatic forefather by extension parallels the political forefathers. The Prologue also scathingly critiques audience members, with special attention paid to the women, for being too concerned with trivial matters and for not considering the bigger picture, or the craft, behind a presented dramatic work:

But now I spy Tyrannick Judges here;
 What pitty 'tis so Fair, and so Severe!
 Fine Lady Criticks—on whose fragrant Breath,
 Depends the Plays long Life, or sudden Death.
 From them the Poet must receive his Doom,
 Just as Affairs succeed with them at Home:
 We hope the Paraquit and the Squirrel's well,
 Else we are Damn'd to th' very Pit of Hell.⁶⁴

⁶² Tate, *Ingratitude*, sig. A4r.

⁶³ Tate, *Ingratitude*, sig. A4r.

⁶⁴ Tate, *Ingratitude*, sig. A4r.

This section of the Prologue extends the themes of precedent and judgment with these lady critics functioning as judges who condemn works to death, but with judgment clouding their domestic, trivial whims. This line of argument also suggests that Tate's viewing audience might be better off if they also read his published prefatory material. This prefatory material, combined with the evidence of the play's linguistic and structural changes, clearly indicates that Tate was interested in the moral import of these adaptations to Shakespeare.

Language and Mood

In addition to the problem of Cordelia's motivation, which Tate had already identified and corrected by constructing a romantic relationship between Cordelia and Edgar, another potential problem for a Restoration audience is the depiction of Lear himself. We have already witnessed Tate's attempts to elevate the character of weak kings with his Richard II and his own descriptions of his changes. In the case of Lear, some of Tate's alterations involve simple verbal substitutions necessary for him to continue to depict the fiction of the Divine Right of Kings. For instance, when Edgar enters the stage during the heath scene, he encounters the king and exclaims, "[H]a! what do I see? by all my Griefs / the poor old King beheaded, / And drencht in this sow Storm" (II.iii.30). Here, "beheaded" is substituted for the original exclamation by Kent, "Alack, bare-headed" (III.iv.60). Similarly, Tate renders regicide more horrible by changing how the order for Lear and Cordelia's execution is given. In Shakespeare's version, Edmund states, "[M]y writ / Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia"

(V.iii.246-7). Tate changes that to an order coming from Goneril: “[D]ispatch your Pris’ners. / Our Empire can have no sure Settlement / But in their Death, the Earth that covers them / Binds fast our Throne. Let me hear they are dead”

(V.iii.56). Goneril, the daughter who has not only betrayed her father, but also would forsake her legitimate husband for the adulterous love of a bastard, is the one here giving the order that would destroy the true king. This change suggests that the most villainous person is the disloyal one, not the one who would be set up in place of the legitimate king. The increased evil of regicide softens Lear’s appearance in comparison.

But most importantly, Tate improves Lear’s character further by removing some of his faults. This is in keeping with changes made to a character’s language to fit his or her station, but moves beyond that because these alterations affect how an audience feels about the character’s virtue. Lear’s dismissal of Cordelia after she lies in order to escape an unwanted marriage is softened considerably.

Shakespeare’s Lear reacts:

Let it be so: thy truth then by thy dow’r!
 For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
 The mysteries of Hecat and the night;
 By all the operation of the orbs,
 From whom we do exist and cease to be;
 Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
 Propinquity and property of blood,
 And as a stranger to my heart and me
 Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
 Or he that makes his generation menses
 To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
 Be as well neighbor’d, pitied, and reliev’d,
 As thou my sometime daughter. (I.i.108-119)

There is no getting around the harshness of Lear's dismissal here, as he calls on a variety of pagan entities and uses them to deny Cordelia's relationship to him permanently. The most damaging blow is Lear's professed preference to know barbarians as opposed to his own child. Tate's Lear, however, does not take such a hard position.

And goes thy Heart with this?
 'Tis said that I am Chol'rick, judge me Gods,
 Is there not cause? now Minion I perceive
 The Truth of what has been suggested to Us,
 Thy Fondness for the Rebel Son of *Gloster*,
 False to his Father, as Thou art to my Hopes:
 And oh take heed, rash Girl, lest We comply
 With thy fond wishes, which thou wilt too late
 Repent, for know Our nature cannot brook
 A Child so young and so Ungentle. (I.i.4-5)

Here, rather than reacting as an angry, irrational old man, Tate's Lear provides a variety of reasons he has for ultimately deciding that Cordelia will be a "Stranger / Both to my Blood and Favor" (I.i.5). He initially addresses the charge that he is choleric, saying that he has good reason for his anger. In this case, he states that he has heard rumors that Cordelia was actually in some kind of relationship with Edmund, the ultimate villain. The political problem posed by Edmund's front and center appearance in the play, and his similarities to Monmouth, is now directly linked to Lear's own domestic problem. His decision to banish Cordelia is actually in keeping with preserving legitimate succession. Lear critiques Edmund for being "False to his Father," which is the same crime Cordelia is here committing and being punished for, only her crime is worse because her disloyalty is both a domestic problem and treason. She is not superseded by barbarians, but she is still "rash" and "ungentle," making her a child not worthy of

a king. Although Lear still gives up his powers to his older daughters, an obvious mistake, they are still his legitimate daughters. He is still preserving the succession, though his example could be considered a warning against constitutional monarchy. The unseen threat is that of Edmund, a bastard whose parentage is uncertain, who imagines himself even to be the son of a king (V.v.60). The conflict is a result of his eldest daughters' alignment with an unforeseen, external threat that Lear attempted to avoid in the play's opening scenes by banishing Cordelia. This act shows a remarkable amount of foresight and reason for someone supposed to be "choleric" and out of touch with his kingdom. In this instance, it is easy to feel that Lear is "[m]ore sin'd against than sinning" (III.i.25). The character problems of Shakespeare's *Lear*, the feeling that he is completely irrational, a king who wants to avoid all duties and retire with pleasure, who made some grave errors in judgment, do not exist in Tate's version.

Likewise, Cordelia's language is changed to reinforce this fantasy of succession. It has frequently been noted, even by Tate himself, that Tate revised and/or replaced much of the language in *Lear*, with the exceptions of the mad scenes. In another one of these important additions, Tate gives Cordelia an opportunity to discuss usurpation. Such expansion of female roles does not simply capitalize on novelty or the draw of the female body; women have now been on stage for over two decades. These revised female roles instead offer playwrights the opportunity to use a clearly defined type of character, the virtuous woman, as a vehicle for the play's moral. In this case, Cordelia, defined as a virtuous woman by her piety, her devotion to both her father and Edgar, her meekness, and her

modesty, may read as more simplistic or weaker to a modern audience used to Shakespeare's more feisty heroines, but fulfilled the need for a clearly prescribed virtuous role.⁶⁵ After Lear recognizes Cordelia through his madness, she does not lead him off of the stage. He is lead off by others, and Cordelia remains to give a speech about how she will support her father's cause, invoking:

[...] You never-erring Gods
 Fight on his side, and Thunder on his Foes
 Such Tempest as his poor ag'd Head sustain'd;
 Your Image suffers when a Monarch bleeds.
 'Tis your own Cause, for that your Succors bring,
 Revenge your Selves, and right an injur'd King. (IV.v.53)

Cordelia could not give this speech in any version other than Tate's, because its invocation of the fantasy of the Divine Right of Kings could not be sustained without Lear's own restoration. The lesson or moral here, as in Davenant's *Macbeth*, is about the importance of true kingship. Gone from Tate's version are any references to pagan gods, corrected here simply to read "gods," which is vague enough to draw in the contemporary audience's desire for the Christian god to act on behalf of the party in need of true justice. Cordelia herself is not going to take any particular action, other than calling upon the heavens to take up a righteous cause. The evidence of the righteous cause is, of course, the happy ending. Cordelia's words and her example help defend Lear's choices and his helplessness against external villains, and they set the audience up for the play's

⁶⁵ For more about how women's roles change on the Restoration stage, and the relationship of the "virtuous" female role in comparison to Restoration conduct books, see Jean I. Marsden, "Rewritten Women: Shakespearean Heroines in the Restoration," *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth*, 43-46.

moral, delivered by Edgar, whose reputation has been redeemed and who will serve as the next king ruling with Cordelia:

Our drooping Country now erects her Head,
Peace spreads her balmy Wings, and Plenty Blooms.
Divine Cordelia, all the Gods can witness
How much thy Love to Empire I prefer!
Thy bright example shall convince the World
(Whatever Storms of Fortune are decreed)
That Truth and Vertue shall at last succeed. (V.vi.67)

At least for the Restoration audience, Cordelia and Edgar directly play into the fantasies of the divine right of kings and of moral triumph. The linguistic changes Tate makes are not mere simplifications, in the negative sense, of Shakespeare's complex characters and metaphors. Instead, we should view his changes as easier to accept, condensed interpretations of themes, which were present in Shakespeare's play and are highlighted in this one adaptation.

Although modern scholars now seem to like the interpretational complexity of Shakespeare's works, adaptations like Tate's seem to be appealing in their simplicity to a late seventeenth century audience. Their vague simplicity makes them easy to relate to. For instance, it is easy to see how the closing lines of Tate's *Lear* would be easier for a wide variety of audiences to relate to across time. Tate uses key words like "peace" and "plenty" to describe the country after the restoration of the monarchy, but of course does not explain how a legitimate monarchy would achieve peace or plenty. When Edgar tells Cordelia that her example is inspiring and that "truth" and "vertue" will triumph, he of course does not define truth or virtue. Those concepts are left for audience members to define for themselves. While we can surmise what Tate meant with his Tory leanings in

the midst of the Exclusion Crisis, his simplified, optimistic ending is actually more open to interpretation than Shakespeare's version. In *The First Whigs: the Politics of the Exclusion Crisis 1678-1683*, J. R. Jones argues that the Whigs tended to simplify the political issues, stating that if they "evaded the fundamental causes of the crisis, and over-simplified the issues, this very crudity or simplicity of their approach increased its appeal."⁶⁶ What is true for political propaganda of the period is also true for the stage. After the political mess of the English Civil Wars and the failed Commonwealth, the simple answer, one coated with the rhetoric of truth and virtue, is going to be the most appealing and the easiest to accept.

The Importance of the Ending

The success of a play that punishes evil characters and rewards the good ones is understandable, particularly during the Restoration. Tate's adaptation of *Lear* was not the only play to capitalize on the Restoration's desire for tragicomedy and poetic justice. It is worth noting that there were several other successful plays, both adapted and unadapted, which fit this pattern. It is well documented that the plays of Beaumont, Fletcher, and Jonson were more popular than Shakespeare's during this period. Jonson's work is more regular in terms of neoclassical unities, but his works could appeal on other levels. Before 1666, *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* are each performed seven times, *Epicoene* nine

⁶⁶ J. R. Jones, *The First Whigs: The Politics of the Exclusion Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 215-216.

times, and *Volpone* three times.⁶⁷ Additional examples of this phenomenon can be found in comedic adaptations of Shakespeare. Davenant's combination of *Measure for Measure* and *Much Ado About Nothing* as *The Law Against Lovers* (1662) becomes almost the very definition of a split plot tragicomedy.

Tate's *Lear*, however, was also likely successful because it provided a clear interpretive model for its audience. In such an environment, when it is possible to write a play seemingly in line with the tastes and laws of the period and its politics and have that same play banned, the final lines of the play become increasingly crucial. Plays that we would expect to succeed based on their content alone, like *The Ingratitude of the Commonwealth* or John Crowne's *The Misery of Civil War* (1680) fail. When the viewing audience does not have the benefit of extended study of the text, playwrights had to make their intentions increasingly explicit in order to show that their works were not morally, or politically, offensive. In this environment, when theater was needing to justify its existence, and when the reading and viewing audiences are likely distinct, it is necessary to summarize the value of the play's content in order to justify its presence on the stage. This kind of change is the practical enactment of the author's literary concerns and theories.

⁶⁷ Dobson, 24. Dobson also writes of Jonson and Fletcher, "Just as Fletcher's most popular plays could be imitated to produce heroic romances implicitly depicting the Restoration as a providential return to legitimacy and order, so Jonson's could be mined to produce comedies explicitly depicting the Commonwealth as a temporary ascendancy of humors-infested religious hypocrites and disreputable cozeners—comedies which moreover represent human character as reassuringly stable despite the violent shifts of ideological allegiance which the Restoration audience and been compelled to experience" (24).

Conclusions

The political context and changing theater conditions of Restoration theater have been well thought out and do account for some of the changes made to plays written before 1642. However, in the case of Davenant's *Macbeth*, explored in the previous chapter, and Tate's *King Lear*, these so-called practical changes made for commercial value and changing theater conditions, which have been the focus of the majority of scholarship on Restoration Shakespeare, do not thoroughly explain all of the changes, nor do they explain the long-term success of certain adaptations of Shakespeare. In the beginning of an article on Tate's adaptation of *Coriolanus*, Thomas G. Olsen writes that

[s]everal recent critical studies of Shakespeare's historical evolution into the figure Michael Dobson calls "the national poet" have considerably enriched our understanding of how Shakespearean adaptations functioned politically and culturally on the Restoration stage. Previously, and in the shadow of early-twentieth-century critics such as George C. D. Odell and Hazelton Spencer, abstract aesthetic considerations had dominated scholarly discussion of late-seventeenth-century productions of Shakespeare.⁶⁸

Olsen also writes that "Restoration theater was in its very inception overtly political. Henry Killigrew and Davenant were not granted their monopolies in a political vacuum, but rather as licensed, regulated servants of Charles and his new government."⁶⁹ This chapter has demonstrated a new interpretation of these changes which reexamines the overtly political nature of Tate's *Lear*. My work shows that those two concerns are not as far apart as they initially seem.

⁶⁸ Thomas G. Olsen, "Apolitical Shakespear; Or, the Restoration *Coriolanus*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38.3 (1998), 411.

⁶⁹ Olsen, 415.

Adaptation is prompted by political turmoil in England. Adapting pre-1642 plays offered playwrights a means of dealing with past and present issues and helped justify the existence and social benefit of theater in an environment that was extremely hostile to it. The aesthetic concerns highlight political problems and issues in the period and make direct attempts to appease and address them. As a result of this environment, the changes made in these adaptations move to restrict meaning while simultaneously equivocating to audiences. These linguistic changes perfectly illustrate the intersection of theoretical and practical changes. Restoration adapters of Shakespeare were changing his language not only to remove, practically speaking, offensive oaths and swearing, but also to limit the meaning of the play in order to provide a clearer message. These changes involved removing or simplifying metaphors in order to render Shakespeare more easily accessible and understandable to a wider audience. Given that the Restoration audience was changing into a broader, albeit smaller audience, this simplification of language, which is usually viewed by scholars as the destruction of Shakespeare, was the attempt of Restoration playwrights to justify the presence of theater in the Restoration time period. They were making conscious and explicit attempts to provide clear, accessible lessons for their audiences, illustrating that theater could have a beneficial social purpose. Most commonly, as the example of Tate's *Lear* illustrates, that beneficial social purpose related to providing some sort of lesson on virtue, which was usually political in nature, especially if a play was adapted between 1678-1682. Adaptation, described by Jean I. Marsden as a practice "widely accepted from the

late seventeenth century on,” is perhaps even more important than the original plays—it is the best possible means of delivering material that is both delightful and instructive to audiences in times of crisis because an adaptation reworks the past while emphasizing what has changed for the present.⁷⁰

While these adaptations offer clear theses and obvious moral positions on each play and their characters, these limitations allow a certain amount of flexibility for the characters and plays overall. Just because an adapter like Tate has turned Edmund into a cliché villain does not mean that position will not resonate for both Tate’s audiences and audiences beyond. In another example, it has been well documented that Restoration adaptations to female roles are precursors to the eighteenth-century pathetic drama, which helps explain the appeal of certain adaptations.⁷¹ The production history of Tate’s *Lear* demonstrates this inherent flexibility associated with simplicity. This restricted interpretation also seems to enhance the emotional response that audiences have to the play. Shakespeare specifically matters when it comes to adaptation because the men producing and adapting Shakespeare, in this instance Nahum Tate, profoundly respect his works and want to show the value of these old plays. They are taking the works of the past, the theater of the past, and demonstrating how they can be valuable to present society, politically, morally, aesthetically, and practically. The very act of adapting something so problematic illustrates that the past and the form of theater are still relevant and useful to contemporary society.

⁷⁰ Marsden, *Re-Imagined*, 4.

⁷¹ See Marsden, “Rewritten Women,” 43-46.

Chapter Three

“Proved most royal”: Producing *Hamlet* in the Restoration

In this second half of my dissertation, I turn to analyze two plays that are commonly considered “unadapted” in the late seventeenth century: *Hamlet* and *Othello*. In doing so, I challenge what constitutes an adaptation in this period by focusing on the textual cuts made for performance. Although partially the result of theatrical practice, as opposed to the agency of one particular adapter, these two plays reflect the same kind of concern interpreting Shakespeare as is reflected in Davenant’s *Macbeth* and Tate’s *King Lear*. I examine the Smock Alley Promptbooks, as well as an acting text from 1676, which serve as important evidence for constructing late-seventeenth-century performances of *Hamlet* and *Othello*. In my discussion of *Hamlet*, I focus on how these texts answer performance questions that address issues still inherent in his plays. In particular, I look at the treatment of Fortinbras. Although he is commonly excised from modern productions, the Smock Alley text retains some of his character. I demonstrate how the textual cuts referencing Fortinbras paint the man who will be heir to the Danish throne in a more positive light. I use this evidence as the basis for my discussion of *Hamlet* as a play interpreted as a lesson about the importance of succession, an issue at the forefront both at the time the play was written, near the end of Elizabeth I’s reign, and during the Restoration.¹

¹ Lori Leigh’s recent book, *Shakespeare and the Embodied Heroine: Staging Female Characters in the Late Plays and Early Adaptations* (2014), has argued for the importance of stagecraft in intersection with contemporary literary theory as a means of understanding and interpreting Shakespeare’s works. She writes, “What these book-length studies have in common [...] is their primary focus upon the written word, or

These promptbooks not only demonstrate that late seventeenth century performances of Shakespeare put dramatic theory into practice, they also show that these producers of Shakespeare addressed performance questions that we still grapple with today. They, too, thought that there was a correct way to interpret Shakespeare's works. *Hamlet*, as is well known, is far too long to be acted in its entirety. It is a play of questions and questioning, and hundreds of years of scholarship have obsessed over how its characters are to be interpreted and portrayed. All productions of Shakespeare's works, whether in the late seventeenth century or the twenty-first century, are adaptations; in order to stage his works, directors and actors are forced to make interpretative decisions. The removal of ambiguities present in adaptations and performance texts of Shakespeare's works demonstrates how some of these performance choices were made. While scholars now appreciate the multiple possibilities of texts and performances, these plays are valuable for showing us one concise interpretation of Shakespeare's works and how they related to late seventeenth century culture and tastes. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the tumultuous theatrical environment of the late seventeenth century made it nearly impossible for the ambiguities of Shakespeare to survive on the stage. Erika T. Linn's writing speaks to concerns of clarity in the theater and how it relates to moral interpretations:

Holding up the mirror to nature did not produce a neutral reflection; it offered a way to grapple with the challenges of theatrical interpretation.

Shakespeare the author, rather than stagecraft of Shakespeare the theatre-maker. [...] always, however, there exist hints and traces that reflect staging and storytelling of thematic importance in the Renaissance play" (2). See Lori Leigh, *Shakespeare and the Embodied Heroine: Staging Female Characters in the Late Plays and Early Adaptations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

We tend to associate epistemological uncertainty (whether something was real or not) with the issue of mimetic representation, and we tend to associate moral uncertainty (whether something was good or not) with the issue of allegorical representation. For early modern audience members, however, theatrical interpretation was simultaneously a mimetic and an allegorical endeavor. Questions of epistemology and moral interpretation were inseparable.²

She continues, “This moral complicity is interwoven with the epistemological difficulties of interpreting performance.”³ Theatergoers could be held accountable for their responses and actions in regard to what they experienced on the stage.⁴ In a time when the very existence of the stage had to be justified to a great many, it behooved theater producers to clarify their intentions and to help their audience in interpreting correctly. But doing so meant that an interpretation had to be established.

The Smock Alley Promptbook of *Hamlet* and the 1676 Acting Quarto by
Davenant

Davenant’s acquisition of the rights to *Hamlet* and the choice to stage it early in the Restoration speaks to the desire of late-seventeenth-century playwrights and managers to create literary authority through the use of older plays. *Hamlet* was one of the few already established and popular plays obtained by Davenant’s company, and that popularity helped in part secure the success of

² Erika T. Linn, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 93.

³ Linn, 94.

⁴ Linn, 130.

the Duke's Company over Killigrew's company.⁵ This popularity, combined with the legend of Shakespeare's legacy, constructed a particular identity for Davenant's company. Of *Hamlet*, Downes writes,

The Tragedy of *Hamlet*; *Hamlet* being Perform'd by Mr. Betterton, Sir William (having seen Mr. Taylor of the Black-Fryars Company Act it, who being Instructed by the Author Mr. Shakespeare) taught Mr. Betterton in every Particle of it; which by his exact Performance of it, gain'd him Esteem and Reputation, Superlative to all other Plays.⁶

Hume and Milhous assess the story as obviously incorrect, as Burbage was dead before Taylor was part of the company, but that "the anecdote indicates respect for a performance tradition."⁷ Dobson notes that in the Restoration few living actors had any experience performing Shakespeare's plays, though *Hamlet* was one of the ones still in repertory.⁸ Part of this popularity was undoubtedly due to Thomas Betterton's brilliant acting ability.⁹ This production of the play also featured one of the earliest examples of changeable scenery, and Ophelia and

⁵ See Hapgood in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Shakespeare in Production, ed. Robert Hapgood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11, as well as Dugas; and Raddadi. Michael Dobson has little to say of Davenant's *Hamlet*, though he notes Evelyn's more negative reaction in 1661 as a response to seeing Davenant's cut version. He writes, "Evelyn's remark is all the more interesting, given that the version of *Hamlet* he saw performed was almost certainly the revised text published in 1676, extensively cut and with its diction frequently modernized and simplified. Even one of the most highly regarded of Shakespeare's plays needed its language clarified for this new generation of playgoers, apparently, and even with such assistance the tragedy might still seem out of date, incongruous in a theatrical repertory whose chief business was to nurture that particular romantic fictions that were among the premises of Charles II's court" (28).

⁶ Downes, 51-52.

⁷ Downes, n. 138, 51-52.

⁸ Dobson, 2.

⁹ See Hapgood, 11-12.

Gertrude were portrayed by women.¹⁰ In terms of changes, however, *Hamlet* is, like *Othello*, considered to be unadapted, though it is recognized that Davenant modernizes the play's language.

Modern critics have not had much to say about the treatment of *Hamlet* in the Restoration. As with *Othello*, which will be explored in the next chapter, few of these scholars consider Davenant's *Hamlet* to be adapted.¹¹ Jean I. Marsden illustrates a representative opinion: "Not all of Shakespeare was adapted, but adapted plays coexisted with the unadapted, many of them unaltered aside from minor omissions and an occasional new line. *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Henry IV, Parts I and II*, *Henry VIII*, and *Julius Caesar*, all popular plays during the Restoration and eighteenth century, appeared unadapted. All of these plays were cut [...]."¹² She says that Betterton's version is an "acting version, not an adaptation."¹³ As

¹⁰ Hapgood, 11.

¹¹ Dugas calls it an "abridgment" (*Marketing*, 32). Raddadi, ever the proponent of Davenant, notes that it was quite common for Elizabethan plays to be cut for performances (64-65). Taylor also opines, "By the standards of more notorious adaptations of the period, Davenant's *Hamlet* hardly seems adapted at all; he adds no new characters or episodes, nor does he restructure the action. But he does make more than three hundred small-scale changes in wording, some of which affect our interpretation of the action or characters. When Shakespeare's Hamlet discovers Claudius alone in Act Three he says, 'Now might I do it pat, now he is praying'; Davenant's Hamlet first secures the audience's moral bearings by saying, 'Where is this murderer' and then (sarcastically, or taken aback) notes that 'he kneels and prays'" (47). See also Bevington; Dobson; Marsden; Odell; Rosenberg; and Sorelius.

¹² Marsden, 157 n.1.

¹³ Marsden, 161 n. 14. Gunnar Sorelius concurs: "It was probably produced in the form in which it was published in 1676, a cut and polished version, probably by Davenant, but with no structural changes" (42). Odell says it was "for all intents and purposes Shakespeare's play" (225). The *Shakespeare in Production* edition of the play, edited by Robert Hapgood, states that "Compared with other plays, however, the impact of these practices on the performance of *Hamlet* was characteristically moderated. It did not undergo the extensive alterations that were made to *The Tempest*, nor was it subjected

with *Macbeth* and *Lear*, the description of what few changes are made to *Hamlet* in this period is usually relegated to notes like “In general, the Restoration patentees were directed to expunge all profanity, scurrility, and obscenity, and so Davenant did with *Hamlet*, along with considerable modernization of diction.”¹⁴ Certainly, producers like Davenant did make such changes. But, as with the more extensive adaptations, like his *Macbeth* or Tate’s *King Lear*, not all of the changes can be categorized in such a manner.¹⁵ What few critics address, however, is how the cutting of *Hamlet* in the late seventeenth century could affect its interpretation and why we might also consider it an adaptation. The play’s meaning is hardly discussed at all. For instance, when discussing the 1676 text, Spencer laments: “What makes this *Hamlet* an alteration, and reprehensible, is the mutilation of Shakespeare’s diction. [...] That the adapter felt no restraint we can be fairly certain, for many of his revisions appear to be purely arbitrary.”¹⁶ Dobson writes that most of the “minor changes have no such overt critical purpose.”¹⁷ In

to the heavy emphasis on spectacle of Davenant’s adaptation of *Macbeth*, although in 1674 it was briefly ‘adorned and embellished with very curious dances between the acts.’” (11). See Sorelius, *The Giant Race Before the Flood: Pre-Restoration Drama on the Stage and in the Criticism of the Restoration* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1966); and George C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920).

¹⁴ Hapgood, 11.

¹⁵ Spencer, surprisingly, is one of the exceptions, noting, “It is a curious fact that this production of *Hamlet* has not hitherto been recognized as belonging to that motley assortment of mangled stage versions which we conveniently lump as Shakespearean alterations, though this mildly reproachful term has regularly been used to include such harmless affairs as the Bettertonian *Henry the Fourth*” (Spencer, “*Hamlet Under the Restoration*,” 772).

¹⁶ Spencer, “*Hamlet Under the Restoration*, 777-778.

¹⁷ Dobson, 47.

contrast, I find that extant performance texts for *Hamlet* from the late-seventeenth century illustrate that the cuts made to the play in this period work towards answering some of the long-standing performance questions plaguing *Hamlet* over hundreds of years of scholarship. We know accept that contemporary performances of Shakespeare's works are each unique adaptations that make interpretive choices.¹⁸ We should similarly consider so-called unadapted tragedies from the late-seventeenth century such *Hamlet* and *Othello*.

In the case of *Hamlet*, these changes can be observed through an examination of the Davenant's 1676 acting text and the Smock Alley Promptbook. This 1676 text was printed marking passages that were omitted in performance. The Davenant edition includes the following note before the playtext: "This Play being too long to be conveniently Acted, such Places as might be least prejudicial to the Plot or the Sense, are left out upon the Stage: but that we may no way wrong the incomparable Author, are here inserted according to the Original Copy, with this Mark “.”"¹⁹ Davenant is, of course, not incorrect. This note is also interesting because it, like the story of Davenant training Betterton in the title role, professes a desire for consistency of interpretation, as well as an authentic Shakespeare.²⁰ It also assumes that a reading audience would

¹⁸ See Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); and Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁹ Shakespeare, 1676, Reader's Note.

²⁰ Spencer, like many other scholars of Restoration *Hamlet*, recounts this story from Downes (*Shakespeare Improved*, 183).

want to know which portions of the play were staged, or how Davenant and others were interpreting the play. This acting text is remarkably consistent with the Smock Alley text, which speaks to the credibility of both as representation of *Hamlet* on the late-seventeenth-century English Stage, as well as a representation of what *Hamlet* looked like on the stage at the beginning of the century. Spencer finds that the 1676 acting text is based on Quarto 6, but there are some differences.²¹ In the case of the 1676 acting text, Spencer suggests that Davenant's track record with *Macbeth* and *The Law Against Lovers* as evidence for his candidacy as the editor of the 1676 acting quarto.²² This conclusion has come to be accepted, and I concur; in this chapter, I will refer to this text as Davenant's *Hamlet*. As to the question of whether or not the 1676 acting text can be said to represent what *Hamlet* looked like on the early Restoration stage, Spencer argues that such a delay was not uncommon.²³ Spencer writes, "And, as Downes asserts, we have D'Avenant to connect the pre- and post-Wars *Hamlet*. I would not maintain that the cuts specified in the edition of 1676, and presumably employed when D'Avenant first staged the play in 1661, are certainly identical with the Elizabethan cuts. But that they were similar is a fair inference."²⁴

²¹ Spencer, *Shakespeare Improved*, 175; Spencer, "Hamlet Under the Restoration."

²² Spencer, "Hamlet Under the Restoration," 786-787.

²³ Spencer, "Hamlet Under the Restoration," 787.

²⁴ Spencer, "Seventeenth-Century Cuts," 260.

The Smock Alley Promptbook is likely dated later, somewhere from 1674-1685. At one point, the promptbook was a single volume, belonging to James Halliwell-Phillipps, who dismembered it and bound the plays individually. As a result, many of the plays are missing pages.²⁵ Although it is a promptbook for a theater in Dublin, editor G. Blakemore Evans finds that “many of the cuts and other changes, which now appear for the first time in the Smock Alley PB, were in fact importations from London... [T]he Smock Alley PB preserves for us in its essentials *Othello* as it was performed in Restoration London.”²⁶ William Van Lennep, for instance, records some of the connections through actors known to have performed both in the Smock Alley Theater and in London. He also discusses the touring of Oxford and in Scotland.²⁷ Likewise, James McManaway writes that “[i]t is abundantly clear that there was a constant interchange of personnel between the Dublin and London theaters, with the result that the acting versions used in one city may be expected to bear a close relation to those current in the other.”²⁸ This was especially true in the early seasons; Stephen Austin Kelly points out that audiences in Dublin wanted to see exactly what the audiences in

²⁵ R. C. Bald, “Shakespeare on the Stage in Restoration Dublin,” *PMLA* 56.2 (1941), 369.

²⁶ G. Evans Blakemore, *Shakespearean Promptbooks in the Seventeenth Century* Vol. 6 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1980), 10.

²⁷ William Van Lennep, “The Smock Alley Players of Dublin,” *ELH* 13.3 (1946): 217-219.

²⁸ James G. McManaway, “Additional Prompt-Books of Shakespeare from the Smock Alley Theatre,” *The Modern Language Review* 45.1 (1950), 65.

London saw.²⁹ Flood writes that there is also an early recorded performance of *Othello* in Dublin, again linking the Smock Alley text with early performance in London.³⁰

The cuts made to *Hamlet* during the Restoration are usually explained away without scholars considering how these cuts affect the interpretation other than some sort of loss to the Shakespearean text. Some of these reasons suggested include the oft-mentioned desire for clarity and elegance.³¹ In *Hamlet*, as with other Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare, many cuts are made in order to remove oaths and overt references to sexuality. I will not focus on these excisions, as my aim is to illustrate how adapters of Shakespeare move beyond this type of alteration; Raddadi details these types of changes.³² Spencer makes no interpretive suggestion as to the bigger cuts, such as the scene where Hamlet meets Fortinbras's army.³³ Misty Kruger, in one of the most extensive treatments

²⁹ Stephen Austin Kelly, "The Theatre Royal in 1662: Smock Alley's First Season," *Dublin Historical Record* 61.2 (2008), 204.

³⁰ Flood, 93.

³¹ Hazelton Spencer writes, "What makes this *Hamlet* an alteration, and reprehensible, is the mutilation of Shakespeare's diction" ("*Hamlet* Under the Restoration," 177.) He finds a variety of linguistic changes, such as the elimination of verbal nouns, elucidation, and the rearrangement of inverted word order ("*Hamlet* Under the Restoration," 179-182).

³² See Mongi Raddadi, *Davenant's Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1979), 67-72.

³³ Bevington suggests spectacle had a role in the play's popularity. David Bevington writes, "Restoration audiences were evidently inclined to luxuriate in sensational moments of this sort at the expense of textual completeness or accuracy" (86). Certainly sensational theatricality was important for Restoration audiences; however, to suggest that there is any hope at a complete or accurate *Hamlet* seems to disregard both performance criticism and adaptation theory. *Hamlet* is fraught with a complicated

of *Hamlet* in the Restoration, suggests that *Hamlet* worked because of its political topicality:

They staged a tragedy that reproduced anxieties circulating in the early Restoration about regicide, revenge, and national instability. *Hamlet* dramatizes views about monarchy and subjecthood that were widespread in early Restoration writing as it spectacularly stages a murdered king's ghost, the usurpation of a throne, a son's royal revenge, and the 'troubles' that ensue following the murder of royalty (young Hamlet included).³⁴

She does not, however, theorize about the choices Davenant (and other Restoration and early eighteenth century producers of Shakespeare) make to the play. These consistent cuts between both performance texts help us better understand certain questions, such as the role of Fortinbras, Hamlet's activity, and Gertrude's complicity, regarding the interpretation of *Hamlet* in the Restoration. In *Hamlet*, as with other Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare, many cuts are made in order to remove oaths and overt references to sexuality. I will not focus on these excisions, as my aim is to illustrate how adapters of Shakespeare move beyond this type of alteration.³⁵

Studying these tragedies illustrate a desire to get back to Shakespeare's own interpretation. One of the ways we see this is in the claim for continuity with

textual history, which Bevington himself details. It is near impossible to claim any sort of complete or authoritative text for any early modern play, let alone *Hamlet*.

³⁴ Misty Krueger, "Revenge in Early Restoration England and Sir William Davenant's *Hamlet*," *New Perspectives on the Eighteenth Century* 8.1 (2011), 37-38. Taylor performs a similar reading, demonstrate relevance with political events from 1642-1660 (*Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History, From the Restoration to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 48-49).

³⁵ Raddadi details these types of changes (67-72).

the pre-war performance tradition.³⁶ It also suggests that *Hamlet* was upheld as a piece of good literature, one that did not need correcting, and suggests that performance cuts made to *Hamlet* in the late-seventeenth century are evidence of how *Hamlet* was interpreted or cut in pre-war theater. If this is untrue, it is still interesting because it belies that those involved with the production of *Hamlet* in the Restoration felt that demonstrating continuity would enhance the play's credibility or popularity somehow. All told, *Hamlet* is a good example of what they thought valuable pre-war literature was, and, as such, is an important piece of evidence of how they were using pre-war drama in the Restoration. Krueger concludes, "At the start of the Restoration, Davenant's *Hamlet* offers Englishmen a fine moralistic lesson much like those circulating in pamphlets, proclamations, and poetry: men must civilize themselves out of a passion for revenge, for it only brings about personal destruction and produces civil unrest."³⁷ I do not necessarily disagree with her conclusion; still, close attention to the shape *Hamlet* takes given these cuts gestures towards answering performance questions that have plagued scholars and performers alike. I suggest that productions of *Hamlet* during the Restoration did use the play for a political message, but that message depends on

³⁶ McManaway and Van Lennep report this story, that Betterton learned his interpretation from Taylor and that Taylor was taught by Shakespeare himself, though the claim Taylor learned from Shakespeare is undoubtedly untrue (McManaway and Van Lennep 69). Taylor joined Shakespeare's company much too late to have learned from him directly, though it is entirely plausible that he learned the performance tradition from Shakespeare's time and perpetuated that (Spencer, "Seventeenth-Century Cuts," 259).

³⁷ Kruger, 41.

answering questions of Hamlet's moral status and his supposed inactivity, Gertrude's complicity, and the significance of Fortinbras.

Hamlet's Delay

The question of Hamlet's inability to act has been a popular concern in modern criticism, though this concept is largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon, with some suggestion about his procrastination in the Restoration and the eighteenth century.³⁸ It matters because whether he delays has bearing on what kind of character he is, what kind of leader or prince. The question is relevant not only for its prominence in the scholarship, but also for its topicality in the seventeenth century. This problem of a delayed successor was an issue at stake both at the end of Elizabeth I's reign and during the reign of Charles II. Kurland illustrates the problem of Elizabeth's delay and the potential for a rebellion from James.³⁹ He summarizes:

Throughout her long reign, Elizabeth had been unwilling to name a successor or even to allow the subject to be discussed. Towards the end of the reign, as Thomas Wilson noted at the time, speculation about the succession was 'to all English capitally forbidden.' While Elizabeth's unwillingness to settle the succession had been a matter of concern earlier in the reign, the issue became increasingly acute during towards the end of the century, with the childless queen's age—she would turn sixty-seven in 1600—an obvious consideration.⁴⁰

³⁸ Bevington discusses this interpretation, see esp. 69-74. J. Yoklavich argues that the reference to shammy shoes suggests delay, at least in the eighteenth century (see Yoklavich, "Hamlet in Shammy Shoes," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 3.3 (1952): 209-218).

³⁹ Kurland, 281-286.

⁴⁰ Kurland, 281.

The problem depicted in *Hamlet* becomes all the more more potent during the Restoration once the Stuart dynasty has been re-established, particularly in the late 1670s and early 1680s with the Exclusion Crisis. Kurland aptly illustrates the importance of the succession question and suggests that we are unable to understand the anxiety of the play given our knowledge of the reign of James I.⁴¹ He also suggests that Fortinbras still poses a problem at the end of the play, that the character is not a symbol of Restoration.⁴²

Generally speaking, critics find that Hamlet was not passive during the Restoration. They emphasize the omission of some “lines of self-reproach” that Betterton omits. Other critics that advocate for an active hero include Titlestad, who, if anything, believes Hamlet to be too active.⁴³ Spencer argues that Shakespeare’s Hamlet is not the Romantic Hamlet, and he uses the Restoration as evidence.⁴⁴ Spencer thinks the “Oh what a rogue” soliloquy is an indication that Hamlet is going to act, and he also believes that Hamlet desires the throne.⁴⁵ Gary Taylor too finds that the cutting of Hamlet “disposed of diversions, tightening and accelerating the play’s action.”⁴⁶ He feels that “[t]he protagonist, too, became more straightforward, less bedeviled by detours and moral ambiguities.

⁴¹ Kurland, 281.

⁴² Kurland, 287.

⁴³ Titlestad, 48.

⁴⁴ Spencer, “Seventeenth-Century Cuts,” 260.

⁴⁵ Spencer, “Seventeenth-Century Cuts,” 262-263.

⁴⁶ Taylor, 48.

Abbreviating the soliloquy at the end of Act Two, scene two (“Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I!”), Davenant produced a more practical Hamlet, who curtly reprimands himself for delaying and then at once settles down to a plan of action.⁴⁷ Raddadi writes, “All that is left of Hamlet after the cuts is a prince who is called on to revenge the murder of his father. He is bereft of his most characteristic features, his philosophical bent, cynicism, and theatricality. He has become more active and less talkative.”⁴⁸ Glick suggests that the slowness of Hamlet is simply his talking a bit too much.⁴⁹ Hapgood takes issue with McManaway’s conclusion that “the spectator who saw a performance of this Restoration version would never question the valor of the Prince or suspect that he was tardy in driving to his revenge.”⁵⁰ He points to many additional examples of self-loathing, as well as to the fact that Hamlet still does not kill Claudius in the prayer scene.⁵¹ He argues, “These are not the emphases of a single-minded revenge-hero.”⁵²

The “Oh what a rogue” speech is important evidence for Hamlet’s supposed inactivity. Some scholars have argued that the cuts to this speech

⁴⁷ Taylor, 48.

⁴⁸ Raddadi, 73.

⁴⁹ Claris Glick, “Hamlet in the English Theatre—Acting Texts from Betterton (1676) to Olivier (1963),” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20.1 (1969), 26.

⁵⁰ Hapgood, 11-12; McManaway, *Studies*, 95.

⁵¹ Hapgood 12.

⁵² Hapgood, 12.

indicate that the Restoration and Elizabethan Hamlet is not self-loathing and that he is active. This speech is usually considered the evidence for that reading.

While there are large cuts made to this speech, however, the versions in both the Smock Alley text and the 1676 acting edition still bear evidence of plenty of self-loathing and introspection on the part of the prince. The opening of the speech, for instance the lines “Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I!,” are preserved (II.ii.501).⁵³ These texts cut the lines from “He would drown the stage with tears, / And cleave the general ear with horrid speech” to “Ha, ‘swounds, I should take it” (II.ii.514-528). The passage then reads:

What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and that for passion
That I have? (II.ii.511-514)

The 1676 acting edition answers this question by keeping the line “Make mad the guilty and appal the free” (II.ii.516), though it is omitted in the Smock Alley text. Both texts pick up with “for it cannot be / But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall / To make oppression bitter” (II.ii.528-530). Both texts do cut the most deeply cutting lines from “Bloody, bawdy villain!” (II.ii.532) through “Fie upon’t, foh! About, my brains!” (II.ii.541). Hamlet’s supposed inactivity and self-loathing seem to be connected in the scholarship. Why are these two traits so commonly separated? Can not an active Hamlet still be self-loathing? The implication seems to be that Hamlet’s delay is a direct result of his self-hatred. Linn emphasizes what is at stake in this soliloquy: “Acting is condemned for its falsehood. Within

⁵³ I cite this acting edition by act, scene and page number, as there are no line numbers in the text.

the fictional narrative, Hamlet's goal is to emphasize that his feelings, unlike those of the First Player, are real. In the actual playhouse, however, this distinction collapses."⁵⁴ While the distinction does collapse, the playgoers would likely recognize the irony of what they were watching. What the soliloquy then emphasizes in this metatheatrical moment is what it is possible to learn from experiencing or participating in theater. It is not a question of Hamlet acting; he will act. This is a question of learning the correct way to act and how interpreting what is seen has bearing on one's own actions. That is the point of including this soliloquy, even cut. Here, Hamlet vocalizes what he learns about his own moral state, a state clarified by watching the performance of a player. He is able to distinguish between himself and that player and make a moral judgment about that difference. As we will see below with Claudius, this is a moral distinction that the play itself makes between the two characters. Hamlet recognizes what he should feel and what he should do; Claudius later recognizes his own feigning and how that betrays and worsens the state of his soul.

In terms of Hamlet's activity versus his delay, it is far stranger that Hamlet loses his entire "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy in Act IV. With the removal of his meeting of Fortinbras' army, Hamlet does not have the moment interpreted as his "most active," his resolution to "from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth" (IV.iv.65-66).⁵⁵ Even Raddadi,

⁵⁴ Linn, 88.

⁵⁵ Lawrence points out that Fortinbras is a necessary foil for interpreting Hamlet's problem as delay (674-675). His article provides a long analysis of the delay question.

Davenant's biggest supporter, feels like this soliloquy is the greatest loss to Hamlet's character.⁵⁶ Thus, while Hamlet is more active than he is portrayed in later periods, he is morally active, using metatheatrical moments to learn as he goes. Hamlet is able to learn and adapt. This activity speaks to this ability, whereas Claudius remains in stasis.

Gertrude's Complicity

Gertrude's level of involvement in the murder of her first husband is another pervasive question, both in criticism and performance. Rowe suggests in 1702 that she was aware of the murder of Old King Hamlet.⁵⁷ She has been portrayed in a variety of ways, ranging from matronly to lusty newlywed to accomplice.⁵⁸ Again, these two performance texts offer clearer answers. Davenant was a playwright who appreciated the use of a good foil. His characters are remarkably clear in their characterizations and their contrasts. In his *Macbeth* (1663), for instance, discussed in the first chapter, he greatly expands the role of Lady Macduff, for him, the paragon of goodness who espouses moral speeches against the wrong kind of political ambition, in order to juxtapose Lady Macbeth.

⁵⁶ Raddadi, 73. Lawrence, too, suggests that the main importance of this scene was to draw a parallel between Fortinbras and Hamlet, as well as to show Hamlet's motivation for delay (687).

⁵⁷ Rowe, "Shakespeare's Life and Works," in *William Shakespeare: the Critical Heritage* Vol. 2, ed. Brian Vickers (New York: Routledge, 1995), 200.

⁵⁸ Rosenberg discusses two different possible interpretations of Gertrude: the passive, weak Gertrude versus the strong, active Gertrude (70-81). See also Hapgood, 53-54.

In his 1667 adaptation of *The Tempest*, a joint venture with Dryden, he gives Miranda a sister, Dorinda, who is her opposite, gives Ariel a girlfriend named Milcha, and turns Sycorax into Caliban's sister. Knowing Davenant's taste for balance is significant because Gertrude essentially functions as an important distinction from her new husband. Both the Smock Alley text and the 1676 acting text show revisions that address this question.

The most obvious way that the late-seventeenth-century acting texts represent Gertrude as a blameless victim is by emphasizing Claudius's villainy. Some scholars suggest that the Restoration Hamlet had more of a domestic focus, especially when the role of Fortinbras is reduced. Raddadi analyzes Claudius's character thus: "The effect of this is to make Claudius less of a political figure."⁵⁹ By this he means that Claudius's main interest is in determining the source of Hamlet's madness; I would argue that this question, as well the treatment of Fortinbras discussed below, relate directly to the efficacy of his kingdom. In this section, I will discuss cuts to the play that highlight his villainy, pulling any potential focus away from Gertrude and dividing them as a couple. This relationship is not one of mutual crime like the Macbeths. One of the finest examples of Claudius's villainy is the prayer scene in Act III. For the most part, these early acting texts remove the majority of Claudius's soliloquies. For instance, Claudius loses his soliloquy at the end of Act IV, scene iii, which muses on the imminent death of Hamlet. Instead, in the Smock Alley text, there is an addition written in for the end of the scene. Addressing Rosencrantz and

⁵⁹ Raddadi, 74.

Guildenstern, Claudius now states, "Follow him close, tempt him with speed
 aboard. And if England our present love thou holdest at ought let it be satisfied by
 Hamlet's death."⁶⁰ As with the changes made to Tate's *Lear*, here the villain gives
 a more direct order of execution. Rosenberg writes of Claudius, "He delays. He is
 roiled by fierce passions. He has a conscience. Give him more soliloquies, and he
 could have been Macbeth."⁶¹ Delay is seen here as an inability to learn. But
 Hamlet is not Macbeth, and Davenant was especially good at distilling
 Shakespeare down to one particular message. In the prayer scene, a good deal of
 this soliloquy is cut, eliminating Claudius's fleeting moments of introspection and
 potential regret. Aside from Hamlet, and perhaps Polonius, Claudius is the
 character that receives the most extensive editing. This moment is an example of
 one of the discrepancies between the 1676 acting text and the Smock Alley
 Promptbook. The 1676 acting texts cuts only two lines from Claudius's speech:
 "In the Corrupted Currents of this World / Offences guided hand may shew by
 Justice."⁶² The Smock Alley text, in contrast, cuts a large portion from the middle
 of the speech, which showcases Claudius's internal struggle. The cuts begin with
 "My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent" and continues through "and we
 ourselves compelled / Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults / to give in
 evidence" (III.iii.40-64). What is most interesting about Hamlet is what he can

⁶⁰ Smock Alley Promptbook, 751. All references to this text cite the text by page number.

⁶¹ Rosenberg, 47.

⁶² *Macbeth*, 1676, 51. All references to this edition cite the text by page number.

learn from metatheatrical moments; with Claudius, he sees the lessons but he is unable to put them into practice. The soliloquies offer moments of introspection, where Hamlet can learn and assess. This is what matters for the audience. Removing these moments for Claudius provides another way to demonstrate to the audience that he is not willing to take these lessons to heart or act upon them correctly. As with *King Lear*, the Restoration *Hamlet* is more focused on the issue of succession, but, in this instance, what happens in the worst case scenario.⁶³

Claudius also loses his aside in Act III, scene I, both in the Smock Alley Promptbook and in the 1676 acting text. It reads:

Oh, 'tis too true.
 How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
 The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,
 Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
 Than is my deed to my most painted word.
 Oh heavy burden! (III.i.49-54)

This aside is a reaction to Polonius's instructions to Ophelia, right before they use her as bait for Hamlet. The reaction comes in response to Polonius's observation that "'Tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage, / And pious action, we do sugar o'er / The devil himself" (III.i.46-49).⁶⁴ The big impact of this moment is

⁶³ Rosenberg also details performance options that allow for a likeable and positively depicted Claudius (see 48). It seems clear that this option was not the case in the late-seventeenth century, and, I would guess, similarly in the early part of the century.

⁶⁴ Polonius's character is greatly reduced. Act I scene iii, which features his advice to his children, is shortened, and the moment becomes less about chastity and more about politics. Act II scene ii, the scene with Polonius and Reynaldo alone, is completely gone. I would suggest, however, that Polonius's character was reduced because the focus of the comedic relief of *Hamlet* is located, rather, in the characters of the gravediggers. Raddadi suggests that Polonius was a comic character based on the actors assigned to the part in the Restoration, Thomas Lovel and James Nokes (Raddadi,

again an issue of metatheatricality and what characters can enact for the audiences about what to do with theater. *Hamlet* is often discussed in terms of metatheatricality but this particular moment is overlooked. This moment is interesting because it has the potential to reflect quite poorly on theater in general, not just on Claudius as a villain. Claudius is worse for his counterfeiting, and he knows it. A king must use power responsibly. Betraying his nephew/stepson is a clear abuse of power. They are theatrically entrapping Hamlet. It could be argued that Claudius loses those lines because they no longer make sense in context without Polonius's comment to Ophelia; however, Davenant certainly did not need to cut Claudius's soliloquy in the third scene. This aside, coming in the beginning of Act III, is one of the few signs of remorse that we get from Claudius. Without it, the text represents a much more straightforward villain.⁶⁵

Still, the performance texts also indicate that the dumb show was kept, an interesting choice again as many contemporary productions remove it, "avoiding the risk of diminishing by repetition the impact of the climactic Mousetrap while

75; see also Hapgood, 54-55). While this may be the case, there are absolutely no cuts made to the gravedigger scene. That Davenant left this scene untouched is striking in contrast to what he does with the Porter in *Macbeth*. Part of the reason must lie in the popularity of the characters, as evidenced by Francis Kirkman's very popular collection of drolls, *The Wits or, Sport for Sport* (1662).

⁶⁵ Claudius does not seem to be played by an actor known for villainous roles. Downes records Thomas Lilleston as playing the role of Claudius (52), a man we know little about. Downes is the only cast list for *Hamlet*, aside from the 1676 quarto. Lilleston was an active actor prior to the Restoration, apparently arrested as a member of Rhodes's for playing during the Interregnum, again suggesting continuity between Davenant's *Hamlet* and Shakespeare's (John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus*, ed. Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1987), 113, n. 3; Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 197). Some of his other roles included Villerius in the *Siege of Rhodes* and the Duke of Parma in Davenant's *Love and Honor*.

obviating the question of why Claudius's conscience is able to resist the miming of his crime yet succumbs to the spoken version."⁶⁶ Combined with Claudius's own self-reflective comments in the scene *just before this one*, including both the dumb show and the mousetrap gives the audience an important moment of comparison. Claudius is only able to counterfeit to a certain degree; when simply viewing a reenactment of his crimes, he is able to resist and continue his counterfeit. Once the spectacle of the stage action is combined with dialogue, he breaks.

In opposition to Claudius, small tweaks to Gertrude render her more sympathetic. Gertrude's lines are largely kept; in an era where women's roles are more commonly expanded, and with a female role already light on lines, this treatment of her character is expected. In both Restoration versions of the play, Claudius also does not ask Hamlet to remain at home as opposed to going to Wittenberg. Only Gertrude does. The cut emphasizes the contrast between the two characters; they do not look like a united front, all the more problematic if Gertrude is his link to the throne. Instead, Gertrude appears more the loving mother appealing to her son to stay. The closet scene is similarly telling. One of the few cuts made to Gertrude's lines occur after Hamlet's long tirade against his mother. Her response reads simply: "Oh Hamlet, speak no more. / Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul" (III.iv.88-89). She loses the lines "And there I see such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct" (III.iv.90-91). These lines could effectively be read as an admission of her guilt; whether or not that

⁶⁶ Hapgood, 192.

guilt is related to the death of her husband, but the question of her complicity in the murder is likely at the forefront of the audience's mind. Hamlet is clearly accusing her of an immoral relationship with her husband's brother, but in a production where Gertrude is complicit in her husband's murder, those lines could also speak to her status as an accomplice. Similarly, the performance texts delete Gertrude's lines in Act IV, scene v, after the messenger announces that Laertes has come to challenge Claudius and that the people are behind him. In Shakespeare's version, Gertrude responds: "How cheerfully on the false trail they cry! / Oh this is counter, you false Danish dogs!" (IV.v.110-111). These two lines seem out of character for her, even in Shakespeare's play.

Bolstering a blameless characterization of the queen is an added line in Act IV scene i. After describing the death of Polonius to Claudius, she adds, "And yet must you not lay overstrict justice on him."⁶⁷ In response, Claudius no longer rationalizes that Hamlet's madness is threatening everyone, Gertrude included. Instead, he replies, "Oh heavy deed! / It had been so with us had we been there. Where is he gone?" (IV.i.12-13, 23). After her answer, he seems to usher her away, with the performance texts retaining the line "Oh Gertrude, come away!" (IV.i.28). The Smock Alley text does not mark her individual exit, but the lines addressing her after the entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are removed. This removal opens up the possibility that in saying "Oh Gertrude, come away!" (IV.i.28), Claudius allows for her stage exit, potentially as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter. Many contemporary productions of Gertrude allow for her to

⁶⁷ Smock Alley Promptbook, 750.

display her disgust with her husband at this point in the play. It is possible that, as with Macbeth, Claudius shuts out his wife completely, as he loses political control. The 1676 text includes a brief address to Gertrude at the end of the scene, but still cuts the closing lines “Transports his poisoned shot, may miss our name / And hit the woundless air. Oh come away, / My soul is full of discord and dismay” (IV.i.43-45; 1676 p. 58). The effect is such that Claudius is putting on much less of a show of pretending to care about Hamlet’s well-being in either seventeenth century version of the playtext.

The Question of Fortinbras

Fortinbras has been problematic since the first recorded reactions to the play. Modern critics disagree on whether or not he is crucial to its interpretation.⁶⁸ He seems a logical excision, if only because his subplot is an easy way to condense the play to a reasonable run time.⁶⁹ Few modern productions of *Hamlet* bother to

⁶⁸ Nancy M. Lee-Riffe argues that the character of Fortinbras is essential to an understanding of the play, as he is a foil to Hamlet. Hamlet is a failure, whereas Fortinbras is a proper ruler. See Lee-Riffe, “What Fortinbras and Laertes Tell Us About Hamlet.” By comparison, Cherrell Guilfoyle suggests that Fortinbras is more connected to Claudius, noting that his good reputation rests on Hamlet’s description of him. She writes, “There is little point in the last forty lines of the play except to establish Fortinbras as Claudius’s successor, in a grim and warlike finale. If the state of Denmark is not exactly geographic, there is no doubt that it is first besmirched by a criminal usurper, and then handed over to its hereditary enemy” (“King Hamlet’s Two Successors,” *Comparative Drama* 15.2 (1981), 128). Bevington feels that the ending appearance of Fortinbras betrays a deep irony (*Murder Most Foul: Hamlet Through the Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50-51).

⁶⁹ See, especially, M. J. Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), esp. Chapter 2.

stage him, despite his obvious political connection.⁷⁰ As such, Fortinbras remains the character who we might say most represents how interpretations of Shakespeare's most famous play have changed over time; his survival in the Restoration suggests that he was important to Shakespeare, but modern performers and readers do not necessarily find him compelling or necessary.⁷¹ Is Fortinbras important to the play or not? What does including him accomplish, particularly without staging Act IV, scene iv? A re-examination of how Fortinbras is used illustrates that the character is crucial to the interpretation of the play in the seventeenth century. Including Fortinbras underscores not only the misrule of Claudius, but also the potential for peace in the kingdom under Fortinbras's rule.

In commenting on the extensive cutting that happens to *Hamlet* in the Restoration, most scholars focus on the fact that the largest appearance of Fortinbras, the scene where Hamlet meets his army, is removed. Raddadi finds that "[i]n Davenant's cut version, several secondary characters are left out. The Fortinbras subplot is cut to its barest outline, and loses all bearing on characterization and plot."⁷² The assumption is then that we only need the threat of invasion to carry us through into the ending, although critics disagree as to what that invasion represents for Claudius as a monarch or for Hamlet as the

⁷⁰ Hapgood, 7-8. For a discussion of political versions of *Hamlet* in performance, see Hapgood 73-81.

⁷¹ For example, Lee-Riffe writes, "Altogether, these descriptions of Fortinbras show us an assertive, aggressive, determined, shrewd, and opportunistic leader, a clever strategist willing to take risks and to strike bargains as well as blows--in short, a proper prince" (105).

⁷² Raddadi, 66.

should-have-been successor and prince. Although the primary scene with Fortinbras is removed, the choice of Restoration producers to include his character at all indicate that they believed the character to be essential to the play's meaning and give us insight into what may have been staged in Shakespeare's time.⁷³

Though scholars differ on what the character of Fortinbras is able to add to the play, those who find him compelling take varying positions on what his presence means for Denmark and Claudius. Some critics find the inclusion of Fortinbras to be evidence that Claudius is an able statesman.⁷⁴ Anselm Haverkamp argues that the character of Fortinbras, when compared to Hamlet, "highlights the present disjointedness of the state of Denmark."⁷⁵ Claris Glick examines and summarizes performance texts from Betterton to Olivier, though he does not address the Smock Alley text. In his survey, he characterizes the "problem of Fortinbras" as one that has a "two-fold" effect. In cutting this material, producers eliminate some speaking roles and provide the play with a more domestic focus.⁷⁶ This change has bearing on Claudius, with Glick suggesting that "[i]ncluded, the interchange with Norway indicates a King in

⁷³ Bevington observes that Laertes and Fortinbras allow Shakespeare to furnish "his play with three sons who are called upon to avenge the death of their fathers" (Bevington, 15).

⁷⁴ Lawrence, 674.

⁷⁵ Anselm Haverkamp, "The Ghost of History: Hamlet and the Politics of Paternity," *Law and Literature* 18.2 (2006), 173-4.

⁷⁶ Glick 22.

control, a successful diplomat. Excluded, he is a lesser ruler. And, finally, of course, the ending which we have come to expect in a Shakespearean tragedy—the peaceful passing on of power after the violent deaths—cannot take place.”⁷⁷

Bevington writes,

In his first public appearance (1.2), Claudius brilliantly displays the political skills that would have been evident to any Elizabethan viewer. He smoothly justifies his hasty marriage to his widowed sister-in-law on the grounds of national emergency, ingratiates himself with those like Polonius who have elected him king, addresses Laertes by name no fewer than five times in the business of authorizing Laertes to return to Paris, and sets into motion a diplomatic gambit aimed at forestalling an impending Norwegian invasion.⁷⁸

This reading that the inclusion of the negotiation with Norway is, I think, potentially problematic. The decision to include Fortinbras, then, does have bearing on the characters of Claudius and Hamlet. Fortinbras is also the character who provides the audience with the Shakespearean verdict on prince Hamlet, as pointed out by Spencer.⁷⁹

The seventeenth-century cuts made to the Fortinbras material are connected to other cuts made to the political descriptions of the environment of Denmark and old king Hamlet. In both the Smock Alley text and the 1676 acting edition, the old King and his relationship with Norway are depicted in a far more positive light in the beginning of the play. Horatio’s first mention of the king’s clash with Norway and the appearance of the ghost remove any remnants of Old

⁷⁷ Glick 22.

⁷⁸ Bevington, 68.

⁷⁹ Hazelton Spencer, “Seventeenth-Century Cuts in Hamlet’s Soliloquies,” *The Review of English Studies* 9.35 (1933), 262.

King Hamlet as a monarch acting on whims or passions. Horatio mentions the king's armor as resembling what he wore in battle with Norway, but the text removes the lines: "so frowned he once, when in an angry parle / He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice. / 'Tis strange" (I.i.62-64). In Horatio's account of the battle, the performance texts also remove the lines describing the King's reasons for fighting Old Fortinbras, "Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride, / Dared to the combat" (I.i.83-84). Any sense here that Old King Hamlet was motivated by some kind of personal pride or injustice is removed from the text.

Young Fortinbras's position is similarly changed. Many scholars make much of his invasion in the context of Restoration politics. In particular, Krueger focuses on this issue, connecting it to revenge.⁸⁰ Krueger reads *Hamlet* in the late seventeenth century as representative of concerns about revenge and carefully traces contemporary documents which illustrate a strong association of Charles II with revenge. She writes,

They staged a tragedy that reproduced anxieties circulating in the early Restoration about regicide, revenge, and national instability. *Hamlet* dramatizes views about monarchy and subjecthood that were widespread in early Restoration writing as it spectacularly stages a murdered king's ghost, the usurpation of a throne, a son's royal revenge, and the 'troubles' that ensue following the murder of royalty (young Hamlet included).⁸¹

She claims that revenge is a rejection of civility and a sovereign's authority; when Hamlet contemplates killing Claudius, this too is regicide.⁸² While the problem of

⁸⁰ Krueger, 40.

⁸¹ Krueger, 37-38.

⁸² Krueger, 39.

revenge is certainly an issue at the heart of *Hamlet*, as well as clearly a concern in the late-seventeenth century, Kruger's reading of Hamlet's killing Claudius does not allow for the possibility of poetic justice. This conclusion also precludes the fact that Claudius took his throne by regicide and treason. One of Krueger's central points about her reading of Claudius is that Hamlet is punished for the mistakes of regicide and revenge because he mistakenly kills Polonius, a so-called innocent bystander. Except that Polonius is not so innocent; he works only to support Claudius, a villain and usurper, and he uses his daughter as bait for Hamlet. Polonius is most often interpreted as a buffoon and played by comedic actors.⁸³ There is no reason not to read Polonius's death as anything but divine justice. If one wants to take such a position, however, his death can also function as Hamlet's punishment for harassing his innocent mother.

Both the character of Fortinbras and the references to his potential invasion are toned down. The scene in which he enters and means to cross over Denmark does not occur in either seventeenth century performance text. The first mention of young Fortinbras cuts his unflattering description, "Of unimprovèd mettle hot and full" (I.i.96). The mention of him cuts most of Horatio's lines, mentioning only that Old Fortinbras had lost the lands, and that young Fortinbras was in the company of "landless resolute" (I.i.104). The effects of these omissions are two-fold; it is clear that this presentation of Old King Hamlet removes any possible interpretation of his character as rash and impulsive. This is not a period where a king can be so negatively, especially in regard to a dispute

⁸³ Hapgood, 54.

over a kingdom. There is a compact mentioned, indicating that Old Hamlet won the lands fairly. Similarly, however, young Fortinbras is also valiant here. Yes, his father lost the lands, but the omission of the descriptors that aligned him with the now removed description of his father and Old Hamlet as having an arbitrary, passionate dispute make him appear valiant and just. He is with “landless resolute,” working to restore what was lost in the past. The choice to use landless, as opposed to lawless, is striking. *Hamlet*, as a very popular old play here has associations with Charles II.⁸⁴ Charles himself was a “landless resolute,” working to regain his old kingdom. Old Hamlet functions as a stand-in for Charles I, no longer a monarch who made mistakes, but had his life and kingdom unfairly taken away from him. Hamlet himself cannot entirely take on this role. He has had his position as king robbed from him, and his father taken away, but he is not displaced from his physical home. Instead, he is ordered to stay. The physical exile and long journey to return home is something that can only be represented by young Fortinbras, who has similarly lost a father, killed too early, and who seeks lands in order to regain his own title.

Even more poignant are the echoes of the relationships between Charles II, the future James II, and Charles’s illegitimate son, James Scott the Duke of Monmouth. Monmouth served in the Second Anglo-Dutch War, in addition to leading a brigade during the Third Anglo-Dutch War. When James refused to take

⁸⁴ Evelyn does mention that people were getting tired of Hamlet, however (3:304). Again, check performance calendar. Dugas discusses the likelihood that audiences would associate Shakespeare with *Hamlet* (87). *Hamlet* was one of the most popular and profitable Shakespearean texts sold in bookstores (129).

the Test in 1673, it was obvious that he had converted. The status of Fortinbras is then continually evolving; by the time the Smock Alley Promptbook appears, as early as 1674, the question of whether the uncle should take over is embedded in the minds of the audience.

Act II, scene ii also features significant cuts to Fortinbras's character. In Claudius's opening speech, both the Smock Alley text and the 1676 acting text cut the reference to Fortinbras invading. Claudius's lines starting with "for all, our thanks / Now follows that you know: young Fortinbras, / Holding a weak supposal of our worth..." (I.ii.16-18) through the end of the speech. Without that context, the characters of Cornelius and Voltmand are cut. Scholars have differing opinions on the mention of Fortinbras in this moment. How exactly does the impending Fortinbras invasion impact Claudius's credibility as a king? This moment, too, shows that including Fortinbras serves to undermine Claudius's ability as a ruler. There is a problem with interpreting this moment as an example of Claudius's prowess as king: the fact that Fortinbras still takes over Denmark. Claudius makes quite a show out of including the mention of Fortinbras in the opening speech. A full court scene, this moment would be inherently spectacular. The speech begins with a few words of grief for his brother and then moves to celebrate the queen, his new love. The section dealing with Fortinbras is by far the longest; it is Claudius's demonstration of power. It is his first public opportunity to state his position and give an illustration of his credibility. In this first moment, the opportunity to dispatch two ambassadors to Norway might help alleviate his perhaps tenuous position. Act II scene ii is the moment when these two

ambassadors return. The scene features the King and Queen with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and “others.” It is unclear whether or not this scene would be blocked as a full court scene in this period. Macready blocked it as such.⁸⁵ The Smock Alley text labels it as being in court.⁸⁶ The 1676 acting text does not note the Others. In any case, both the Smock Alley text and the 1676 acting edition cut the reentrance of Voltmand and Cornelius, as well as any mention of the Fortinbras situation. In Shakespeare’s text, this moment would have been definitively more positive than the initial mention of the impending invasion, as Voltmand reports that Norway has negotiated with young Fortinbras and that he “in fine / Makes vow before his uncoe never more / To give th’assay of arms against your majesty” (II.ii.69-71). It appears, in this moment, that Claudius is successful in his office. But we know, as likely did many of the audience members, that Fortinbras is going to appear with soldiers in the end and will take possession of the kingdom. Laertes’s rebellion moment likewise calls Claudius’s rule into question; Laertes is able to summon a following quite easily. The abruptness of this transition and the unrest of the mob suggests extreme unrest in the kingdom and undermines any suggestion that Claudius is functioning as an effective ruler. Taken all together, I find it unconvincing that the Fortinbras episode(s) do not depict Claudius as such. When left in, even in part, the character of Fortinbras, in contrast, represents an effective leader and a line of succession.

⁸⁵ Hapgood, 151.

⁸⁶ Smock Alley Promptbook, 738.

The Smock Alley text makes some subtle, but important, changes to Fortinbras's closing lines. Bevington writes, "One indication of the way in which *Hamlet* indeed refuses to tidy up the debate for its Elizabethan audience is to be found in Horatio's last comments on the tragic tale that he and the audience have witnessed."⁸⁷ It is not surprising that these acting texts would pay attention to the ending. First, the promptbook removes the description of Hamlet that reads, "For he was likely, had he been put on, / To have proved most royal" (V.ii.376-377). This cut is not made in the 1676 acting text. I agree with Kurland that, written during and performed in the wake of a succession problem, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has strong references to the transition from the Tudor to Stuart dynasties. The impact of this change is even more important after the civil war, because audiences know the longevity of the Stuart line and want to believe in the goodness of its restoration and continuation. Performed early in the Restoration, as well as throughout the late seventeenth century, the play's emphasis on the succession problem would be continuously relevant. The idea that Hamlet would have "proved most royal" cannot be believed. Fortinbras, though unrelated to the Danish rulers, is also a stand-in for James I; he was always meant to be the successor and ruler. Both texts also cut the ending line, "Go bid the soldiers shoot" (V.ii.382). This seemingly simple or inconsequential omission could, and probably does, speak to a change in stage direction. It may be that post-1660 *Hamlet* is no longer performed with soldiers shooting in response to Hamlet's funeral procession; it could be that this is an internal stage direction that was

⁸⁷ Bevington, 76.

never realized in performance. Some of the changes made to these performance texts show other evidence of changed stage direction.⁸⁸ However, removing that line also means that the play ends with the lines: “Such a sight as this / Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss” (V.ii.380-381). By associating Hamlet’s death with soldiers and violence, Fortinbras then connects himself with peaceful rule, stating that these instruments of war and violence do not belong in this particular space. The words of the play also emphasize the misrule of Claudius’s reign. The play is able to end then not with a sense of foreboding, that everyone has been killed and the kingdom left in disarray, but that the right person has seen the turmoil and was able to step in and correct it.

Conclusion

This chapter shows how the *Hamlet* in the Restoration addresses a variety of performance questions, while clarifying the producers’ interpretation of *Hamlet*. Understanding how *Hamlet* was interpreted, what words were likely put on the stage in conjunction with spectacular revenge material, is significant in several ways. This is likely as close as we can get to any sort of definitive claim about what this play looked like in the seventeenth century. We can also use these works as inspiration for how to reconsider both the history of Shakespearean criticism and performance as well as our current productions of Shakespeare. Bevington writes, “Drama thrives on conflict and uncertainty, and *Hamlet* is

⁸⁸ For instance, in the opening scene of the play, the Smock Alley text removes all references to the characters being asked to sit down. It is clear that in those productions, they were not going to sit on stage.

preeminently a play in which questions are asked but not fully answered.”⁸⁹

Performance texts of *Hamlet* provide further evidence Shakespeare’s tragedies illustrate that *Hamlet* is just as much an adaptation of Shakespeare’s play in the Restoration as more radically changed plays, such as *Macbeth* and *Lear*, and that these adapters of Shakespeare had higher order, theoretical concerns that they tried to meld with practical performance issues. Gary Taylor cites Dryden’s response to *Hamlet* as an example of Shakespeare’s reputation during the 1670s. He writes, “Midway between Evelyn and Collier, in 1679, John Dryden in his only explicit allusion to the play cites a passage from *Hamlet* as a characteristic demonstration of Shakespearean bombast.”⁹⁰ He finds that “Dryden’s discussion of this passage can be taken as typical of the period. He writes with analytical relish—and accuracy, and intelligence—about its deficiencies as a piece of poetry.”⁹¹ What Taylor does not note is that both Davenant in the 1676 acting text and the Smock Alley text cut the majority of the passages that Dryden is responding to. The passages Dryden finds to be offensive and “unreasonable” are found in Hamlet’s meeting of the player’s: the description of fortune as a strumpet and the description of Hecuba just after Priam was killed.⁹² This omission by the text illustrates how closely these authors paid attention to contemporary theory and concerns about the English stage; Dryden, in looking at Shakespeare’s text,

⁸⁹ Raddadi, 75.

⁹⁰ Taylor, 40.

⁹¹ Taylor, 41.

⁹² Qtd. in Taylor, 41.

felt that it was problematic and the stage versions in the period addresses these concerns. These worries involved the blending of spectacle in a variety of forms with a simplified message or interpretation. Linn writes, “Both healthfully refreshing and dangerously seductive, performance would be inescapably compelling. Part of the allure of theatre may have been the complex ways in which spectators were pulled into the action on stage. Such participatory notions of spectatorship suggests the need to rethink common assumptions about playhouse practices.”⁹³ Post-1660, when audiences are hard to come by and inattentive, one might read the reaction of various playwrights and theater managers as concern that theater would lose what made it most valuable: its complex participatory nature. If audience members were not listening correctly, they could not benefit from theater. In and of itself, without being combined with language, spectacle could be dangerous, especially if one was of dubious moral character (i.e. Claudius). The simplified language of revisions to Shakespeare's plays combined with spectacle made them work more effectively. Tragedies could be used, and were used, as ethical vehicles, to address problems of both the past and the present.⁹⁴

⁹³ Linn, 132.

⁹⁴ For a discussion of how seventeenth-century tragedy could function as such, see Angus Fletcher, *Evolving Hamlet: Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy and the Ethics of Natural Selection* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Chapter Four

“Usurpation, tho’ it thrive a while, will at last be punish’d”: *Othello* as a Villain Play

My study ends with another popular tragedy, but one that seems to stand apart from the others in terms of treatment and reception: *Othello*. *Othello* has always been a popular play, ever since its origins in the early seventeenth century.¹ By many contemporary accounts throughout the seventeenth century, the play was deemed one of the best tragedies that England had to offer. In defending herself against charges of indecency, Aphra Behn counts the tragedy as amongst “some of the best Plays I know.”² In his infamous critique of the play, Thomas Rymer observes that “[f]rom all the Tragedies acted on our English Stage, *Othello* is said to bear the Bell away.”³ The play also has the distinction of being characterized as one of the few Shakespearean dramas not extensively emended or adapted. Why did *Othello* not warrant the same extensive treatment? How was *Othello* able to remain a popular tragedy when others, like *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, were transformed? The comparison with *Lear* is especially important. Samuel Johnson

¹ Virginia M. Vaughan, “Politics and Plagiarism: *Othello* in the Restoration,” *Theatre History Studies* 9 (1989), 1-2; Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print, 1660-1740* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006): 13-17.

² Qtd. in Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Othello: the Search for the Identity of Othello, Iago and Desdemona by Three Centuries of Actors and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 17.

³ Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy: Its Original, Excellency, and Corruption with some Reflections on Shakespear, and Other Practitioners for the Stage* (London: 1693), 86.

found both the ending to *Lear* and to *Othello* unendurable.⁴ Pepys notes in his diary that upon seeing Desdemona's death, a woman in the audience cries out.⁵ Nahum Tate's 1681 adaptation was hugely successful, in part, because of its ability to deal with the problem of the ending.⁶ Both the French and the Italians wrote alternate endings for *Othello* because they were horrified by Desdemona's death.⁷ So why was *Othello*, particularly the ending, not treated in the same manner? As with *Hamlet*, I suggest that *Othello* was emended much the same way as other Shakespearean tragedies in the Restoration. I also argue that the late-seventeenth-century version of *Othello* answered performance questions, such as where the blame for Desdemona's death lies, in much the same way as the other tragedies in my study.

The critical conversation surrounding Restoration *Othello* has had two primary arguments for the play's success in its original form, focusing on the play's content and on its acting history.⁸ Some of the assumptions about the

⁴ Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson* Vol. II (London: 1796), 165; Rosenberg, *Masks of Othello*.

⁵ Pepys also felt that the play was "well done" (Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1670), 264).

⁶ A. C. Bradley felt that "*Othello* is the most painfully exciting and the most terrible" (*Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (London and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 176).

⁷ Julie Hankey, ed., *Othello* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 53-56; Rosenberg, *Masks of Othello*, 32.

⁸ Virginia M. Vaughan argues against the assumption that *Othello* was perceived solely as a domestic or an erotic tragedy at this time. She emphasizes the military resonances, pointing out, for instance, that actors had military backgrounds, including Charles Hart, who played Othello from the 1670s until Betterton took over in 1682, served as Lieutenant of the Horse in Prince Rupert's regiment (4-6). She also catalogues

content as a reason for its popularity include arguments for topicality based on theatrical trends including domestic tragedy, Cavalier drama, and heroic drama and the tradition of “exotic blameless heroes.”⁹ The quality of the actors in the lead roles, especially Betterton in the title role, in the period can hardly be disputed and undoubtedly had an effect on the play’s popularity.¹⁰

Another common assumption for the play’s treatment in the late seventeenth century includes the fact that *Othello* was one of the plays kept by Killigrew when he and Davenant received their licenses in 1660. The King’s Company certainly did not have the same history of adaptation as Davenant’s Duke’s Company.¹¹ However, the simple fact that the King’s Company had the rights to *Othello* suggests that it was already understood as a play that did not need any significant changes, since Killigrew was clearly favored when Charles II granted rights to plays. If the play were perceived as something that should be

the realistic depictions of a standing army in peacetime (10-12). She also uses contextual evidence to argue that the play would be perceived as a villain play and that productions emphasized both Iago’s evil and Othello’s nobility (18-19). Rosenberg feels that all of the major cuts to the play as evidenced by the Smock Alley Promptbook were made for the sake of decorum, perhaps in response to Rymer (16-33). See Hankey, *Othello*; and Vaughan, “Politics and Plagiarism.”

⁹ Hankey, *Othello*, 18; Vaughan, “Politics and Plagiarism,” esp. 2.

¹⁰ Motten makes an argument about the quality of actors playing similar roles (427). See also, Hankey, *Othello*, 20-22; J. P. Vander Motten, “Iago at Lincoln’s Inn Fields: Thomas Porter’s *The Villain* on the Early Restoration Stage,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24.3 (1984): 415-428; Rosenberg, *Masks of Othello*, 20; and Vaughan, “Politics and Plagiarism.”

¹¹ Due to the King’s Company’s track record of not adapting Shakespeare, Sorelius argues that *Othello* was already much less likely to be adapted. Gunnar Sorelius, *The Giant Race Before the Flood: Pre-Restoration Drama on the Stage and in the Criticism of the Restoration* (Uppsala, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1966), 40, 201.

changed or too problematic to perform, then the outcome likely would have been different; Davenant could have been granted rights to the play or it could have been left unperformed, which was the case with plays like *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

The focus on subject matter and acting history does not completely explain the play's success, however, especially when one considers the various problems with the play that still exist, even in contemporary scholarship. In particular, topicality and popularity of genre do not account for the untouched ending of the play. In a quest to understand how *Othello* was understood and received in the late seventeenth century, it is unfortunate that no published quartos of *Othello* included the same types of prefatory commentary as adapted Shakespeare. We can, however, get a sense of how *Othello* was performed and understood by looking at the Smock Alley Promptbook of *Othello* in its contemporary critical context. I reconstruct the critical context focused around the most infamous discussion of *Othello* in the late seventeenth century: Thomas Rymer's *A Short View of Tragedy* (1693) and the response it generates. Rymer's text is most commonly read as part of a narrative of developing bardology, as opposed to a statement of contemporary dramatic theory.¹² Although modern critics do not take Rymer's work, especially *A Short View*, seriously, his contemporaries did.¹³ While we cannot read Rymer's work as impacting *Othello*

¹² See, for example, Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History, from the Restoration to the Present* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 135.

¹³ Jean I. Marsden feels Rymer's critique of *Othello* was not only ineffectual, but also that the lack of an adaptation of *Othello* illustrates that his views were largely ignored (60). Conversely, both Paul Cannan and Don-John Dugas argue convincingly for

immediately after the Restoration, we can read it as an important contemporary critical response to *Othello* and as an indication of what writers thought of tragedy and of Shakespeare. What does Rymer's opinion of *Othello* tell us about late seventeenth century tragedy and *Othello*'s reputation? Given Rymer's reaction and other reactions to him, what was most important to audiences and writers regarding *Othello*? A close examination of this conversation and the play's performance history, focused on the Smock Alley Promptbook, illustrates that, as it was performed in the late seventeenth century, the play had a tighter focus: the blamelessness of Othello and Desdemona and seeing their malefactor, Iago, punished for his crimes. The performance cuts, though small in comparison to changes to plays like *King Lear*, are enough to render the play consistent with poetic justice; Othello and Desdemona are presented as innocent victims of Iago. If the play is a villain play, as it almost certainly was, then Desdemona has to die.¹⁴ It does not necessarily make sense for Cordelia and Lear to die in Tate's *Lear*, whereas, in the case of *Othello*, the play's onslaught of innocent deaths better shows the consequence of Iago's actions. Although not as extensive, these

Rymer's influence. Dugas notes that the various responses to Rymer, including the fact that they adopted his techniques in their criticism, indicate he was taken seriously (152). As I will demonstrate, the performance cuts do indicate that some of the theories expressed in Rymer's works, were actually consistent with those who argued against his detractors and are in fact consistent with the interpretations in the Smock Alley Promptbook. See Paul D. Cannan, *The Emergence of Dramatic Criticism in England: From Jonson to Pope* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print 1660-1740* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2006); Jean I. Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, & Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

¹⁴ Motten, "Iago at Lincon's Inn Fields," 415-428; Vaughan, "Politics and Plagiarism."

changes are consistent with similar changes made by writers like Davenant and Tate who made conscious efforts to tighten Shakespeare's work thematically in a drive to heighten audience understanding and appreciation. They made the interpretation of the play narrower by cutting figurative language. These findings illustrate a pattern—that similar changes were made to all of Shakespeare's tragedies whether there was a named adapter or not.

Additionally, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, many assumptions have been made about the scant contemporary evidence we have for *Othello* in the Restoration, which have shaped our understanding of the play. For instance, the two most often cited comparative texts, Thomas Porter's *The Villain* (1662) and Henry Evil Payne's *The Fatal Jealousie* (1673), are argued to be plagiarisms of *Othello* meant to capitalize on its success.¹⁵ But these plays include some spectacular elements that the Smock Alley Promptbook eliminates: comic relief, song, and dance. If we are to read these as reflections on *Othello*, then we must wonder why these elements are eliminated for performance, especially Desdemona's Willow Song. Scholars have gathered the scanty accounts we have of what *Othello* looked like in the Restoration and examined it in comparison with similar tragedies, but no one has seriously considered the play in comparison with contemporary critical theory. Part of this oversight is surely due to one of the most famous criticisms of *Othello*, Rymer's *Short View*, coming late in the century. Although the Smock Alley Promptbook is dated late as well, somewhere between 1675 and 1685, reading the changes in comparison to contemporary

¹⁵ Motten, "Iago at Lincoln's Inn Fields"; Vaughan, "Politics and Plagiarism."

writings about tragedy and the contemporary reactions to *Othello* illustrates that the changes go beyond changes for decorum or to enhance Othello's essential nobility or Iago's meanness. In fact, as Julie Hankey points out, *Othello* was never considered lewd, which is why Behn cites it in her defense.¹⁶ Thus, any sorts of changes to that effect were more likely limited to the terms of the patent. This observation begs us to reconsider some of the lesser-discussed alterations made to the performance text. I argue that *Othello* was successful in the Restoration and was left relatively untouched because its action was clear and inherently spectacular. Although it does not follow the unities of time or place, it has only one plot. The Smock Alley text eliminates figurative language and heightens the characterizations in order to clarify the play's message. A close examination of this text and a rereading of the critical controversy surrounding *Othello* at the end of the century illustrate that for the late seventeenth century audience, the play was really about the horror of seeing innocents react rationally to extreme scheming and seeing that schemer caught and punished. When an already tightly wrought play is condensed in this manner, it can be read as a demonstration of a sort of poetic justice. As such, we can see that the treatments of *Othello* and other adapted tragedies by Shakespeare in the late seventeenth century are not so far apart as they seem.

Smock Alley Promptbook: Performing *Othello* in the Late Seventeenth Century

¹⁶ Hankey, *Othello*, 17.

As with *Hamlet*, the Smock Alley Promptbook serves as an important touchstone for how *Othello* was performed in the late seventeenth century. The few critics who have worked with the Promptbook have categorized the changes to be found (the promptbook is missing six pages, from II.i.88 to III.iii.19, as well as the final page) as cuts made primarily for decorum. Marvin Rosenberg's history, *The Masks of Othello*, is the most prominent example, with Rosenberg arguing that the characters were shaped for "refinement" and that the changes are largely a consequence of decorum.¹⁷ Virginia Mason Vaughan, although arguing convincingly that *Othello* was perceived as a villain play during the Restoration, does consider the big cuts to have been made "for propriety's sake," and she connects Othello's character to the tradition of the noble exotic.¹⁸ Certainly, the essential nobility of Othello's character in the late seventeenth century is supported by a great deal of evidence. In addition to the tradition of the noble exotic mentioned by Vaughan, Othello's traditional costuming as a general indicates that he would have been taken to be a noble figure.¹⁹ This costuming is reflecting in an engraving Rowe's 1709 edition of Shakespeare.

The assumption of an emphasis on decorum, however, carries with it some problems that suggest an alternate interpretation of *Othello* in the Restoration.

¹⁷ Rosenberg, *Masks of Othello*, 20, 27.

¹⁸ Vaughan, "Politics and Plagiarism," 1-2; Vaughan also suggests that the play is successful over time because of the pleasure of watching a white actor portray a black man (See Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Hankey, *Othello*, 12.

Some of the cuts found in the Smock Alley Promptbook are unsurprising and probably for the sake of decorum, or at least for the sake of the patent. In the first scene of the play, Iago is supposed to have said “Zounds” twice. As this is an oath, it is not surprising that the word is simply removed.²⁰ Likewise, in the instances that Desdemona’s handkerchief is referred to as a napkin in Act III scene iii, the word is changed to handkerchief. But not all of the cuts can be interpreted in this manner, and not every indecorous statement is removed. For instance, Iago’s crass statement that “an old black ram / Is tuppung your white ewe” (I.i.88-89) remains. The line remains in the text until Kemble cuts it.²¹ Instead, I suggest that the Smock Alley Promptbook cuts to *Othello* illustrate a drive to remove figurative language and to control the interpretation of characters by addressing some of the questions that modern critics still have. How much blame exactly falls on Othello and on Desdemona? Does Othello display essential jealousy? The Smock Alley text illustrates concern for these questions. As I will show in the second half of this chapter, the critical concerns surrounding *Othello* were ones related to clarity of language and how that affected the play’s overall message or moral. The Smock Alley text gives us evidence that *Othello* was successful in the same way that Tate’s *King Lear* and Davenant’s *Macbeth* were: those who edited it for performance were able to take an already tightly wrought text and eliminate figurative language and character confusions in order to

²⁰ Smock Alley Promptbook, 788-789. All references to this text cite the text by page number.

²¹ Smock Alley Promptbook, 789.

enhance poetic justice and emphasize pathos. Combined with the play's topicality and superb acting, the play remained successful throughout the end of the seventeenth century. The play's popularity in the late seventeenth century rests on its ability to promote Iago as the villain, and Othello and Desdemona as blameless victims. When one interprets the changes made to the Smock Alley *Othello* in that light, it becomes clear that this play is not only topically appealing, as scholars like Vaughn have demonstrated, in a post-1660 militarized world, but also this play meets the need for audience desires for poetic justice.

In order for audiences to feel the full horror of Iago's deception, however, Othello and Desdemona need to be blameless in a manner that extends beyond basic nobility. Many of the Smock Alley cuts that do not fall under the purview of decorum speak to this need. Vaughn describes the Smock Alley cuts to Othello's character thus: "In particular, passages that stress Othello's age, his unattractiveness, or his ferocious passion have been admitted."²² The temptation scene exhibits many examples of these types of cuts. His lines, "Exchange me for a goat / When I shall turn the business of my soup / To such exsufflicate and blown surmises / Matching thy inference" (III.iii.182-5), were a traditional cut.²³ Othello also loses the lines: "Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw / The smallest fear or doubt for her revolt, / For she had eyes and chose me" (III.iii.189-191) and the reference to their age difference: "declined / Into the vale of years" (III.iii.267-8). But many of these cuts can be interpreted as removing reasons for

²² Vaughn, "Politics and Plagiarism," 4.

²³ Hankey, *Othello*, 200, n. 182b-5a.

Othello to take some part in the blame for Desdemona's death. For instance, in addition to issues of age and race, one of the commonly discussed problems with Othello's character is that he believes Iago too easily. Much of the excised material has to do with removing any trace of his complicity in Desdemona's death. This version of the play is one that does not place as much focus on Othello or Desdemona's cross racial relationship, but instead removes some of the more damning comments made by Othello and some of the other characters regarding his marriage.

A few simple changes made by the Smock Alley editors fixed the problem of Othello's complicity. Although Shakespeare's text allows Othello to question Iago and demand proof, Othello is less easily manipulated in the Smock Alley temptation scene. When Iago begins to work on Othello, the original passage reads:

Othello: What dost thou think?

Iago: Think, my lord?

Othello: Think, my lord! By heaven, he echoes me,

As if there were some monster in his thought

Too hideous to be shown. (III.iii.105-109)

Othello's reaction to Iago's hedging is changed to read, "Think, my lord! Why dost thou echo me."²⁴ One of the ways the performance text plays with this idea is by giving Othello an additional, albeit brief, moment in which he can question what he is hearing from Iago. This change, clearly not made for the usual reasons prescribed for late-seventeenth century alterations to Shakespeare, gives Othello a moment, as an authority figure, to directly confront his ensign in a direct

²⁴ Smock Alley Promptbook, 801.

questioning of his motives. Obviously, Iago lies. But, coupled later with his desire to be provided with “ocular proof,” in Act III, scene iii, Othello does not appear as blindly trusting. This change, I argue, has less to do with essential virtue and more to do with demonstrating Othello’s reasonable reaction to the situation. John Hill’s reaction in his *The Actor Or, A Treatise on the Art of Playing* (1755) documents the same conclusion in a contemporary reaction:

We see indeed a kind of savage in Othello, but this is not from nature, Iago works him to it slowly, difficultly, and with the deepest cunning. His fury would be too horrible without these circumstances; but as it is, when Iago is well acted, we hardly blame him for the crime, notwithstanding all the horror and brutality of murdering a wife. Shakespear has reconciled it to the character of an hero: but Shakespear has done this in vain, if the actor do not by his deportment assist in it.²⁵

Hill’s assessment is that Shakespeare provided a clear interpretation of Othello’s personal blame, but it was up to the actor to demonstrate it. The Smock Alley Othello also exhibits more trust for his wife in that he does not ask Iago to have Emilia follow Desdemona (III.iii.242). That simple line is struck out, again showing that Othello is not so quick to jump to action.

Another way that the Smock Alley text readjusts the focus of the play’s message is by slightly deemphasizing Brabantio’s harsh reaction to his daughter’s marriage. The result of this change is that the audience no longer feels that Othello and Desdemona are being harshly punished for what was clearly a doomed elopement. Brabantio’s reaction in Act I, scene iii is tempered through the removal of the line: “I had rather to adopt a child than get it” (I.iii.189). The

²⁵ John Hill, *The Actor; Or, A Treatise on the Art of Playing* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1972), 216.

effect of removing this single line is that his reaction reads more like an acceptance of the marriage, as opposed to a bitter resignation to Desdemona's decision in the original: "Please it your grace, on to the state affairs. / Come hither, Moor: / I here do give thee" (I.iii.188-191). Although we cannot know how the actor performed these lines, as acceptance or as bitter resignation, the removal of most resentful line tilts the balance towards the former. Similarly, although Brabantio is still revealed to be dead in Act 5, Gratiano's words that blame Desdemona's elopement for his death are removed. In Act 5 scene 2 he states simply, "Poor Desdemon, I am glad thy father's dead" (V.ii.203). In downplaying the resistance or superbly negative reaction by Brabantio, the play allows for a more sympathetic interpretation of his death. He is no longer necessarily killed by his daughter's marriage, but instead can be interpreted as a father who has escaped the pain of a daughter's death.

Many of the most often discussed cuts to Othello's lines in the Smock Alley text have more to do with the figurative language they contain than with decorum. The fit scene is probably the best example out of these oft-mentioned deletions. The Smock Alley text cuts most of the fit dialogue; Othello states only, "Lie with her? Lie on her? Oh devil!"²⁶ All the dialogue that exhibits Othello's free association of suppressed sexual images and his mental breakdown over his wife's imagined infidelity is removed. In a play interpreted as the terrible actions of a man who was reasonably led to believe in his wife's betrayal, this sort of mental breakdown has no place. The language itself, as Othello's train-of-thought

²⁶ Smock Alley Promptbook, 807.

reaction, can also be read as unnecessary. The removal of the fit speech illustrates Othello's blamelessness and the removal of nonsensical language.

Many of Othello's other moments are cut down with similar concerns. In his first substantial speech in Act I, scene iii, he loses the lines "For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith / ... More than pertains to feats of broils and battle" (lines 83-87). There is nothing particularly offensive in these lines, but they are slow in getting to the point. All Othello is doing is explaining how he won Desdemona's heart. Much of the more ambiguous or overtly sexual comments are removed. The Smock Alley text, for instance, chooses the folio "sighs" over "kisses" (I.iii.158).

Many of the cuts to Iago's character fall under the same purview. Rosenberg describes Iago as largely unchanged. He assumes that changes for the sake of decorum could not fix Iago, as they were a result of an "occupational hazard."²⁷ Iago, however, loses some of his most beautiful, cynical musings about humanity. In Act I scene iii, he loses a large chunk of a speech to Roderigo, most of which is comprised of figurative language:

'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners. So that if we plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry, why the power and corrigible authority or this lines in our wills.... (I.iii.313-319)

²⁷ Rosenberg, *Masks of Othello*, 26.

Iago loses this speech all the way from the portion quoted above until his next set of lines, which starts “It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will” (I.iii.326).

Some of the minor unnamed characters receive the same trimming. Any information that is not essential to the main plot concerning Iago’s actions against Othello and Desdemona is removed, no matter how beautiful it is. At the beginning of Act II, the second gentlemen loses his lines about the storm that takes out the Turkish fleet:

The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane,
Seems to cast water on the burning Bear
And quench the guards of th’ever-fixèd Pole.
I never did like molestation view
On the enchafèd flood. (II.i.13-17)

In the same scene, Montano loses a line about the mountains and the dialogue about greeting Othello. The scene largely cuts to the entrance of Cassio. Cassio, in that same scene, loses some of his more poetic lines, which are sexual in nature but do not serve to advance the plot.

The Smock Alley cuts work similarly for Desdemona. One of the assumptions about the play’s success is that it worked as a showcase for the first professional female actress on stage in England.²⁸ This role first featured a woman on the English stage on 3 January 1661, and it offered an opportunity to showcase a female actress on stage wearing a nightgown.²⁹ The 1709 Nicholas Rowe edition of the play offers an illustration that shows Desdemona on a bed, in

²⁸ Hankey, *Othello*, 15-17.

²⁹ Hankey, *Othello*, 17.

a nightgown, with one breast exposed. It is likely that the Rowe engravings showed actual performance practices.³⁰ In these circumstances, one might assume that if Desdemona, or the women who played her, were such an integral part of the play and its success, then her role would have been increasingly important. The Smock Alley cuts illustrate that the producers of *Othello* had larger concerns than spectacle for spectacle's sake; some of Desdemona's best moments, namely her Willow Song, are excised. She also loses the greater part of her interaction with Cassio upon her arrival in Cyprus and the scene with the clown. The popularity of the play cannot rest entirely, then, on the appeal of an expanded female role on stage in a domestic setting, or on the spectacle of song.

The cuts which are surprising to us now do make sense if *Othello* is read as a villain play in the late seventeenth century. If audience members are meant to place most of the blame upon Iago, then not only Othello, but also Desdemona must be blameless. Part of removing this blame has to do with Cassio. Some of the interactions between Cassio and Desdemona can easily be read and performed as dubious. For example, when Desdemona first arrives on Cyprus, some of Cassio's lines are certainly removed for decorum (e.g. he no longer references "Great Jove Othello" making "love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms" (II.i.77-80)). But, more interestingly, the performance cuts also diminish the apparent affection between the two characters. When Cassio greets Desdemona, he says simply, "Hail to thee lady" (II.i.85). His more exuberant exclamations are

³⁰ Dugas, *Marketing the Bard*, 145; Hankey, *Othello*, 17; Rosenberg, *Masks of Othello*, 19.

removed: “You men of Cyprus, let her have your knees. [...] And the grace of heaven, / Before, behind thee, and on every hand, enwheel thee round” (II.i.84-87). The interaction between them upon her arrival thus looks much more innocent in comparison. Also gone is Desdemona’s vow to harangue Othello about Cassio’s reappointment in the most private of locations. Her line, “His bed shall seem a school, his board a shift,” is struck (III.iii.24). This line certainly would be inappropriate for a married woman to use with her husband’s ex-lieutenant, so the change is one that could be considered for decorum’s sake, but also works to emphasize Desdemona’s innocence.

The Willow Song is one of the most notable cuts in the Smock Alley Promptbook. The trimming in Act IV scene iii begins with Emilia’s line about making the bed with the wedding sheets (IV.iii.21) and continues through to the last line of the song, “If I court moe women, you’ll couch with moe men” (IV.iii.54). This deletion has usually been discussed as an unfortunate removal of Desdemona’s shining moment before her death but it is more significant, especially to Desdemona’s detractors, because it also contains the discussion about how attractive Lodovico is and how women would love to sleep with him. This discussion, however innocent, is effectively an admission that Desdemona does think about such things, which she has denied in previous passages. This moment proves that statement untrue. When it immediately precedes Emilia and Desdemona’s discussion about infidelity, it also suggests to the audience that while Desdemona may not have betrayed Othello yet, that possibility remains open in the future.

Responses and Seventeenth-Century Writing about *Othello*

Rymer's Critique in A Short View of Tragedy

Rymer's *A Short View of Tragedy* remains one of the most famous writings on Shakespeare in the seventeenth century, and he still suffers a poor reputation. Paul Cannan describes the common summation of Rymer's text: "Rymer's lambasting of *Othello* in *A Short View of Tragedy* is generally regarded as a testament to late seventeenth-century bad taste and willful disrespect of the Bard."³¹ Rather than downright dismissing Rymer's comments, we should recognize his significance and consider his original critical works as important context, not only for *Othello*'s reputation in the late seventeenth century, but also for their impact on contemporary theory of tragedy at that time. In this discussion, I am indebted to the work of Paul Cannan. Cannan's work demonstrates the extent of Rymer's importance and influence in the late seventeenth century, especially Rymer's first work, *The Tragedies of the Last Age* (1678). Rymer's reputation is also evidence by Dryden's willingness to write a preface for his translation of Ovid's *Epistles* in 1680, only two years after his first significant work of original criticism on tragedy. By the time Rymer wrote the infamous *Short View of Tragedy* in 1693, he was already made historiographer royal. More importantly for this analysis, however, is Cannan's point that Rymer's more famous *A Short View of Tragedy* is often read out of context. Cannan, one of the first scholars to demonstrate the significance and coherence of Rymer's most famous work,

³¹ Cannan, *Emergence*, 55.

illustrates that the text should be read as part of Rymer's goal to "regulate the production and reception of English drama along classical models."³² Read in this context, Rymer's radical criticism of *Othello* and his desire to reinstate the Greek chorus make more sense. Rymer wanted the Greek style chorus to do what a well-wrought fable sometimes cannot: provide a clear and concise summary of action, insights into characters, and emphasize themes.³³ As I have discussed in previous chapters, the more extensive adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies do just that, but with dialogue.

In this section, I would like to reconsider what Rymer's lengthy discussion of *Othello* can tell us about the late-seventeenth-century opinion of the tragedy and its success in the context of Rymer's aim to improve English tragedy with increased governmental support. In the dedication, Rymer writes, "But because, some years ago, I tryed the Publick with Observations concerning the Stage; It was principally your Countenance that buoy'd me up, and supported a Righteous Cause against the Prejudice and Corruption then reigning."³⁴ This statement flatters Charles Sackville, the 6th Earl of Dorset and the 1st Earl of Middlesex and a great patron of poets including Dryden, Samuel Butler, and William Wycherley, to whom Rymer dedicates this work; but it also indicates that Rymer felt it imperative to write against the current state of the stage in hopes for the better and that he felt that the situation has somewhat improved since then. Here, Rymer

³² Cannan, *Emergence*, 55.

³³ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 3.

³⁴ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, sig. A3v-A4r.

clearly states that it is for the vindication of the stage that he is writing. He believes in this project and has constructed another work of criticism to that end.

Although special attention is given to the length of Rymer's critique of *Othello*, he certainly spends much more time developing his thoughts on the historical precedent for governmental control of the theater. His desire for that control is based on his belief in the social function that theater could play. All of his suggestions and concerns are rooted in a desire to improve upon what is there and a careful study of the history of drama. Rymer is especially interested in explaining the close ties between morality, government, and theater. For instance, he traces the origins of tragedy as original part of a worship service, only then moving to the theater.³⁵ He recounts that the government spent money on theater and that Demosthenes refused to reallocate the theater money for war. Rymer observes, "Monestaries and Church Lands were never with us so sacred."³⁶ He also describes another ancient rule of theater, that it be educational for adults.³⁷ His third chapter gives a brief history of how Christianity took a disliking to theater. Plays were declared "pagan" and said to participate in the "Worship of False Gods."³⁸ As for the old charges that comedies in particular are examples of lewdness and debauchery and that tragedies exhibit "Parricides, Incests, and Wickedness," Rymer admits that those charges still stand and are worth

³⁵ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, esp. 19.

³⁶ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 21.

³⁷ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 22.

³⁸ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 30, 34.

considering.³⁹ Chapter Four is Rymer's answer to those objections and it is mostly based on Aristotle. Rymer recounts Aristotle's rebuttal of those who would critique poetry on moral grounds. He states that, "a Critick need not be so fierce and positive to quarrel on that account, where all are in the dark, that neither Critick nor Poet know ought of the matter."⁴⁰ He notes that this is in accord with Homer's point that God could use "evil means, and instruments" for "good ends and purposes."⁴¹

What Rymer does argue, like almost every late-seventeenth century playwright, is that the purpose of literature is to instruct because it does so better than any other means. He writes, "The wisest part of the World were always taken with Fables, as the most delightful means to convey Instruction, and leave the strongest Impression on our Mind."⁴² He points out that people in the east used fables, as did Christ. He quotes the Apostle Paul as wondering why Christians must be denied the educational benefit of allegory. He points out that if Fables, or stories, worked for educational purposes before drama was invented, then no one should level the same kinds of criticisms against drama.⁴³ This position obviously overlooks the unique, performative aspect of drama: that many of its criticisms are based on the fact that audience members are not just hearing the words, they

³⁹ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 36.

⁴⁰ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 42-43.

⁴¹ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 43.

⁴² Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 44.

⁴³ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 47.

are seeing the play's action acted out. Using an "ill instrument" in this manner has a very different effect than simply reading the words or hearing them spoken aloud. In addition, many non-conformist accusations of drama, for instance, argued that part of the peril of the theater was its ability to draw audience members away from more productive activities.⁴⁴ Although later on, he grants that there are so many elements to a tragedy (inventions, novelty, verse, expression, passion, costumes, actors, and the like) that it is much harder to not be affected by it as by a church service.⁴⁵ Still he wonders, "Grant all this, I say, where is the hurt? what is the danger? If the End of all is to shew Virtue in Triumph. [...] Nor can a Moral lesson be less profitable, when dressed and set off with all the advantage and decoration of the Theatre."⁴⁶ His overall point, however, is that theater is seductive and effective, and thus should be kept "under the special eye and direction of a Virtuous Government."⁴⁷ Rymer uses historical precedent to illustrate that theater could set a moral example if cleaned up and used properly.

The most interesting piece of evidence that Rymer collects in his argument for governmental support and regulation of the theater is a long quoted segment of a charge against the theater and playwrights from 1541, from the French

⁴⁴ Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

⁴⁵ Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy*, 47-49.

⁴⁶ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 49-50.

⁴⁷ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 50.

Parliament Rolls; these rolls provide an example of the French's justification for the usefulness and significance of the theater. Rymer provides an abridged, translated version of this charge.⁴⁸ It tries to shut down performances, but the interested parties presented a letter of permission from the King. They had argued to the king that theatrical performances were for "the Edification of the People," and the tract accuses this claim as false and states that the theater is only interested in financial gain.⁴⁹ This point is significant because the claim that dramatists included spectacle for entertainment's value only, and thus to make quick coin, emphasizes the problems Rymer finds with spectacle, which is at the heart of his argument against *Othello*. In his mind, *Othello* is the best negative example of shock and horror used to entice an audience, but without providing a clear lesson to be derived from the fable. Rymer's point is that the founding of the Académie Française answered these charges helped create an environment for some of the best tragedy and criticism they had ever experienced.⁵⁰ Rymer here does more work than even Davenant to illustrate why the issue of morality matters, why it does not necessarily have to be a problem, and why it would no longer be a problem if the government were more involved. Unfortunately, he either overlooks attempts at theatrical regulation already in place or thinks they should be greater. The English government had a long track record, especially

⁴⁸ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 53-59.

⁴⁹ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 177.

⁵⁰ Rymer had already made his career capitalizing on the popularity of French criticism by translating Rapin. See Cannan, *Emergence*, 57.

during the Civil Wars, of being unable to completely suppress theatrical production, although the majority of theatrical outlets were certainly closed. Most importantly, Rymer illustrates here that the issue of morality in drama is mostly about control of information. In order to control information, these writers had to control the language and limit the meaning.

When Rymer finally does get to his critique of *Othello* we find that his problem with the play's language is not because he finds it outdated. Chapter V is the most notorious section of *A Short View of Tragedy*, as it contains Rymer's assessment of *Othello*. He has two chief complaints against the play: an improbability (of plot and characters) and the language. He notes that the plot is the most important element to consider because the "Fable is always accounted the Soul of Tragedy."⁵¹ This is because the other elements of tragedy, wit, thoughts, and expression, are taken care of by moral philosophers, rhetoricians, and grammarians, respectively.⁵² Rymer then compares Shakespeare's play to his source, Cinthio, arguing that all of the changes Shakespeare's made were detrimental to the tragedy, mainly because everything that Shakespeare did to his source material sacrifice the clarity of the play's moral. Primarily, in his most well-rehearsed critiques, Rymer felt that the characters of Desdemona, Iago, and Othello were all highly improbable. He claimed that "Nothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lye; And, certainly, never was a Play fraught, like this of *Othello*, with improbabilities. The Characters or Manners, which are the second

⁵¹ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 86.

⁵² Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 87.

part in a Tragedy, are not less unnatural and improper, than the Fable was improbable or absurd.”⁵³ Because both the fable and the characters of the play are improbable and unnatural, the thoughts cannot be “true, or fine, or noble.”⁵⁴

Rymer seems to find much more fault with the language of Shakespeare’s tragedies than with the action, in so much as it does not make the play’s virtues clear.⁵⁵ He writes,

Many, peradventure, of the Tragical Scenes in Shakespear, cry’d up for the Action, might do yet better without words: Words are a sort of heavy baggage, that were better out of the way, at the push of Action; especially in this bombast Circumstance, where the Words and Action are seldom akin, generally are inconsistent, at cross purposes, embarrass or destroy each other; yet to those who take not the words distinctly, there may be something in the buz and found, that like a drone to Bagpipe may serve to set off the Action.⁵⁶

His main complaint against the language, although he finds fault with characters from *Othello* because they are not natural and do not speak to their station, is that the language is either unclear or distracting. This reading demonstrates why he leads with a complaint that words should serve the play’s plot and why he feels so strongly about clear pronunciation. He argues that when a play’s action does not show its meaning, then the pronunciation of the words is of increasing importance: “So it is not in Song only, that a good voice diverts us from Wit and

⁵³ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 92.

⁵⁴ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 95.

⁵⁵ Murray makes the point that Rymer’s key problem with Shakespeare was with his words. Similarly, she notes that Edward Phillips implied that “Shakespeare employs unconnected and uncompleted metaphors” (35). She feels that these contemporary writers thought that his writing was “incoherently figurative” (35).

⁵⁶ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 4.

Sense. From the Stage, the Bar or the Pulpit, a good voice will prepossess our ears, and having seized the Pass, is in a fair way to surprise our Judgment.”⁵⁷

Rymer critiques the language in the temptation scene as both vexing and repetitive. His comments on this scene illustrate how closely connected issues of language were for him. He, per usual, goes back to classical theater, claiming that such language would have never been accepted. He writes that “here we see a known Language does woefully encumber, and clog the operation: as either forc’d, or heavy, or trifling, or incoherent, or improper, or most what improbable.”⁵⁸ He feels that such a play will not inspire pity nor move passions, but will cause “horror and aversion.”⁵⁹ Rymer also critiques the fit scene for the same problems, saying that the language and circumstances are, as other moments of the play, not befitting a soldier of Othello’s station.⁶⁰ Both of these scenes underwent, however, some of the greatest linguistic revision in the Smock Alley text. The majority of the fit no longer existed in performance by the time Rymer was writing, if we take the Smock Alley Promptbook as indicative of theatrical practice in London. This discrepancy suggests that Rymer was writing based on what he had read, and not on what he had seen. There were a string of recorded performances of the United Company, during the early to mid 1680s, but no known performances around the time that *A Short View of Tragedy* was

⁵⁷ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 7.

⁵⁸ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 119.

⁵⁹ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 121.

⁶⁰ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 120.

published.⁶¹ An additional comparative example would be the disparate reactions of Pepys. Although he frequently changes his opinions of plays over time, in the case of *Othello*, Pepys finds the play “well done” in 1660 when he views it on the stage, but thinks it “mean” in 1666 when he reads it. He also notes the discrepancy in his opinion that he “heretofore esteemed [*Othello*] a mighty good play.”⁶² This similar experience could suggest that reading the Third Folio of *Othello* and viewing the play with the performance cuts produced two very different reactions for audiences.

Like many of his shocked contemporaries, Rymer also takes issue with Desdemona’s murder: “Then after a little spurt of villany and Murder, we are brought to the most lamentable, that ever appear’d on any Stage. A noble Venetian Lady is to be murdered by our Poet; in sober sadness, purely for being a Fool.”⁶³ Rymer feels that even a pagan poet would have found a way to save her.⁶⁴ Most importantly, he feels there is no lesson to be derived from the play’s action: “Rather we may ask here what unnatural crime Desdemona, or her Parents had committed, to bring this Judgment down upon her; to Wed a Black-amoor, and innocent to be thus cruelly murder’d by him. What instruction can we make out of this Catastrophe? Or whither must our reflection lead us? Is not this to envenome and sour our spirits, to make us repine and grumble at Providence; and

⁶¹ Dugas, *Marketing the Bard*, 17.

⁶² Pepys, 11 October 1660, 20 Aug 1666.

⁶³ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 133.

⁶⁴ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 137.

the government of the World? If this be our end, what boots it to be Vertuous?"⁶⁵

Rymer's chief problem with the play is then the clarity and quality of the message. With inconsistent or improbable characters and muddled language, Rymer felt that there was no discernable moral with which to interpret the play. That combined with the horror of Desdemona's death made the tragedy the perfect example of spectacle for spectacle's sake. According to Rymer's criteria for a valuable tragedy, *Othello* could offer no beneficial social function for audiences. An indiscernible lesson directly connects the morality or the usefulness of the play to its language. The fact that the majority of the changes made to the Smock Alley Promptbook address the problem of clarity illustrate that the fans and supporters of *Othello* did not entirely disagree with its biggest detractor. These similar concerns illustrate that earlier in the century, producers of *Othello* had similar opinions of tragedy; *Othello* would only be successful if its horror was focused by the removal of blame and of figurative language. When Rymer's complaints against *Othello* are viewed in this context, it is clear that his opinions of what makes quality, English theater and not so inconsistent with those of his contemporaries. In the context, then, of his history of tragedy, Rymer's feeling about *Othello*'s shortcomings and successes makes sense. He is offended by the play's sense of unnecessary and unabashed tragedy; there is no poetic justice in his mind, mostly because of Desdemona's fate. In fact, his argument about the appeal of *Othello* and its importance mirrors my own: that it does need to have an educational and significant lesson to impart to its audience. His views on how to

⁶⁵ Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy*, 138.

most appropriately convey that message, however, differ from many of his contemporaries. Although those contemporaries get caught up in his criticisms of *Othello*, which are not necessarily out of line, and his burlesque style of criticism, Rymer's desires for the English stage are not inconsistent with other writers of the late seventeenth century, such as Davenant and Charles Gildon.

Gildon's Response(s)

Gildon is one of the more significant contemporary responses to Rymer. Gildon, as a late-seventeenth-century adapter of Shakespeare and prolific author of essays, translations, plays, poems, letters and short stories, was certainly not opposed to altering and amending Shakespeare's plays. Gildon's response to Rymer is one of the most successful.⁶⁶ While eventually admitting that Rymer was correct in much of his assessment of *Othello*, Gildon did his best to champion Shakespeare.⁶⁷ Gildon argued against Rymer in terms that he would have found to be crucial: moral value. His response is a strong piece of evidence for the use of theater as a moral space, albeit one that comes towards the end of the century. The performance cuts made to *Othello*, which were likely carried out throughout the end of the seventeenth century, offer audience that *Othello*'s popularity resided not only in the ability of great actors of the period but also in what audiences

⁶⁶ For some discussion of the various responses, see Cannan, *Emergence*; Paul D. Cannan, "A Short View of Tragedy and Rymer's Proposals for Regulating the English Stage," *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language* 52.206 (2001): 207-226; Dugas, *Marketing the Bard*, esp. 161-2.

⁶⁷ Charles Gildon, "An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome and England," in *Mr. William Shakespeare's Works*, ed. Charles Gildon, Vol. 7 (London: 1709).

would have perceived to be a moral value of the play itself.

In the Preface to his *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays on Several Subjects* (1694), Gildon writes against Rymer in defense of Shakespeare. However, what seems to offend him most deeply is not necessarily Rymer's arguments against Shakespeare, but the fact that his arguments are rooted in a preference for classical poets over England's poets. Gildon begins his response to Rymer with a defense of Iago and Roderigo's method of waking Brabantio to inform him that his daughter was gone. But he quickly transitions into a critique of Rymer's theatrical preferences: "I am sorry that a Man of Mr. Rymer's Learning shou'd be so bigotted to the Ancients, as to become an Enemy to the Honor of his own country in that thing, which is perhaps the only way we can truly pretend to excel all others in, viz. Poetry, Courage, Virtue, and Wisdom, Greece and ROME will never be out-Rival'd in, but I am apt to think they have both been out done in Poetry by the English."⁶⁸ In this preface, Gildon correlates England's strength in poetry, with virtue and wisdom. These attributes are the strengths of literature and add to its value. Gildon's main reasoning for England's excellence in the literary arts rests in his feeling that quality poetry is natural to the English. He describes Poetry as "our Native Right."⁶⁹ Evidence of Gildon's thoughts on poetry's value is found further at the end of the preface. Gildon states that the reason he is so passionate about the defense and promotion of poetry is that "'tis observable from

⁶⁸ Charles Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays, on several Subjects*, eds. Dryden and John (London: 1694), sig. A7v-A8r.

⁶⁹ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 8.

History, that the Decay and Neglect of that, always was a fatal Symptom of the Loss of Antient Virtue, Power and Glory.”⁷⁰ In Gildon’s mind, the state of poetry is connected to the country’s virtue and prowess.

In Gildon’s extended response, “Some Reflections on Mr. Rymer’s Short View of Tragedy, and an Attempt at a Vindication of Shakespeare, in an Essay directed to John Dryden Esq.,” found in his *Miscellaneous Essays and Letters*, he states that he is writing because friends of Shakespeare had yet to craft a response, which, to him, suggested that they might agree with Rymer, which was not the case. He is writing to Dryden because Dryden will be the best judge, as poet laureate, of the arguments presented by Rymer and by Gildon. He freely admits that many people have critiqued Shakespeare, perhaps even fairly, but that many of his faults are excusable and that Shakespeare still has value.⁷¹

What a careful reading of Gildon’s response to Rymer illustrates is that Gildon actually agrees with Rymer on all essential points. He agrees that the theater would benefit from, and even needs, government support. The majority of his disagreement with Rymer stems from his feeling that Rymer should focus on contemporary writers, not ancient ones. Gildon points out that educated people love Shakespeare and that Rymer doesn’t even follow the unities himself.⁷² Gildon states that we need more of a reason to follow the Ancients, because they

⁷⁰ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 9.

⁷¹ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 64, 66-67.

⁷² Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 68.

are “fond of the Opinion of Learning, more than the thing itself.”⁷³ Ethics and natural study don’t necessary go hand in hand, so Gildon doesn’t understand why the Greeks have such an advantage over the English.⁷⁴ He states that Rymer should have been able to distinguish between Shakespeare’s vices and the vices of the age he lives in: “the Poet often falls into Vices by complying with the Palate of the Age he lives in; and to this may we truly and justly refer a great many of these Faults Shakespeare is guilty of.”⁷⁵ Gildon feels that Shakespeare’s chief problem was that he wasn’t very well supported by the government; instead, he had to make sure that he catered to popular taste in order to make his living. In making this argument, Gildon makes it clear that in an idea world, a poet would have governmental support. Only then, could that poet be free to fully craft art. This is why most of his tragedies have a mixed tone.⁷⁶ In this point, Gildon and Rymer do agree. Iago is an example of this problem. Gildon writes that “Iago was in much esteem for a Comedian, which made Shakespeare put several words, and expressions into his part (perhaps not agreeable to his Character) to make the Audience laugh, who had not yet learnt to endure to be serious a whole Play.”⁷⁷ Thus it is the vice of the age that corrupts Shakespeare’s characters. Significantly, this vice is located in lines or phrases which are not consistent with what the

⁷³ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 87.

⁷⁴ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 87.

⁷⁵ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 88.

⁷⁶ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 88.

⁷⁷ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 89.

character is meant to be or with the mood of the play.

Gildon then introduces the art verses nature argument. Gildon feels that Rymer is claiming that Shakespeare is no poet since he lacked Art. He says never till Rymer did anyone say that one only needed art. He states that genius cannot be bound by the rules, but instead “Glories in a Noble Irregularity.”⁷⁸ It is the case that the “greatest Virtues have been mixt with great Vice, as well as the Writings of Shakespeare.”⁷⁹

But yet the less perfect ought not to be Rob'd of their Merits, because they have defects, especially when the Number of those exceed these, as in Shakespear, all whose Faults have not been able to frustrate his obtaining the end of All just Poems, Pleasure and Profit. [...] He has (I say) in most, if not all, of his Plays attain'd the full end of Poetry Delight, and Profit; by moving Terror and Pity for the Changes of Fortune, which Humane Life is subject to, by giving us a lively and just Image of them (the best Defintion of a Play) for the Motion of these Passions afford us Pleasure, and their Purgation Profit. Besides, there are few or none of those many he has writ, but have their Just Moral, not only of more general Use and Advantage, but also more naturally the Effect of them.⁸⁰

Gildon's response is as an adapter wanting to improve *Othello* for issues of clarity. The main problem with Gildon's response is that he and Rymer agree on everything except the inherent value of the play. Their opinions then hinge on their occupations: Gildon as an adapter and active playwright, and Rymer as primarily a critic. Gildon summarizes the plot of *Othello* as a tale of Iago's jealousy and revenge, due to his own ambition. Gildon argues that in order for the

⁷⁸ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 91.

⁷⁹ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 91.

⁸⁰ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 92.

fable, or plot, to be perfect it must be admirable and probable. He defines admirable as uncommon and extraordinary and probably as what is agreeable to a common opinion. He says no one would deny the play as admirable, but wants to reconsider (Rymer's) claim that the play is not probable. Gildon then first addresses the charge that it is improbable that Othello would have been employed in a war against the Turks, assuming that he is also Muslim. Gildon counters that first, Venetians often employed strangers in their wars and second, Othello was represented as Christian. Gildon also counters that Shakespeare needed to name Othello in order to elevate his status and give him the nobility the character deserved.⁸¹ Gildon admits that "Negroes" are often not of such a high status, but states, "Now 'tis certain, there is no reason in the nature of things, why a Negro of equal Birth and Merit, should not be on an equal bottom, with a German, a Hollander, French-man &c."⁸² Gildon chastises Rymer for arguing that the color of a man might determine his nature. As for the charge that Desdemona could not love a Moor, Gildon argues that since Othello is of noble blood, is Christian, and exhibits a variety of virtues, there is no reason why she would not love him.⁸³ He finds that many women have had "Sable Lovers," who were not so virtuous as Othello.⁸⁴ Gildon is, in actuality, the first critic to take Rymer to task for his racism. One of Rymer's main problems with Shakespeare and his *Othello* are that

⁸¹ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 92-97.

⁸² Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 97.

⁸³ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 99.

⁸⁴ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 100.

no Moor would be able to rise to the station of general. In retort, Gildon writes that

‘Tis granted, a *Negro* here does seldom rise above a Trumpeter, nor often perhaps higher at *Venice*. But then that proceeds from the Vice of Mankind, which is the Poets Duty as he informs us, to correct, and to represent things as they should be, not as they are. Now ‘tis certain, there is no reason in the nature of things, why a *Negro* of equal Birth and Merit, should not be on an equal bottom, with a *German, Hollander, Frenchman, &c.* The Poet, therefore ought to do justice to Nations, as well as Persons.⁸⁵

Gildon feels that it is natural that Othello’s tales of virtue and courage would move her to love. He cites that Dido was likewise moved by Aeneas.⁸⁶ He then gets into a lot of classical examples and anecdotes. Gildon then turns to Oedipus as his anti-example of a problem of a classical play lacking probability in fable.

Gildon argues that:

These are much more the consequences of this Fable of *Oedipus*, than those wond’rous Truths, he draws from that of *Othello*. Nay, the moral *Sophocles* concludes his *Oedipus* with, will serve justly for *Othello*. viz. *That no Man can be call’d happy before his Death*. But the whole *Fable of Oedipus*, tho so much admir’d, is so very *singular and improbable*, that ‘tis scarce possible, it ever could have happen’d; on the other hand, the fatal Jealousie of *Othello* and the Revenge of *Jago*, are the natural Consequence of our ungovern’d Passions, which by prospect of such Tragical effects of their being indulg’d, may the better be regulated and govern’d by us. So that tho’ *Othello* ends not so formally with a moral Sentence, as *Oedipus* does, yet it sets out one of much greater Value. If it be a fault in *Shakespear*, that it end not with such a sentence, *Sophocles* is guilty of no less in his *Philoctetes*, which not only concludes without any Moral, but is also incapable of being reduc’d to any, at least of any moment. Whereas the Morals of *Hamlet, Macbeth*, and most of *Shakespear’s* Plays, prove a lesson of mightier consequence than any in

⁸⁵ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 97. For an extended discussion of the depiction of race in *Othello*, see Vaughan, *Performing Blackness*.

⁸⁶ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 100-101.

Sophocles, except the *Electr*, viz. that Usurpation, tho' it thrive a while, will at last be punish'd, &c. Besides the worst, and most irregular of *Shakespear's* Plays, contains two or three such Fables, as that of *Philoctetes*, which answers not one of the ends of Poetry.⁸⁷

Shakespeare's plays have stronger morals than ancient drama and will have more impact, as they are closer to home.

Gildon actually argues that he thinks Desdemona is the most faulty character, but since Rymer thinks Iago is such he focuses on him. He argues that we must follow Horace and consider what country Iago is from. He basically argues that other characters in classical writing have been just as guilty in manners as Iago. Gildon, against the charge against Shakespeare's excellence in expression, cites speeches from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Richard II*, which he believes are beautiful.⁸⁸ Gildon argues that Shakespeare's words give beauty to everything, though he admits that

'Tis true, the Words he sometimes uses, by their absoleteness renders some of his Expressions a little dark, but then we must remember the great alterations our Language has undergone since his time; but examine well the sense of his Words, you'l seldome find him guilty of Bombast, (tho' laid to his charge by Mr. Rymer,) that is Words and Thoughts ill match'd.⁸⁹

To this end, Gildon makes the well-known argument that archaic language rendered some of Shakespeare's language unclear. It would be impossible to derive the wonderful morals from his language unless the clarity is improved.

⁸⁷ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 108.

⁸⁸ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 109-115.

⁸⁹ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 115-116.

Gildon claims that Shakespeare does a great job of representing true jealousy in the scene in which Othello sees Cassio with Desdemona and Iago says “I like not that.”⁹⁰ Gildon’s answer is typical for an adapter of Shakespeare; his plays did have good morals, but they weren’t stated as clearly as they could be.

Conclusion

The seventeenth century critical debate surrounding *Othello* illustrates that issues of moral value and clarity were the most important concerns at hand and that they coincided for a general push to create useful drama under government support and to elevate status of drama in England. Critics have continuously identified problems of interpretations in Shakespeare’s plays, and adapters have worked to address those questions. Rymer was inspired by social function of Greek drama, and Gildon, despite his best efforts, essentially agrees with him. The uproar over *Othello* in the criticism of the late seventeenth century is symptomatic of this fundamental disagreement over whether *Othello* did or did not offer a valuable or clear social lesson. While dated prior to Rymer’s infamous critique of the play, the Smock Alley text nevertheless illustrates similar concerns. The performance cuts yield a narrower interpretation of the play’s characters and their culpability in the play’s devastating conclusion. The removal of a good portion of the figurative language that was unnecessary to the main events of the play further enhanced this focus. While the Smock Alley text also illustrates that

⁹⁰ Gildon, *Miscellaneous Letters*, 117.

many of the expected spectacular elements were removed, such as the clown and Desdemona's Willow Song, the play's main events are spectacular in and of themselves. The very enactment of a murder on stage of an innocent person by someone tricked into doing the deed is the stuff of Restoration intrigue that was so popular on the stage. Given that the plot of *Othello* is spectacular in and of itself, it is no wonder that Rymer would find it so offensive. Unlike Davenant, Rymer's critical writing shows that, despite his love of the Greek chorus, he fundamentally disagreed with the idea that spectacle could focus the audience on the play's message. Examining the critical context of *Othello* in conjunction with its performance cuts illustrates that the play's success cannot be fully explained without considering its social effects or importance. The controversy of *Othello* is and remains what sort of social lesson the play exhibits. The emendations of producers of Shakespeare in this time to *Othello* took a play that was already spectacular enough to succeed and cemented its place in the repertory.

Conclusion

These concerns of these adapters and producers of Shakespeare in the late seventeenth century are not so different from the concerns of modern audiences.

They wrestled with the very same problems of performance and interpretation.

Gary Taylor writes,

As every actor today knows, parts of any play by Shakespeare will be unintelligible to a handsome fraction of any audience. Contemporary British actors in particular, who cut their histrionic teeth on Shakespeare while importing more spectators than any other actors in the world, are often bemused by the masses of apparently insensible American and Japanese tourists who file obediently into their theatres during the summer season, appreciatively uncomprehending. But the audiences keep coming; they pay the bills, they keep theatres open. Such modern audiences love Shakespeare without understanding him.³⁶⁶

One of Dryden's main complaints was regarding the incomprehensibility of Shakespeare, a complaint echoed by many of his contemporaries. This concern has not changed throughout the years, though we have only recently become more understanding of our own contemporary adaptations and our desires to make the Bard more accessible.³⁶⁷ These considerations are no longer so far from our own, particularly with recent developments in adaptation and performance criticism.

³⁶⁶ Taylor, 43.

³⁶⁷ Marsden comments, "The evolving attitude toward adaptation emphasizes this shift. As Shakespeare's words are no longer considered easily replaceable, he becomes an established author with a specific, unchangeable canon. [...] Such a change indicates a stress on text rather than performance, on defining the literary work in terms of its language rather than its plot. Although today such ideas are commonplace, the issue of adaptation remains alive in our own theatrical and literary productions. Like the Restoration and eighteenth century, we alter Shakespeare with every new performance" (*Re-Imagined*, 154). See also Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); and Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

Why, then, do we continue to disregard these adaptations as bastardizations or simplifications?

My project demonstrates that late-seventeenth century adapters of Shakespeare used pre-1642 plays in order to comment on their political past and to elevate the status of English theater. They employed adaptation as a vehicle to display the moral value and craft behind English literature. These works thus function as both significant critical commentary on Shakespeare by his near-contemporaries of Shakespeare and as evidence for what these writers thought constituted a serious work of literature.

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