

**“A good broken music”: Shakespeare, Marston, and  
Dramatic Experimentation in the Repertory Companies, 1599-1604**

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## ABSTRACT

“‘A good broken music’: Shakespeare, Marston, and Dramatic Experimentation in the Repertory Companies, 1599-1604” builds on recent performance criticism to propose the interaction between repertory companies as a framework for the interpretation of early modern plays. Such a method focuses less on an author’s work in isolation than on the complex dynamics between playwrights and performers in the theatrical community of early seventeenth-century London. Within this paradigm, the concepts of mimetic desire and anti-character function are synthesized in order to read the dramatic experimentation of John Marston’s *Antonio* plays (*Children of Paul’s*, performed 1599-1601) and William Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* (*Lord Chamberlain’s Men*, performed 1601/2) as case studies of a unique moment in early modern English theater when dramatic experimentation with representation, language, and performance styles was not only a practice, but a self-consciously radical project. Perspective on the play texts is drawn from contemporary evidence of the conditions of performance and the performers’ unique onstage personas. The study concludes by meditating on the implications of the repertory company paradigm and these case studies for our conception of dramatic authorship, concluding with a call for a vision of early modern dramatic authorship and tradition not as individual or static, but as communal and continuing cultural processes.

If wee present a mingle-mangle, our fault is to be excused,  
 because the whole worlde is become an Hodge-podge.  
 – John Lyly, Prologue to *Midas* (1592)

Minding true things by what their mock'ries be.  
 – *Henry V* IV.1 (1599)

## I.

In July 2009, Matthew Dunster's production of *Troilus and Cressida* took to the stage at Shakespeare's Globe. It was the second time the play had been produced at the reconstructed theater in Southwark, a testament to the play's resonance in contemporary culture; it is speculated that the play was never put on at the original Globe, that it was too much of an artistic gamble and a potential commercial failure. Dunster's production offered many insights and surprises, but particularly revelatory was Matthew Kelly's performance as Pandarus, the immortal bawd.<sup>1</sup> Kelly modulated brilliantly between charisma and servility, but it was in the Epilogue that he took the stage by force. The hierarchies and ideologies of the armies broken by hypocrisy and violence, young love dashed by naïveté and insincerity, the Epilogue could be delivered with resignation or a lascivious sneer. Instead, Kelly's Pandarus railed – he spat his words at the audience, all illusion of courtly unctuousness immolated in desperate rage. The performance was breathtaking in its intensity – it also echoed, unexpectedly, the origins of the play in early seventeenth-century London. As I hope to show, the raillery of Pandarus has its origins at least in part in the mocking, anti-illusionistic performances of the Children of Paul's, who became important competitors for the Chamberlain's Men across the river at the recently opened Globe.

In autumn 1599, after a nine-year absence from the London scene, the Children of Paul's opened their season with the first performance of John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*. The revival of the boy companies, and the type of peculiarly hard-edged satire

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<sup>1</sup> These observations are based on my recollection of a performance of this production.

Marston in particular wrote for them, fundamentally altered the dynamic of the drama being produced in London at the turn of the seventeenth century. In their own commercial interest, the major adult theatrical companies could not have helped but to respond to the dramatic challenge of the Children in their own productions. I will argue that Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, written for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, when read with an eye for its radical experiments with dramatic convention and illusion, cannot be fully understood outside of the context of engagement with the dynamic marketplace of ideas between the repertory companies. In the following I will investigate how the *Antonio* plays and *Troilus and Cressida* respond to specific theatrical circumstances at a particular moment in time, when experimentation with language and with old forms of celebrative performance and equally old, but increasingly dominant, illusionistic personation became the subject of these radical dramas. I will not attempt an exact theory of influence; instead, I will envision the theatrical culture of late Elizabethan London as a vibrant community, engaged in the free exchange of ideas and intensely aware of the work of other playwrights and performers. Such a vision allows one to begin to understand how these plays speak to each other across the Thames – how the play texts provide a way in to a unique transitional moment in early modern English theater, into performances that are singular and tantalizingly unrecoverable, available through the page but always just out of reach.

Almost forty years ago, R.A. Foakes observed:

[In] his development as a dramatist after 1600, Shakespeare *seems* to have been much influenced by, and to have developed in his own way, new techniques and possibilities for drama that arose particularly in connection with the revival of the children's companies.<sup>2</sup> (emphasis mine)

In the last decade, performance criticism has developed a paradigm for “why seems it so particular.” Based on the suggestion that company repertories ought to be

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<sup>2</sup> Foakes 1971 4

considered “with the kinds of critical and textual attention that are normally reserved for the canons of the playwrights,”<sup>3</sup> McMillin, MacLean and Knutson were among the first proponents of using the repertory companies as a framework for interpretation, allowing one “to consider individual plays within the spectrum of offerings across lines of company and playhouse in a given time frame.”<sup>4</sup> The patterns that emerge from groupings of plays in a given season’s repertory, between different companies or within one company, enable the critic to develop a vision of dramatic authorship that is situated not just in a cultural milieu, but importantly in a *theatrical* one. This study has been especially motivated by a conception of dramatic authorship as “a historically embedded but personally inflected creative phenomenon”<sup>5</sup> and of late Elizabethan theater professionals as “a self-propagating society of friends whose whole aim in life was to make their mystery a success.”<sup>6</sup> In this instance, the paradigm is enhanced by Duncan-Jones’ suggestion that Marston and Shakespeare were in friendly “collusion” in their writings during this period,<sup>7</sup> especially on *Hamlet* and *Antonio’s Revenge*, that the plays show an intimate awareness of each other that is too exact to have been memorially reconstructed from performance. This is highly speculative, and space does not permit me to expand on the case of *Hamlet* fully. But that the playwrights and their companies influenced each other and developed together in this period is what I aim to show. A focus on play-texts as products of a repertory company environment, with an intimate awareness of the productions of other repertory companies, creates the framework for this study.

In the case of Marston especially, I will show that inter-company awareness and allusion often registers as a desire for the *Antonio* plays and the boy actors performing in

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<sup>3</sup> McMillin and MacLean 1998 xi

<sup>4</sup> Knutson 1997 462

<sup>5</sup> Hirschfeld 2004 1

<sup>6</sup> Baldwin 1961 161

<sup>7</sup> Duncan-Jones 2001 145

them to be as mimetically authentic as those of the adult companies. In this, I draw on René Girard's concept of mimetic desire, a process I will show is operating both in the world of the play and in the theater itself. Girard defines mimetic desire as a process by which imitation does not lead to "bland conformity" but rather to a desire of what the imitated person possesses, of the reality he embodies.<sup>8</sup> This desire "covets the superior *being* that neither the someone nor something alone, but the conjunction of the two, seems to possess."<sup>9</sup> Mimetic desire is as suggestive for dramatic authorship in a repertory context as it is for the literary interpretation of dramatic characters. Mimetic representation takes up a central position in this study, since I will argue that the experiments Marston, Shakespeare, and their collaborators take part in are more than merely generic, a focus of much criticism of these "tragicomedies" or "problem plays." I will define "experimental" as the destabilizing distancing and estranging effects in terms of representation, language and performance that play on the spectrum between mimesis and non-mimesis. These plays' experiments interrogate the limits of genre and the idea of theatrical representation itself, manipulating the "bifold authority" of the actor and the character he embodies. The concepts of *locus* ("place") and *platea* ("scaffold" or "stage") are a convenient place to begin thinking about the nature of representation on the early modern stage.<sup>10</sup> Dillon provides the clearest definition:

The essential difference between a *locus*...and the *platea*...is precisely one of representational function: whereas *locus* always represents, for a given stretch of time, a specific location, the *platea* is essentially fluid and frequently non-representational. It is not tied to the illusion, to the fictional places where the drama is set, but is often predominantly an actor's space, a space in which performance can be recognized as performance rather than as the fiction it intermittently seeks to represent.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Girard 1991 3

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 4

<sup>10</sup> Weimann 1988

<sup>11</sup> Dillon 2006 4.

The “bifold authority” of *locus* and *platea* allows for the negotiation between the two under the pressure of theatrical performance. It is often a process through which, Weimann argues, cultural power is authorized on stage.<sup>12</sup> Below, I will argue not against Weimann but to a different end, not seeking how authority “is implicated in the process...of the dramatic production itself” in a positive way, as he suggests,<sup>13</sup> but how in these plays the authority of *locus* and *platea* is repeatedly destabilized.

Soule’s idea of the actor as “anti-character” is a particularly rich concept for understanding the destabilizing energies of performers, especially boys and fools, on the early modern stage, and their significance for interpretation. Soule usefully expands Weimann’s concepts of the bifold authority of *locus* and *platea*, somewhat blinkered by the textual and Shakespearean focus of the New Historicism, to performative contexts in the Globe and beyond. Importantly, she theorizes the representational significance of performers *within* the performative space Weimann interprets. The actor’s anti-character function is located in the “quarrelsome relationship” between the dramatic and the theatrical.<sup>14</sup> On stage, the actor performs two distinct functions: he is simultaneously a character within a mimetic representation, a *locus*, and a performer on a *platea* who enacts his “own presence and skills in interplay with the audience.”<sup>15</sup> Soule traces the two broad modes available to the actor in the Western tradition: the mimetic (“emphasizing the actor’s representation of an absent character”), which developed along with the evolution of tragic performance out of early Greek ritual, and the non-mimetic (“focusing on the actor’s presentation of self as a natural person or stage persona”), originating in the Old Comedy of fifth-century Athens.<sup>16</sup> A third mode, which mixes mimetic and non-mimetic performance at will, becomes her focus since “in

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<sup>12</sup> Weimann 1988 401

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 409

<sup>14</sup> Thomson 1997 332.

<sup>15</sup> Soule 2000 3

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 7, 13

premodern popular performance, spectators had no trouble accepting an actor as performer, as character, or as almost any combination of the two.”<sup>17</sup> She draws a parallel between Old Comedy and Elizabethan comedy, saying, “such plays were often intentionally non-aesthetic. Their disunity had the purpose of preventing complete dominance by mimetic illusion and preserving the unpredictability of improvisatory performance and spontaneous, direct interaction between spectators and actors.”<sup>18</sup>

Soule’s reading of performances at the newly opened Globe in 1599 could easily be transferred to those at Paul’s:

[It] was a mixed theatre in which elements from two traditions still interacted vitally, where mimesis and topsy-turvydom, neoclassical humanism and the popular folk tradition were juxtaposed, contrasting and playing off each other...it was a multiconscious theatre [in which] the Elizabethan audience could attend to more than one stage action at a time and was readily capable of simultaneous ritual and mimetic belief in its perception of dramatic performance.<sup>19</sup>

It was in these circumstances that boy actors and fools especially thrived. “It was only at the end of the sixteenth century,” Soule continues, “that the hegemony of textualist [i.e., mimetic] theatre finally seemed assured (at least until the twentieth century).”<sup>20</sup> The slow regime change from Elizabeth to James in the background, with celebrative personalities like Richard Tarlton and Will Kemp in the past, the boy’s companies on the wane, and brilliantly, fully illusionistic drama by Shakespeare and others on the rise, “mass emotion in playgoers and powerful ‘personation’ on stage grew together.”<sup>21</sup> Marston’s *Antonio* plays and Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* are not the first plays to actively experiment with the relationship between illusionistic and anti-illusionistic performance and, as Thomson notes, the Elizabethan development of acting as “personation” registers no

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 10

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 118

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 14

<sup>21</sup> Gurr 1987 136

performative disjunction in moving “from dialogue to aside to dialogue to soliloquy.”<sup>22</sup> Even still, they are plays situated in a moment that saw a gradual shift from a popular drama that kaleidoscopes between illusion and anti-illusion to one that embraces the illusionistic mode fully. They are plays that actively engage with and experiment with that shift, that allowed performers unique to their repertory companies and historical moment to negotiate with the idea of theater itself.

## II.

### “CONFUSION TO ALL COMFORT!”: THE CHILDREN OF PAUL’S RADICAL EXPERIMENTS IN THE *ANTONIO* PLAYS

From the outset, *Antonio and Mellida* positions itself on the cutting edge of experimentation with presentational and representational acting styles, among other conventions of dramatic language and performance. When the boy playing Alberto asks the boy playing Piero, “Whom do you personate?”, it is among the first instances “personate” is used to specifically refer to an acting style.<sup>23</sup> The word had appeared with slightly different connotations earlier in the 1590s, and is defined as “to acte or play a part in a play” in Florio’s 1598 *A World of Wordes*, but *Antonio and Mellida* is its first appearance in a dramatic context.<sup>24</sup> The Induction not only represents a discussion about acting, but is verbally preoccupied with it as well: along with “personate,” “act” appears three times and “play” seven.<sup>25</sup> Bearing this in mind, I will argue that the play, when viewed as its publishers and some critics have<sup>26</sup> – as a whole, if discontinuous and

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<sup>22</sup> Thomson 1997 329

<sup>23</sup> Induction ln. 5. Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Antonio and Mellida* are to the Revels Plays edition, ed. W. Reavley Gair. Manchester: UP, 1991. References will henceforward be abbreviated as *AM*.

<sup>24</sup> Florio 1598 271

<sup>25</sup> Weiss 1987 86

<sup>26</sup> See Bergson 1971 308.

unstable drama – enacts a trajectory from anti-representation and a “mingle-mangle” pseudo-operatic event to conventional tragic illusionistic representation. The play gains confidence but always maintaining a self-conscious distance, opening up a space in which to comment on this process, before finally destabilizing both modes. So as to situate my argument exactly, I will briefly outline the textual and recent critical histories of the *Antonio* plays.

As the origins of early modern play-texts go, the textual history of the *Antonio* plays is relatively straightforward. Mathew Lownes and Thomas Fisher entered both together into the Stationer’s Register on 24 October 1601 as “the ffyrst and second partes of the play called Anthonio and melida,” making this the accepted terminal date for the first productions of both plays.<sup>27</sup> The first quartos (Q1) of the two plays were published by Lownes and Fisher in 1602, marked “the first part” and “the second part” respectively on their title pages. Hunter vaguely posits a “literary” origin for Q1 *Antonio and Mellida*,<sup>28</sup> but Gair persuasively argues that both Q1 texts were based on theatrical prompt copies mostly corrected by Marston, due to a stage direction in *Antonio and Mellida* that refers to two of the boy actors by name (“*Enter Andrugio, Lucio, Cole and Norwood?*”) and a note (“*ficto?*”) in *Antonio’s Revenge* that seems to describe how the actor playing Piero should deliver the line.<sup>29</sup>

The properties brought on stage at the beginning of Act V of *Antonio and Mellida* – two paintings, one inscribed “*Anno Domini 1599*” and the other “*Aetatis suae twenty-four?*” (*AM* V.1.8-11) – have been taken by most, following Gair and Hunter, to date the play’s first performance after October 1599, when Marston (thought to be the subject

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<sup>27</sup> Qtd. in Gair, *Antonio’s Revenge* 1. Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Antonio’s Revenge* are to the Revels Plays edition, ed. W. Reavley Gair. References will henceforward be abbreviated as *AR*.

<sup>28</sup> Hunter ed. *Antonio and Mellida* 1965 ix

<sup>29</sup> *AR* 2. The stage directions in question are at *AM* IV.1.29 and *AR* IV.2.36. Gair further argues that the two boys named, Robert Coles and John Norwood, were the actors who played Andrugio and Lucio, respectively (see note at *AM* IV.1.29).

of the second picture) would have been in “the twenty-fourth year of his age.”<sup>30</sup> Cathcart further pinpoints *Antonio and Mellida* as having been produced before the end of spring 1600.<sup>31</sup> The Induction makes it clear that a sequel was only sketchily planned when *Antonio and Mellida* opened the first Paul’s season in a decade, leaving the matter to the audience’s reception (ln. 146-7). This is in part a commonplace – for example, the Epilogue to *II Henry IV*, though they perform very different work in their respective contexts, also alludes to another sequel “with Sir John in’t” “if you be not too much cloyed with fat meat.”<sup>32</sup> But, in the case of *Antonio and Mellida*, it is also a practical stance that furthers the partially apologetic function of the Induction. The Children of Paul’s were a commercial and, as the *Antonio* plays show, an artistic gamble. After this initial run, Marston and the company determined the play had obtained enough “gracious acceptance” to “try [their] fortune” at *Antonio’s Revenge*, a play that distances itself radically from its predecessor and yet feeds back into its concerns. Therefore, the commonly accepted range of dates for the first productions of both plays separately – there is no evidence they were produced together – is between October 1599 and October 1601.

Since the origins of the plays’ texts and early performance history are comparatively uncomplicated, the most important critical debate since the second half of the twentieth century has been, broadly, whether the *Antonio* plays should be interpreted as serious or parodic. It is a question that has dogged literary and performance-based criticism, and has become the most partisan issue in recent Marston scholarship. Much earlier criticism saw the *Antonio* plays as basically serious, if poorly handled. Hunter, writing in 1954 of late Elizabethan two-part plays – the best of which,

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<sup>30</sup> Hunter *Antonio and Mellida* x

<sup>31</sup> Cathcart 2001 342

<sup>32</sup> *II Henry IV* Epilogue ln. 24-6. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Shakespeare’s plays are to Bevington, ed. *Complete Works*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1992.

he argues, achieve unity through parceling out incident in parallel – described the *Antonio* plays as “a good example of the bastard unity which results when the method of parallelism is handled ineptly.”<sup>33</sup> More recently, Blake summarized this critical attitude: “The response of critics to the notorious peculiarities of John Marston’s plays is to censure, to abuse, or, at best, to neglect them.”<sup>34</sup>

Foakes began the critical reevaluation of the *Antonio* plays in the 1960s, though he shows scarcely more patience for them than Hunter does. Persistently referring to the actors pejoratively as “children,” Foakes argues:

The peculiar tone of the *Antonio* plays is largely generated through the exploitation of the clash between the “infant weakness” of the boys and their “passion”; they speak more than gods, and, at the same time, Marston does not let his audience forget that they are less than men.<sup>35</sup>

The mode of the *Antonio* plays, in Foakes’ estimation, becomes primarily parody and burlesque of adult theater conventions. “A lady was the appropriate part for a boy to play on the public stages,” Foakes argues, “and strutting in a ranting role becomes grotesque in a child.”<sup>36</sup> Foakes’ argument does not account for other serious drama written for boys’ companies from the 1580s on, from Lyly’s *Campaspe* and *Midas* to Jonson’s *Epicoene* and Middleton’s city comedies, plays in which “there is no recognition whatsoever...that the actors are anything but actors.”<sup>37</sup> The Children of Paul’s would have probably ranged in age from ten to seventeen – scarcely mere children.<sup>38</sup> In spite of a flawed vision of the company as performers, Foakes makes the significant conclusion that “parody, and a sardonic or grotesque humour were predominant in

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<sup>33</sup> Hunter 1954 242-4

<sup>34</sup> Blake 1987 471

<sup>35</sup> Foakes 1962 235

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 229

<sup>37</sup> Blake 1987 482

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 475

[Marston's] conception, and much of the so-called clumsiness, nonsense, and bad writing are there *for deliberate effect*? (emphasis mine).<sup>39</sup>

At the opposite end of the critical spectrum, Weiss downplays the possible parodic significances of the actors' performances by arguing that the boys' displays of rhetorical self-consciousness show their sophistication over other productions, in schools and on the professional stage.<sup>40</sup> The Induction shows "the *choristers* of St Paul's are...able to engage in a rapid roundtable of rhetorical criticism, spot a figure when they hear one, compose extemporaneous descriptions of persons, mimic the rhetorical style of a colleague's role and judge audience perceptions" (emphasis mine).<sup>41</sup> Not to dwell overly on terminology, but Weiss's discussion of the company as "choristers" hinders his argument analogously to Foakes' use of "children." The Paul's company were indeed choristers putting on a "school play" of sorts, but this reading loses sight of the important fact that, with the premiere of *Antonio and Mellida*, the Children of Paul's was a professional theater company making its debut nine years' after being banned from the London stage.<sup>42</sup> They were putting themselves in direct competition with the Admiral's Men and the Chamberlain's Men, companies that had solidified their dominant positions in the culture and the nascent theatrical market in the 1590s. In this context, the Induction reads as an (over)confident display of rhetorical athletic skill that self-consciously positions Paul's as "up-market," closer to Inns of Court spectacles (or those at the royal court) than the offerings of their adult competitors.

Gair, in his history of the Children, takes a more moderate approach. He allows that parody was one mode available to the players, but emphasizes the "tentative and

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<sup>39</sup> Foakes 1962 238

<sup>40</sup> Weiss 1987 83

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 87

<sup>42</sup> The Children were banned after being implicated, through Lyly, in the Marprelate controversy in 1590. See Gair 1982, especially ch. 1 and 2.

provisional” trope expressed in the Induction and the Epilogue of *Antonio and Mellida*.<sup>43</sup> The Epilogue, probably spoken by Andrugio (thus one of the older players), expresses this most earnestly: “What imperfection you have seen in us, leave with us and we’ll amend it; what hath pleased you, take with you and cherish it” (ln. 4-6). Any sense of mimetic illusion dissolved, the Epilogue at once acknowledges the young company’s shortcomings and is a direct invitation to the audience to establish a creative, celebrative community with the players. Gair’s approach makes good practical sense, acknowledging as it does the precariousness of a boy’s company taking the stage, with notably experimental material, after a significant absence.<sup>44</sup> Despite criticism (then as now) of verbal and performative excess, Gair argues that the overall image Marston’s plays afforded the company was “progressive and impressive, rather than a merely negative and critical one.”<sup>45</sup> It was, indeed, after the success of the *Antonio* plays as part of the Children of Paul’s first season that the Children of the Revels were reestablished in Blackfriars.<sup>46</sup>

Blake goes further in countering Foakes’ and others’ readings by suggesting that their arguments are circular – they argue for the existence of a primarily parodic acting style, and the confirmation for the argument is found in the same plays.<sup>47</sup> Further, the argument that no dramatic illusion is created at all in the *Antonio* plays, that the performances were only understood as grotesque send-ups of adult convention, denies “that shift in perspective which theatre audiences make at the beginning of every performance,” enabling the audience to engage with performers on an imaginative level.<sup>48</sup> To deny this is to deny the complexity both of the dramatic modes utilized by

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<sup>43</sup> Gair 1982 143

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 119

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 142

<sup>46</sup> Munro 2005 17

<sup>47</sup> Blake 1987 473

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

the Children, as evidenced in the play-texts, and that of an early modern audience's simultaneous engagement with mimetic and anti-mimetic elements in the same play and, indeed, in the same performers. Especially in *Antonio's Revenge*, "Marston's interest in the reaction of his characters to the extremities of suffering which he devises for them seems...to suggest an interest in more than theatrical parody."<sup>49</sup>

It is doubtful that the boys' performances were exclusively parodic – the range of emotion and the verbal agility of the *Antonio* plays do not allow for that, as I hope to show. But self-consciousness about their company's fledgling position, not to mention Marston's stylistic inclinations, means that references to the adult companies' repertoire sometimes naturally register as parody. In arguing against the parodists, Blake comes close to disavowing the anti-illusionistic acting style as one mode among several used in the *Antonio* plays, which certainly do not create a sustained dramatic illusion. Below, I will show that the *Antonio* plays in effect take dramatic representation as the subject of their tentative experiments with dramatic convention and performance style. As they relate to the themes of the present study, the play's concerns are packed into Antonio's anguished lines, "I will not swell like a tragedian / In forcèd passion of affected strains" (*AR* II.3.104-5). Maintaining a vision of the Children of Paul's as a professional theater company composed of boys and young men ranging in age from approximately ten to seventeen years of age, with distinctive talents and a range of performative modes available to them, is crucial for interpreting the play's obsession with emotion and how it is expressed in language and performance in a unique theatrical context.

Mapping the play's representational experiments must begin, of course, with the Induction to *Antonio and Mellida*. The complexity of the Induction has been given short shrift by some, including Foakes, who describes it as only calling attention to the spectacle of the "child actors" and assuming in the audience a knowledge of the plays

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 479

and conventions of the public theaters.<sup>50</sup> The Induction does function in these ways, but that is not all. As Munro has shown, an Induction is one of the important centers of audience positioning in a dramatic text, in which expectations are interpolated and situated.<sup>51</sup> The Induction plays on a sense of excited apprehension shared between the company and the audience: how will this new company of inexperienced players fare in its first production of a new play, itself written by an inexperienced playwright notorious for his poetic satires, which were publicly burned during the Bishop's Ban earlier in 1599? This apprehension is immediately addressed, and deflated:

*Enter Galeazzo, Piero, Alberto, Antonio,  
Forobosco, Balurdo, Mazzagente, and Felice, with parts  
in their hands, having cloaks cast over their apparel.*

*Galeazzo.* Come sirs, come! The music will sound straight for  
entrance. Are ye ready, are ye perfect?

*Piero.* Faith, we can say our parts, but we are ignorant in what  
mould we must cast our actors. (0.1-5)

Effectively, the Induction is a dramatization of a last-minute rehearsal. The players enter, with cloaks concealing their costumes and their “parts” or scripts in hand, onto a bare, artificially lit stage. It is intentionally not a fortuitous beginning, and its purpose is “at once apologetic (with an implied request for the tolerance of inexperience) and invitational (soliciting response from the audience in guiding the future development of this theatrical enterprise).”<sup>52</sup> The Induction balances apology for inexperience with a humorous embrace of it, and builds confidence (in the players as in the audience) through a quick-witted display of rhetorical and performative knowledge.

The actor playing Alberto – perhaps Robert Coles – who doubles later as Andrugio, is at the center of the proceedings, an older performer using the posture of

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<sup>50</sup> Foakes 1962 229

<sup>51</sup> Munro 2005 7-9

<sup>52</sup> Gair 1982 119

experience (which he may not have had) to “direct” his colleagues.<sup>53</sup> This posture is the most sustained example in the Induction of Marston’s technique of “linguistic characterization,” through which characters are critically aware of how they speak, and use that awareness to adjust their relationships with other characters, the audience, and themselves.<sup>54</sup> Alberto’s direction to Forobosco, “you must seem now as glib and straight in outward semblance as a lady’s busk,” suggests ribald gestural possibilities, and also knowledge of performance styles and ladies’ underwear (ln. 54-5). The line interfaces with the illusionistic world of the actor and the “real” world of a young man, allowing Alberto the character to establish authority over his colleagues through the actor Coles’ anti-character function. It has been argued that Marston’s strategy of enhancing the illusion of “under-rehearsed students” is furthered by the printed text, which, unlike the later Induction to the King’s Men’s version of *The Malcontent*, specifies the actors’ roles rather than their real names.<sup>55</sup> This may appear to be Marston’s strategy to a *reader* of the play, but not to a *spectator* in the playhouse at Paul’s. Unlike Will Sly in the Induction to *The Malcontent*, who emphasizes the metatheatricality of the scene by saying, “Where’s Harry Condell, Dick Burbage, and Will Sly?”, here none of the player address each other as their part’s name, though each in turn identifies his own part.<sup>56</sup>

But that the Induction is a carefully balanced metatheatrical illusion is a point well taken; it is one of the layers of representational complexity frequently ignored by critics. Effectively, Robert Coles, along with his colleagues, is a boy playing a boy reading a part. It is in this representational space between player and part that the self-conscious linguistic characterization and interrogation of dramatic convention, which

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<sup>53</sup> Alberto says, “the necessity of the play forceth me to act two parts,” and names the other as Andrugio (ln. 21-2).

<sup>54</sup> For a fuller discussion of Marston’s mode of characterization, see Yearling 1980.

<sup>55</sup> Weiss 1987 84

<sup>56</sup> *The Malcontent* Induction ln. 11

typify the play as a whole, begin to develop. Forobosco displays something of this development through Alberto's witty "directorial" intervention:

*Forobosco.* Ha, ha, ha! Tolerably good, good faith, sweet wag.  
*Alberto.* Umph. Why "Tolerably good, good faith, sweet wag"?  
 Go, go! You flatter me.  
*Forobosco.* Right. I but dispose my speech to the habit of my part.  
 (ln. 41-5)

Alberto then gives him lengthy direction, turning on the tongue-in-cheek advice to play it straight "as a lady's busk," to which Forobosco replies:

*Forobosco.* I warrant you, I warrant you, you shall see me prove  
 the very periwig to cover the bald pate of brainless genti-  
 lity. Ho, I will so tickle the sense of *bella graziosa*  
*madonna*, with the titillation of hyperbolic praise, that  
 I'll strike it in the nick, in the very nick, chuck. (ln. 59-63)

Notice the shift in Forobosco's delivery: already in the first line he shows something of a sense for the repetitiveness of the part, but when Alberto questions him, Forobosco loses all sense of playing the character, instead showing the player's sullen lack of confidence in clipped, straightforward language. After Alberto's intervention, he recovers and extends his confidence in a full-on display of the tawdry servility of his part. To Forobosco's promise to "tickle the sense of *bella graziosa madonna*," Felice responds, "Thou promisest more than I hope any spectator gives faith of performance" (ln. 64-5). This shows the strong association between theatrical performance and performance of the sexual act, and how the players' discussion of performative mode and rhetoric is interwoven with sexual innuendo. As such it is a discussion, like Alberto's remark about the "lady's busk," that operates in the interstice between player and part.

The players show their knowledge of rhetoric is particularly well developed. Quoting Heywood's outline in *An Apology for Actors* (published 1612) of the features of classical oratory, Weiss shows the actors were principally concerned with the rhetorical

processes of memory, pronunciation, and action.<sup>57</sup> It is in this context that Piero's distinction between being able to "say our parts" (memory and pronunciation) and to "cast our actors" (action) should be understood; this is the distinction that is dramatized in the rest of the play. Alberto shows himself to be particularly adept in showing off a sophisticated schoolboy's grasp of classical learning. He calls Balurdo's part as the fool "the part of all the world" – loosely translating the Ciceronian commonplace, *stultorum plena sunt omnia*, a favorite of Elizabethan playwrights and satirists – and jokes on Felice's syntactical contortions, "What's all this periphrasis, ha?" (ln. 29, 51)

Alberto and the other actors also reveal a considerable knowledge of the conventions of the early modern English stage, which are entwined with the classical tradition. In his instructions to Forobosco, Alberto describes the part as "the parasite" (ln. 53), a stock character familiar from the Latin comedy the boys (not to mention Marston and Shakespeare) would have read in school. Forobosco understands the reference, and adjusts his performance immediately. When Antonio complains that he is to play two parts – his worry about being able to play a lady shows he may have been a younger boy whose voice had just broken – Alberto chastises him, "Away, away, 'tis common fashion. Nay, if you cannot bear two subtle fronts under one hood, idiot, go by, go by, off this world's stage!" (ln. 77-9) The phrase "this world's stage" implies public visibility, and further underscores the importance of seeing the Children as a new professional company, while showing the players' awareness that they are to engage with the adult companies on their level and their terms.

The allusion to the adult companies, and more immediately Matzagente's florid pentameters, causes Felice to deliver the play's best-known allusion: "Rampum,

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<sup>57</sup> The selection from Heywood is a useful gloss: "Tully in his booke *ad Caium Herennium*, requires five things in an Orator, *Invention, Disposition, Eloquution, Memory*, and *Pronunciation*, yet all are imperfect without the sixth, which is *Action*" (qtd. in Weiss 1987 83).

scrampum, mount tufty Tamburlaine! What rattling thunderclap breaks from his lips?” (ln. 91-2) “Tufty” could allude to a stage Tamburlaine’s bearded appearance specifically and to bearded adult players in general. As such, it sets up a contrast to the Children who, as Gair has shown, likely did not wear false beards.<sup>58</sup> Yearling has recently argued that false facial hair was occasionally used at Paul’s, based on Rosaline saying in Act I that Matzagente has “a thin coal-black beard” (I.1.131).<sup>59</sup> Given the age range of players in the company, and that Matzagente is likely the elder of Mellida’s suitors since Galeatzo has “a naked chin,” it seems far more likely that the actor playing Galeatzo was a young man capable of growing a thin beard (I.1.106). The flat, caricature-like appearance of a boy wearing a false beard and pronouncing Marlovian rhetoric would overwhelm any attempt at serious dramatic illusion. In context – these are young men, after all – Felice’s remark about “tufty Tamburlaine” could be a dig at Matzagente’s weak beard.

But more important than the beard is Tamburlaine himself. The reference is both to an unfashionably high-flown acting style and its best-known practitioner, Edward Alleyn, who was still playing at the Fortune with the Admiral’s Men when *Antonio and Mellida* was first produced. Here and elsewhere in the play (and in Marston’s other dramatic work), the florid style of earlier drama is brought up in order for it to be rejected as bombast worthy of a *miles gloriosus*. And yet, the style continues to appear because the characters are “intelligently conscious of words and of the comedy or inadequacy of linguistic display”; especially in the tragic plot of *Antonio’s Revenge*, a more measured style does not seem to be adequate to the emotions that must be expressed.<sup>60</sup> The Children of Paul’s cannot profess to reject the high-flown style wholeheartedly, since the older plays from the company’s last productive period before 1590 likely filled

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<sup>58</sup> Gair 1982 143

<sup>59</sup> Yearling 2005 219

<sup>60</sup> Yearling 1980 262

out the rest of its repertoire. In the Induction, then, Marston and the Children cannot wholly reject the style of *Tamburlaine*. Rather, they enter into active, frequently satirical negotiation with it as a part of the wider commentary on presentational and representational modes that develops throughout the play. Especially as it develops in *Antonio's Revenge*, the use of allusion to a high-flown performance style is evidence of a mimetic desire to simultaneously satirize a certain dramatic mode and to embody the force of such performances.

For its complex, often lascivious humor and odd, tentative yet knowing tone, the Induction still achieves the basic dramatic purposes of situating the play as a comedy (ln. 145), laying out a sketch of the plot (ln. 70-4), and integrating an audience of frequent theater-goers into the dramatic process by somewhat satirical allusions to *Tamburlaine* and *Spanish Tragedy*. Since the rest of the Children of Paul's initial repertoire likely consisted of older plays such as those by Marlowe and Kyd, these allusions also have the purpose of introducing the audience, somewhat archly, to the kind of fare to be expected in the season as a whole. The rapid exchange of rhetorical and acting references manipulates the players' unique position as schoolboys and professional actors, and elicits "audience approval for the talented actors, who are able not only to create their roles without rehearsal but also to engage in sophisticated critical commentary about their material."<sup>61</sup> Soule, writing of boy actors in the adult companies, notes that apprentices, who made up a sizeable portion of the audience, would have had a particular interest in the performances of the young men, and in words not as literary objects but as performances of personal skill.<sup>62</sup> Though the composition of the Paul's audience is not known, it is often speculated that young members of the Inns of Court

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<sup>61</sup> Weiss 1987 88

<sup>62</sup> Soule 2000 122-3, 137

made up a significant portion of the initial spectators.<sup>63</sup> If this is so, the Induction succeeds in acclimating its initial audience by displaying language as literary and performative, satisfying needs for intellectual sophistication and for verbal athletic skill in performance.

The playful verbal and theatrical self-awareness and interest in spectacle established in the Induction continue to develop throughout *Antonio and Mellida*. Characters self-consciously play with their words, weighing them and trading them back and forth. They repeat and echo each other, in ways that sometimes strike a modern auditor as Beckettian, especially when the characters are in crisis and words and names struggle to signify anything meaningful.<sup>64</sup> The best example of the practice of playful repetition used in rhetorical gamesmanship is Balurdo, the first of Marston's several "verbal idiots."<sup>65</sup> Balurdo seizes on a word he fancies and unknowingly uses it against himself – "I thank my planets my leg is not altogether unpropitiously shaped. There's a word – 'unpropitiously'! I think I speak 'unpropitiously' as well as any courtier in Italy" (II.1.106-9). Through his misappropriation of language, Balurdo begins to comically destabilize the relationship between rhetoric and meaning, making it useful only in impressing people, incapable of serious emotional expression.<sup>66</sup> For Antonio especially, this will become the central crisis of the play. Balurdo's folly can be understood as a comically uncalculated version of Ulysses' rhetorical insincerity, to be discussed below.

The self-conscious verbal games and commentaries on acting modes come to a head in Act IV, beginning with Antonio's dramatic speech. Antonio and Mellida, disguised as a sailor and a page respectively, have escaped the court separately unbeknownst to each other (III.2.241-57). Antonio returns to the stage in IV.1 still

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Weiss 1987 83.

<sup>64</sup> See *AM* IV.1.90-105.

<sup>65</sup> Yearling 1980 262

<sup>66</sup> Here I am indebted to Burnett's discussion of Balurdo's function in *AR*, especially p. 314-5.

pretending to pursue himself, and the emotional stress of his separation from Mellida, compounded by his self-abnegating duplicity in escaping, causes something like what popular psychology would now call an identity crisis: “Vain breath, vain breath, Antonio’s lost. / He cannot find himself, not seize himself. / Alas, this that you see is not Antonio” (IV.1.2-4). In the speech that follows, the actor’s anti-character function, in which the player steps outside of the part to comment on it, intertwines with humanist contemplation of essential selfhood:

Conceit you me as, having clasped a rose  
 Within my palm, the rose being ta’en away,  
 My hand retains a little breath of sweet;  
 So may man’s trunk, his spirit slipped away,  
 Hold still a faint perfume of his sweet guest.  
 ’Tis so, for when discursive powers fly out  
 And roam in progress through the bounds of heaven,  
 The soul itself gallops along with them  
 As chieftain of this wingèd troop of thought,  
 Whilst the dull lodge of spirit standeth waste  
 Until the soul return from – what was’t I said? (IV.1.13-23)

The question the passage grapples with is, how is an essential, inwardly aware self to be represented on stage, in this case by an inexperienced young actor? Marston, displaying his humanist credentials, litters the speech with borrowings and allusions, as if dramatizing a commonplace book. For example, the image of the rose in ln. 13-15 is derived from Erasmus’ colloquy *Proci et Puellae*.<sup>67</sup>

But, whereas Balurdo’s earlier allusion to this colloquy (at II.1.234-41) is estranged from its original sense by his nonsensical exchange with Rosaline, Antonio never quite makes sense of what the allusion can signify in his emotional crisis. Unable to derive any meaning from his self-conscious allusions, Antonio shifts the simile into a pseudo-Platonic meditation on the soul’s separation from the body before interrupting himself – “what was’t I said?” The question becomes, who is the “I” who speaks the line? If it is not the character Antonio, who is the “spirit” that still “hovers in Piero’s

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<sup>67</sup> See Gair’s note, *AM* p. 125

court,” it is the “trunk,” the actor who, until this moment, embodied the part with varying degrees of illusionistic depth (IV.1.5). The emotional strain of the moment has not only caused a crisis in language – the speech is constructed to be hard to follow, and it dissolves into gibberish after his self-interruption – but also a crisis in representation. The illusion has failed, and the actor, aware he has become dissociated from his stage self, can only fall to the ground. After expressing his misgivings in the Induction about playing two parts in one, Antonio and the actor playing him are repeatedly shown to be self-consciously aware of their inability to play a mature, tragic lover. The actor and the character have both been miscast; the *Antonio* plays dramatize their unsuccessful quest to become a mature, unified dramatic self.

Coming on stage separately, Andrugio continues Antonio’s metatheatrical ramblings about dramatic selfhood and its loss:

[*Andrugio.*] Give me assay. How we mock greatness now!

*Lucio.* A strong conceit is rich, so most men deem.

If not to be, ’tis comfort yet to seem.

*Andrugio.* Why, man, I never was a prince till now. (IV.1.42-5)

By obeying the command to give “assay,” to taste his food for poison, Lucio is encouraging the deposed duke to take comfort in the rituals of power, in the illusion that he is still a great man. But where characters in other plays find strength in a sense of self unified with lost prestige (“I am the Duchess of Malfi still”), Andrugio finds only mockery in ritual, and proceeds to realign his definition of princehood, and thus of himself:

’Tis not the barèd pate, the bended knees,  
Gilt tipstaves, Tyrian purple, chairs of state,  
Troops of pied butterflies that flutter still  
In greatness’ summer, that confirm a prince.

[...]

No, Lucio, he’s a king...

Who is not blown up with the flattering puffs  
Of spongy sycophants, who stands unmoved  
Despite the jostling of opinion,

[...]

This, Lucio, is a king,  
 And of this empire every man's possessed  
 That's worth his soul. (IV.1.46-9, 52, 55-7, 63-5)

Real power is self-possession, Andrugio realizes, a definition that spans Senecan stoicism and modern ideas of individuality, that eschews older rituals of power and extends the play's persistent anti-court satire.

Lest the audience think Andrugio has become unusually egalitarian, Lucio mentions his former subjects and Andrugio's newfound subjectivity is immediately reduced to raillery:

Name not the Genoese! That very word  
 Unkings me quite, makes me vile passion's slave.  
 [...]
   
 O rotten props of the crazed multitude,  
 How you still falter under the lightest chance  
 That strains your veins! Alas, one battle lost,  
 Your whorish love, your drunken healths, your shouts,  
 Your smooth 'God save's', and all your devils last,  
 That tempts our quiet, to your hell of throngs.  
 Spit on me Lucio, for I am turned slave.  
 Observe how passion domineers o'er me. (IV.1. 67-8, 76-83)

Discussions of the masses' fickleness in Shakespeare's recent *Julius Caesar* (performed 1599) are here briefly extended. That Andrugio makes no distinction between the Genoese and the court with its new leader shows that he is no democrat, that his new sense of selfhood is fragile and solipsistic. It is passion that "unkings" him, and Andrugio's earlier, stoical clarity dissolves into stoical despair with an allusion to Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*: "Ay, Lucio, having lost a son, a son, / A country, house, crown, son. *O lares, miseri lares!*" (IV.1. 86-7) The trajectory of Andrugio's expression in this scene is striking, from a sure sense of self clarified by anger, to that clarity immolated in raillery, and finally to an inability to express himself. It is the "clarified extremity" of Senecan tragic rhetoric that Marston utilizes here to excellent effect, one

he will return to repeatedly in *Antonio's Revenge*.<sup>68</sup> In this passage Andrugio not only recalls Seneca, but also *The Spanish Tragedy* with “My dear sweet boy, my dear Antonio”<sup>69</sup> – at this point, any sense of Andrugio as a distinct character has dissolved into sentences composed only of woeful repetition and allusions to other plays. In their shared reversion to allusion, there is a family resemblance between Antonio’s despair and Andrugio’s.

Andrugio’s metatheatrical plight is, of course, comically undercut by the fact that his son has been laying crumpled elsewhere onstage the whole time. Antonio instantly perks up when his name is mentioned, perhaps the best moment of non-satiric comedy in the play (IV.1.90). In this moment, father and son share their crises and resolve to move forward together:

*Andrugio.* Art thou Antonio?

*Antonio.* I think I am.

*Andrugio.* Dost thou but think? What, does not know thyself?

*Antonio.* He is a fool that thinks he knows himself.

[...]

*Andrugio.* But, O, remember to forget thyself.

Forget remembrance what thou once has been.

(IV.1. 101-4, 124-5)

Andrugio’s stoical entreaty to “know thyself?” is deflated by Antonio’s bitter rejoinder, though not his joy at being reunited with his son. Since both have failed to find ways to keep their prior identities whole through the crises caused by their change in fortune, they resolve to forget these identities and move forward without them. As has been shown, neither was successful in their prior role when put under duress. Andrugio’s instruction to “forget remembrance” recalls the metatheatrical discussion of rhetoric in the Induction – on one level, Andrugio is entreating Antonio to forget how to “say his part” that they might “cast [their] actors” anew so as to regain the status they have lost.

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<sup>68</sup> Braden 1985 2

<sup>69</sup> See *The Spanish Tragedy* II.4.94-5, “Ay me most wretched, that have lost my joy, / In losing Horatio, my sweet boy!”

In their prior roles there was no way to *act* that would make this happen; when they regain their positions in V.2, they even return in disguise – Andrugio in armor, Antonio carried in a coffin – as part of a spectacle that overwhelms any of the play’s more serious moments. In this central scene and throughout the play, Marston and the boy actors use metatheatrical self-awareness and a range of verbal effects to experiment with the destabilization of the dramatic character as a “stable signification of meaning,” a representation on the border between coherent selfhood and unstable theatrical energies.<sup>70</sup>

Another source of the unstable energy of *Antonio and Mellida*, one usually underappreciated in criticism of the play, is the sheer range of extra-dramatic spectacle put on for the audience. Spectacles – be they processions, dumb shows, songs or battles – are familiar features of early modern drama, especially comedy, but those in *Antonio and Mellida* take very specific advantage of the performance space at Paul’s and the boy actors’ talents and unique anti-character function. These presentations of spectacle often interrupt the unfolding drama, keeping the audience from surrendering to a sense of theatrical illusion. Co-existing with the drama as it unfolds in time, the play’s many spectacles are another plane on which illusionistic representation is subverted, and one on which the talents of the boy actors are celebrated. Though the stage at Paul’s itself was rather small – Piero later says, “The room’s too scant. Boys, stand in there, close” (V.2.75) – it had two, probably opposing doors for the procession in I.1 to enter and exit through, and a space above the main stage that held at least three actors.<sup>71</sup> The pageant in I.1, during which the courtiers pass by as the women watch from above, is a novel use of the “‘above’ space,” allowing the women to comment on the dumb show

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<sup>70</sup> Soule 2000 4

<sup>71</sup> *AM* Introduction p. 42

below.<sup>72</sup> Whether intentionally or not, the similar scene in *Troilus and Cressida* I.2 echoes this one both in its use of the upper playing space and in the bawdiness of the commentary. It is both a clever way of introducing the whole company, some of it having assumed their “parts” after the Induction, and a chance for Rosaline and Flavia, the more free-speaking of the women characters, to get in some satirical jibes at the vain courtiers, developing the play’s anti-court theme.

Another dumb show occurs in Act III.2, and this one foregrounds the childish qualities of the boy actors:

*Enter Balurdo backward, Dildo following him with a looking glass in one hand and a candle in the other hand; Flavia following him backward with a looking glass in one hand and a candle in the other; Rosaline following her. Balurdo and Rosaline stand setting of faces, and so the scene begins. (III.2.118.1-5)*

The setting is just before dawn, and the characters are primping before facing the court. They are also “setting of faces,” that is, making silly faces at the mirrors; in so doing they underscore the vanity and childishness of the courtiers and send up the actors’ youthful appearances. Felice, onstage already, can only laugh at the spectacle: “O, for time and place long enough and large enough to act these fools! Here might be a rare scene of folly, if the plot could bear it” (III.2.119-21). It is entirely possible that Felice turned to the audience to deliver these lines; regardless, he winkingly comments on the limitations of the stage space and on the confines of the audience’s expectations for a performance at Paul’s. If that first audience was made up mostly of friends and colleagues from the Inns of Court, the expectation for the performance may have been considerably more “high-brow” than those for a performance at one of the public theaters. This is a perfect moment for the kind of broad improvisatory humor of a

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<sup>72</sup> Gair 1982 120. “‘Above’ space” is Gair’s term, used to distinguish the space at Paul’s from “galleries” at other theaters, due to the limited amount of space available.

Tarlton or Kemp, Felice seems to say, but the “plot,” both the theatrical space and the dramatic context, will not allow for it.

More prominent than the dumb shows is the wealth of music in *Antonio and Mellida*. The words and, as is increasingly being recognized, *tunes* of the songs – not to mention the performers’ skill in delivering them – created meanings that conditioned the significances of the verbal and dramatic elements of plays. As Marsh has it, “melody made meaning,” and although these specific meanings are now lost, it is still useful to acknowledge and explore the fundamentally aural and oral experience of early seventeenth-century performances.<sup>73</sup> Edward Pearce was Master of Choristers when the *Antonio* plays were produced; Thomas Ravenscroft, a chorister at Paul’s and later a musician and composer, wrote in 1614 that Pearce was “a man of singular eminency in *his Profession*,” in “the ordering of the *Voyce* so as the *Quality* might afterward *credit* him” and in “his skilfull Instructions for other Instruments too, as his fruits can beare him witnesse.”<sup>74</sup> The thirteen whole or part-songs in the play – none of which survive – were likely written or arranged by Pearce, and can be supposed to be among the “fruits” of which Ravenscroft wrote. They were written in a variety of styles, from a measure in II.1 to a “mournful sennet” in V.2, and probably for an orchestra comprised of a five-piece viol consort and a quintet of wind instruments including the cornet, sackbut and recorder.<sup>75</sup> Marston also weaves musical imagery into the text of the play, which allows the actual music performed to resonate more subtly. It also extends the play’s concerns with the appropriate expression of emotion in a new direction:

Come, come, let’s dance. O music, thou distill’st  
 More sweetness in us than this jarring world!  
 Both time and measure from thy strains do breathe,  
 Whilst from the channel of this dirt doth flow  
 Nothing but timeless grief, unmeasured woe. (II.1.201-5)

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<sup>73</sup> Marsh 2004 171

<sup>74</sup> *Brief Discourse* 1614 A2-A2<sup>v</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Gair 1982 65

In this, the play's most clear and earnest comment on the subject, Mellida seems to detect in music the stable signification of meaning the play struggles to find in language and other performative modes. Music was, perhaps, the mode in which the chorister-actors felt most confident.

The most musical part of the play is Act II. Gair notes, "the second act is used to display, and draw attention to, additional skills among the company"<sup>76</sup> – music, as has been shown, would have been the most prominent skill on display. The first song in the play is sung by Dildo, Cazzo and Flavia, and since the matter is, so says Cazzo, a "descant [Flavia] made upon our names," the tone of the song could scarcely be expected to be much elevated above the ribald jokes Dildo and Cazzo exchanged at the beginning of the scene (II.1.51). Flavia extends the apologetic function of the Induction by worrying aloud, "Faith, the song will seem to come off hardly" (II.1.52). She came onstage on her way to Mellida's chamber, and is playing at being under-rehearsed. But the bawdy pun on "hardly" shows a puckish confidence – she tells them to strike up the orchestra, and to sing with the same fervor with which they exchanged vulgar jokes: "Pert Cazzo, knock it lustily, then!" (II.1.54)

Their initial feigned lack of confidence resolved with the song, the musicality of the scene gains momentum as the court enters with Castilio "*singing fantastically*" and Rosaline "*running a coranto pace*," a popular dance in a fast triple meter.<sup>77</sup> The subsequent masque-like pageant – in which nearly the whole company is onstage and three couples dance a stately measure – provides an appropriately ceremonious tableau for Piero to visually establish his power, overseeing the spectacle from his "state," a throne at center stage, and for Antonio (disguised as Florizel) and Mellida to lament their love, frustrated

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<sup>76</sup> Gair 1982 121

<sup>77</sup> This style of dance is more commonly known by its French name, *courante*, "running" (*Grove Music Online*).

as it has been by courtly machinations, as the distraught Mellida is forced to dance with her two suitors (II.1.160.1-7, 170-205). Within one scene, the players have shown off a range of musical skills in energetic displays of youthful exuberance. Antonio's despair swells along with the music and, if the music was as accomplished as Ravenscroft remembered, the audience would have been fully imaginatively engaged with the spectacle by scene's end.

Though music in *Antonio and Mellida* usually functions in this way, enhancing the illusionistic depth of the dramatic proceedings, it occasionally subverts it, especially after the virtuosic display of the second act. In III.2, Castilio, Cazzo and Felice share a song, somewhat incongruously located after Felice's railing speech about "nocturnal court delights" (III.2.6, 35.1): After the song finishes, it appears that Castilio is inviting Felice to sing another impromptu song when Felice abruptly recalls that he is the malcontent character:

*Castilio.* Felice! Health, fortune, mirth, and wine –  
*Felice.* To thee, my love divine.  
*Castilio.* I drink to thee, sweeting.  
*Felice.* Plague on thee for an ass! (III.2.36-9)

His sudden outburst would have provoked laughter in the audience, but at the same time frustrated the expectation of another song from some of the company's best singers (including Castilio, who entered "*singing fantastically*" in II.1). Musical spectacle becomes even more incongruous later in the scene when it becomes the lovers' means of escape. After the dumb show of the players pulling faces, Antonio becomes distraught in his eagerness to escape, but is persuaded by Felice to disguise himself as a mariner (III.2.237.1). This fools Piero, and as he contemplates Antonio's punishment, Mellida enters disguised as a boy page, and dances poorly enough to fool her father. Once it is revealed that Mellida too has disappeared, Felice sings the only named song in the play, "And was not good Solomon," as Piero feverishly commands his men to

pursue them (III.2.270-5). The skillful singing and dancing of prior scenes, and the seemingly serious emotion Antonio expresses earlier in this one, devolve into broadly parodic spectacle. Existing as a series of events taking place in time, the effect of the pageantry and parody of these scenes is of somewhat overwhelming tonal dissonance.

The experimentation with spectacle and deflationary metatheatrical commentary entwine at the end of IV.1, in one of the more controversial moments of the play. When Antonio recognizes Mellida, still disguised as a page, the lovers suddenly speak to each other in fervent Italian for nearly twenty lines (IV.1.189-206). Foakes is a particularly harsh critic of this passage, arguing that the audience, witnessing the jump from the flatness of the surrounding English to resonant Italian, “would have laughed at the absurdity of it.”<sup>78</sup> It is certainly a disjunctive moment, but for how long the sensation of disjunction lasted cannot be known. If the small audience at Paul’s was made up of young intellectuals from the Inns of Court, some of them likely understood what the actors were saying. Also, as some spectators of modern opera can attest, a lack of comprehension of an unfamiliar language does not entirely preclude emotional engagement. For the actors to perform the lines as parody or as dramatically believable are equally available choices. How absurd the first audiences found the passage is entirely dependent on factors inextricable from the moment of the first performances, the players’ fluency and skill not least of all.

Further, the play attempts to contain criticism of Marston’s shift to Italian by deflating it in a metatheatrical commentary by Antonio’s page delivered ten lines later:

I think confusion of Babel is fallen upon these lovers,  
that they change their language; but I fear me my master,  
having but feigned the person of a woman, hath got their  
unfeigned imperfection and is grown double tongued. As  
for Mellida, she were no woman if she could not yield  
strange language. But howsoever, if I should sit in judge-  
ment, ’tis an error easier to be pardoned by the auditors

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<sup>78</sup> Foakes 1962 232

than excused by the authors, and yet some private respect may rebate the edge of the keener censure. (IV.1.216-225)

The page's mention of "private respect" addresses the Inns of Court members among the "auditors" directly; knowing as they may have that Marston, one of their own members, was half Italian, perhaps they would have indulged his strange whimsy.<sup>79</sup> As this shows, the page's speech appears to exist wholly within the world of the play, but, to return to Weimann's terms, it really exists somewhere between the *locus* of the scene and the *platea* of Paul's. It directly addresses the destabilizing and potentially uncontrollable effects of the actors, themselves only just becoming sexually mature, changing genders at will through disguise and personation. "Boys and women," Soule notes, "lived outside the serious realm of responsible people and therefore represented, in varying degrees, figures of playful freedom on the stage."<sup>80</sup> The page seems to ask: can the lovers' sudden switch to Italian be explained by the disjunctive relationship between player, part, and disguise? The potential for comedic instability in a boy disguised as a woman, and in a boy playing a woman disguised as a boy, represents a serious challenge to conventional dramatic meaning-making, and here the players push this to an extreme by taking away the language they have shared with the audience throughout. The effect is disjunctive, funny, and strange, as the page's comments acknowledge – he points out the potential "error" of what they are doing, repeating the trope of hesitation from the Induction, but he does not apologize.

The multilingual episodes, musical spectacle and subversions of dramatic character in *Antonio and Mellida* experiment with an audience's understanding of how drama should function. Rather than just mixing mimetic and non-mimetic representation, as much early modern comedy does, the play takes this practice as its

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<sup>79</sup> For a full discussion of Marston's relationship with the Inns of Court, see Finkelppearl 1969.

<sup>80</sup> Soule 2000 132

subject and confronts its audience's preconceptions about it. Marston consciously manipulates the skills of the Children of Paul's to transform it from a "comedy" or even a "play," in what Gair has called "a first tentative and hesitant step towards a pseudo-operatic form."<sup>81</sup> *Antonio and Mellida* has been accused of being dramatically unsatisfying, and this is a fair criticism by traditional literary criteria. But to leave it at that is to misunderstand how the play revels in the spectacle of representation and subverts the textual fixity of character, how it celebrates the unstable energies its young actors embody when channeling the playwright's unconventional vision.

The experiment proved popular enough to merit a sequel, but whereas *Antonio and Mellida* celebrates the instability of language and performance, *Antonio's Revenge* agonizes over how rhetoric should become action. On its own, *Antonio's Revenge* is far less experimental than its predecessor. But when read as a unified work, what become interesting are the ways in which *Antonio's Revenge* uses convention to subvert celebration in the shift from "mingle-mangle" satirical comedy to illusionistic tragedy. "To display suffering in theatrical performance requires mimetic illusion," and so in tragedy the anti-character function of the boy actors must be channeled in different ways.<sup>82</sup> As such, *Antonio's Revenge* maintains a self-conscious distance in which the characters comment on the process, often utilizing the railing style that becomes the trademark of Marston's plays and the Children as a company. In exploring these trends in *Antonio's Revenge*, I will argue that one way of reading the movement from comedy to revenge tragedy is as mimetic desire being performed by Marston, the actors and their characters. In so doing, the *Antonio* plays as a whole become a complex engagement

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<sup>81</sup> Gair 1982 121

<sup>82</sup> Soule 2000 8

with the conventions and modes of early modern drama, reveling in and revealing the limitations of comedic and tragic representations of reality.<sup>83</sup>

The reconfiguration to conventional revenge tragedy begins in the language of the Prologue. The season has shifted since the revels of *Antonio and Mellida* ended, in the world of the theater and the play, but the festive atmosphere has not been forgotten: “The rawish dank of clumsy winter ramps / The fluent summer’s vein” (Prologue ln. 1-2). The atmosphere of foreboding is heightened by the stage being draped in black (ln. 20); one begins to fear that when Antonio happily proclaimed, “Here ends the comic crosses of true love,” he was only too right (*AM* V.2.279). Rather than confronting the audience with the spectacle of under-rehearsed players hashing out the details of the performance to follow, the Prologue seeks to assure the audience of the consonance of the mood and subsequent action: “O now, methinks, a sullen tragic scene / Would suit the time with pleasing congruence” (ln. 9-10). It also continues the apologetic function of the Induction, albeit with a more menacing edge:

Therefore we proclaim,  
If any spirit breathes within this round  
Uncapable of weighty passion, [...] let such  
Hurry amain from our black-visaged shows;  
We shall affright their eyes. (ln. 13-15, 19-21)

The tone is less reminiscent of a harried schoolboy than a cocky street tough. Having gained confidence through the success of *Antonio and Mellida*, the players are as concerned that “*we* be happy in our weak devoir” (emphasis mine), that they live up to their own expectations, as with what the audience will think of their new play (ln. 9).

The Prologue concludes with a conventional appeal to the “favour” of the audience, but still it is the desire of the players to “weigh massy in judicious scale” – their own estimation as much as an audience’s – that is foregrounded (ln. 28). This desire can best be described as mimetic; the players want to be as real, as effectively

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<sup>83</sup> In this I am much indebted to Bergson 1971, especially 308-9.

tragic, as they imagine they can be. Their idea of what an illusionistic tragic actor should be is, of course, rooted in knowledge of the performances of their adult counterparts in other companies' productions of tragedy. It is a metatheatrical version of Troilus's contemplation of "the act" as "a slave to limit," in this case the limit being their ability to enact a revenge tragedy, a kind of drama considerably less hospitable to the playful energies of boy actors. The Prologue simultaneously desires fully realized tragic illusion, cockily assures the audience that this is what they will see, and worries about the ability of the performers to make it come to pass. It is a complicated position, and anxiety about it registers in the heavy-handed use of startling imagery, from "snarling gusts" to "a breast / nailed to the earth with grief" (ln. 4, 21). The adolescent aggressiveness of the actors, unable to be channeled in song, dance or broad comedy, fuels the Prologue, and it becomes an important method for the play to enact the transition from comedy to tragedy.

Aggressiveness characterizes many villains in revenge tragedy – De Flores in *The Changeling* (performed 1622) exemplifies this – but Piero's aggression is self-conscious, predicated on a sense of how a powerful villain should behave. Within the growingly illusionistic world of the play, Piero's desperation is also self-reflexive. At the end of *Antonio and Mellida*, Piero offered Antonio himself in fellowship (*AM* V.2.241). As the sequel opens, the clearest path for Piero to regain self-possession is to become a merciless revenger; his change also offers a gloss on the unlikely resolution of the animosity depicted in the comedy. Throughout I.1, in which Piero truculently recounts his violent machinations, every use of a conventional revenge tragedy trope prompts a self-conscious reflection on his abilities as a revenger:

Say, faith, didst thou e'er hear, or read, or see  
 Such happy vengeance, unsuspected death?  
 [...]
 Nay, but weigh it – then Felice stabbed  
 (Whose sinking thought frightèd my conscious heart)

And laid by Mellida, to stop the match  
 And hale on mischief. This all in one night!  
 Is't to be equalled think'st thou? O, I could eat  
 Thy fumbling throat for thy lagged censure. Fut!  
 Is't not rare? (*AR* I.1.66-7, 75-81)

A villain part gives an actor a chance to shock the audience when he brags about his horrible deeds. In *The Jew of Malta* (performed 1592), Barabas memorably does so by describing how he would, among other misdeeds, “walk abroad o’ nights, /And kill sick people groaning under walls.”<sup>84</sup> In addition to wanting to frighten the audience with his depravity, Piero desperately wants to be seen, by Strozco and the audience, as an unequalled revenger. The Senecan “declamatory exorbitance” Piero uses here (Braden calls him “a modern Atreus”) helps him negotiate the ambiguities of illusionistic selfhood, using the classical model in a “Renaissance exploration of the dissonances between the self and its context.”<sup>85</sup>

Of course, his task is hindered by the fact that he is being played by a teenager. Even as it sets up the illusion needed by its genre, the play requires its audience to maintain a double vision of its villain as a character and as a boy actor attempting the personation demanded by his part. In this scene Strozco gives only monosyllabic responses, refusing to inflate Piero’s self-image and actually allowing the revenger to become more impassioned and, perhaps, mimetically realistic. Piero here begins to establish autocratic control over expression in his court, forcing the reticent Strozco to concede, “Fut! I’ll not smother your speech” (I.1.42). He surrounds himself with followers “whose wit / Reacheth no further than to admire their lord,” “as if fearing that his position would be threatened by those with a greater linguistic dexterity” (II.1.58-9).<sup>86</sup> One begins to sense Piero gaining confidence when he returns to the

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<sup>84</sup> *The Jew of Malta* II.3. Barabas’ wanton blasphemy is also echoed when Piero mentions his own irreligiousness at *AR* I.1.99-101.

<sup>85</sup> Braden 1985 170-3

<sup>86</sup> Burnett 1989 313

railing style of *Antonio and Mellida*, taunting his victims and proclaiming, “I ha’ no reason to be reasonable” (*AR* I.4.28). It is the fusion of this style with a self-consciousness about how to “prove a villain” that makes Piero a uniquely railing revenger.

The play’s allusions to other villains from the early modern stage become another vehicle for Piero’s mimetic desire to establish his authority as an unparalleled villain. Upon learning that Andrugio’s widow is coming to court, Piero boasts, “Poison the father, butcher the son, and marry the mother – ha!” (I.1.104). The line echoes Richard of Gloucester’s promise, “I’ll have her.../ What! I that kill’d her husband and her father.”<sup>87</sup> In I.3, when a curtain is pulled back to reveal Felice’s mutilated body “hung up,” the allusion is even more audacious in that it is not merely verbal, but echoes the very staging of Horatio’s murder in *The Spanish Tragedy* II.4, the most influential early modern revenge tragedy (*AM* I.3.129.1-2). Mulryne posits that, in staging the scene in the earlier play, “a trellis-work arch with a seat in it” may have been used.<sup>88</sup> Though Marston’s stage directions do not specify, what is known about the Children’s use of properties suggests that a similar, minimally functional object may have been used, with the added effect of deliberately reminding an audience of frequent theatergoers of the shocking imagery of the older, immensely popular play. Henslowe’s diary records Jonson being paid for “additions” to *The Spanish Tragedy* on 25 September 1601, meaning it was likely revived by the Admiral’s Men sometime that year.<sup>89</sup> If this is the case, the recent revival would have allowed Marston and the Children to exploit renewed interest in the play by imitating its language and staging.

Uncharitable critics might read the deliberate re-use of language and staging devices as indicators of the derivativeness of *Antonio’s Revenge*, but early modern revenge

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<sup>87</sup> *Richard III* I.2.232-3. Of course, though it is not necessarily chronologically significant, the description of poisoning the father and marrying the mother resemble *Hamlet*.

<sup>88</sup> *The Spanish Tragedy* p. 43, note on II.4.63.1

<sup>89</sup> Foakes ed. *Henslowe* 2002 182

tragedies steal from each other frequently and gleefully. Further, these and other allusions to well-known plays produced by the adult companies not only appeal to the memories of its audience, but are a metatheatrical extension of the play's mimetic desire to be as shockingly memorable as the older plays. Rooted as it is in the oldest plays in the Western tradition and older concepts of justice, revenge in drama always has an atavistic quality. Memory, an important element of mimesis, allows the audience to construct a narrative understanding in time of the relationships between itself and representations of reality. The act of allusion deepens the play's connection to the rituals and intonations of the past (even the recent past) and to the ritual of theatergoing itself. Appealing to the audience's memory asks them to move past the spectacle of boy actors to the unsettling illusion of murder. No matter the age of the performer, seeing someone's corpse strung up onstage will be affecting.

Faced with the murders of Felice and Andrugio and the imprisonment of Mellida, the protagonists are forced to decide how they will *act* to achieve justice and retribution. Confronted with his son's murder, Pandulpho can find no words to express his anguish, and only laughs – “Ha, ha, ha” (I.5.26, 57, 74) – echoing Titus's overwhelmed response when presented with the severed heads of his sons.<sup>90</sup> The tragic laughter in Shakespeare's play itself echoes Hieronimo's in *The Spanish Tragedy*.<sup>91</sup> Confronted about the appropriateness of his response, Pandulpho says:

Wouldst have me turn rank mad,  
Or wring my face with mimic action,  
Stamp, curse, weep, rage, and then my bosom strike?  
Away, 'tis apish action, player-like. (I.5.76-80)

Similarly, when entreated by Mellida to accept their fate, Antonio resolves, “I will not swell like a tragedian / In forcèd passion of affected strains” (II.3.104-5). These passages find the protagonists struggling with the mode of behavior characteristic of

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<sup>90</sup> *Titus Andronicus* III.1.264

<sup>91</sup> *The Spanish Tragedy* III.11.31-2

revenge tragedy, one that Piero, in part by channeling Kyd and Marlowe, has embraced fully. It is a problem, Burnett has shown, of finding an adequate means of expressing their grievances without an extravagant performance of the kind associated with an acting style they disdain and increasingly associate with Piero.<sup>92</sup> Questions of performance and politics are always mixed in court situations, and the self-consciousness of Pandulpho, Antonio and others has wider significance: “Marston experiments with performative styles to demonstrate the effect on individuals of a repressive society in which the use of language is strictly regulated.”<sup>93</sup>

Both characters rail against acting as the circumstances of revenge tragedy demand, but ultimately there is no other way – with his lover “defamed and stowed / under the hatches of obscuring earth,” Antonio resolves in an aside to fight Piero with “dissemblance” (II.4.17-8, 27).<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, this means Antonio will combat Piero’s simulation of the revenger with dissimulation as a fool, in a final spectacle that is both highly allusive and strikingly original. Before that, Antonio addresses the freedom disguising himself as a fool allows:

*Enter Antonio in a fool's habit[.]*

[...]

*Antonio.* By wisdom’s heart, there is no essence mortal  
That I can envy, but a plump-cheeked fool.  
O, he hath a patent of immunities,  
Confirmed by custom, sealed by policy,  
As large as spacious thought.  
...A baubled fool [is] sole canonical,  
Whilst pale-cheeked wisdom and lean-ribbed art

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<sup>92</sup> Burnett 1989 319

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Though space prevents me from discussing it more fully, no criticism I am aware of has addressed the possible connection between the staging of Mellida’s imprisonment behind “*the grate*” (II.3.122.2) and that of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* IV.2, which was likely performed by the Chamberlain’s Men at the Inns of Court in January 1600, where Marston was in residence, and so probably between the first performances of *AM* and *AR* to similar audiences. For the gulling scene’s stage history, albeit without reference to *AR*, see David Carnegie, “*Maluolio within*: Performance Perspectives on the Dark House,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52:3 (Fall 2001).

Are kept in distance at the halberd's point[.]  
(IV.1.0.1-2, 11-15, 19-21)

The disjunction between the end of the third act and the beginning of the fourth is striking – Antonio last entered with “*his arms bloody*” from murdering Julio, the ghost of Andrugio entreating him to be “peerless in revenge” through the use of “feignèd habit” (III.5.13.1, 28). Andrugio shows that this juxtaposition of a comedic figure acting as a revenger is not disjunctive within the *locus* of the play, but rather to the audience watching. When Antonio comes onstage in his disguise, Maria and Alberto act as a chorus, giving voice to the audience’s possible misgivings about this juxtaposition – Alberto cautions that such action would disgrace Antonio’s “high resolve,” and Maria that “such feigning...disgraceth much” (IV.1.10, 26).

Antonio scoffs at his mother’s propriety, and satirically inveighs against the courtly rules that would count his fool’s disguise as a disgrace: “Pish! Most things that morally adhere to souls / Wholly exist in drunken opinion” (IV.1.29-31). This last may refer to the drunkenness of the court alluded to throughout,<sup>95</sup> but it also calls up Antonio and Andrugio’s contemplation of the soul and selfhood in *Antonio and Mellida* IV.1, the parallel scene to this one. Here, Antonio finally rejects the search for a stable dramatic selfhood and a corresponding mode of self-expression and action, choosing instead the guise of the fool, a celebrative figure who is “allowed to stand outside social hierarchies.”<sup>96</sup> A revenge plot achieved through disguise and dissimulation is not rare, but the specific significances of a boy dressing as a fool make this one particularly notable. Soule argues, “Like the boys with whom he shared the stage, the clown was not quite a full member of the social body; therefore, like them, he was free from having to

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<sup>95</sup> One such instance is Alberto’s mention of Piero, “who drinks deep,” and his court, which is “racked to pleasure” (V.3.8-9).

<sup>96</sup> Wiles 1987 158

obey the rules of adult social conduct.”<sup>97</sup> In this case, fool and boy are not sharing the stage, but rather one actor’s body. In terms of the boy actor’s anti-character function, Antonio dressing like a fool in order to commit murder makes him a doubly unstable figure in the final acts of *Antonio’s Revenge*.

As if presaged by Antonio’s transformation into a fool, Act V is full of spectacle, which, apart from a few songs and a funeral procession in Act II, has largely been absent from the play. Almost the whole company appears onstage for a courtly dumb show at the beginning of the act, and Balurdo delivers a somewhat comical monologue partially from beneath the stage, utilizing the trap door that had been installed between the first performances of the two plays (V.2.0.1).<sup>98</sup> But the masque in V.5 is the thing: after dancing a measure, during which the tension mounts through asides amongst the conspirators, Antonio and his fellow “maskers” manipulate their status as celebrative figures, who stand outside the social hierarchy, to trick Piero into staying alone with them (V.5.24-32). The scene that follows is breathtaking in its violence, with its visceral allusions to *Titus Andronicus* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, in which the organ by which Piero controlled his court – his tongue – is cut from his mouth.

When a senator asks, “Whose hand presents this gory spectacle?”, the tone of aggression from the Induction returns as the three conspirators fall over each other to take credit for the display (V.6.1-2). In *Antonio’s Revenge*, violent spectacle and allusion become the modes through which the anti-character function of the boy actors is re-directed, a complex renegotiation with tradition that becomes a conduit for the young players’ unstable energies. Both plays are resolved in improbable spectacle, not because of the inept handling of the playwright but, rather, because it is a somewhat exaggerated version of what is required of their genre. Marston and the Children of Paul’s complex

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<sup>97</sup> Soule 2000 131

<sup>98</sup> Gair 1982 131

engagement with dramatic traditions allows them to desire the characteristics of the conventions they mock while pointing up the limitations of comic and tragic representations of reality. The *Antonio* plays use the unique characteristics of the performers to “mock adults in a different key,”<sup>99</sup> to cast the passions of their adult competitors into starker relief.

The Children of Paul’s and the plays Marston wrote for them are perhaps best understood as a theater of young men with virtuosic talents and an energetic relish for rhetoric and spectacle, hungry to challenge the expectations and conventions of the cultural market it is entering. As has been reiterated time and again, it was not an entirely successful experiment; but, as Shakespeare’s plays that share an historical moment with them show, it certainly was an influential one. The *Antonio* plays, at their core, are about the process of becoming through dramatic representation, an idea taken up in *Troilus and Cressida*, in which characters must “live aye with thy name.”<sup>100</sup> The problem that haunts the *Antonio* plays is the desire to become as compellingly real as the conventions of drama and contemporary theater demand, while maintaining a space in which to comment on those very conventions; the problem that haunts *Troilus and Cressida* is coming to terms with embodying the characters the culture demands they must become.

### III.

#### PLAYER KINGS: PERFORMING INSTABILITY IN *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*

As a company man, a shareholder and the Chamberlain’s Men’s best-known playwright, Shakespeare – the consummate man of the theater – likely considered it a

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<sup>99</sup> Ackroyd 2005 386

<sup>100</sup> *Troilus and Cressida* V.11.34

professional obligation to take a boat to the other side of the Thames to see his friend Marston's *Antonio* plays at Paul's. He would have been checking out the competition, an instinct artists and businessmen share. With this in mind, I will argue that it is vital to envision *Troilus and Cressida* as a play that responds to very specific cultural and theatrical conditions, including the provocative representational experiments of the Paul's company. Much performance-based criticism of *Troilus and Cressida* has called it "our play,"<sup>101</sup> arguing that its bitter humor and bleak vision are better suited to the turn of the twenty-first century than to the turn of the seventeenth. It is indisputable that the play has experienced better critical and theatrical fortunes in the last century, but below I will argue that, read with the experimental theater at Paul's and other contemporary theatrical factors in mind, *Troilus and Cressida* is very much a play of its own moment. Unlike recent criticism of the *Antonio* plays, bibliographical quandaries have dominated the conversation about *Troilus and Cressida*. Since the theme of this study, dramatic representation in performance, is contingent on the materiality of the play texts,<sup>102</sup> I will first address textual criticism and its implications for both literary and theatrical interpretation.

Ackroyd has noted, "The purpose of *Troilus and Cressida* is now all but lost in the fog of conflicting critical commentaries."<sup>103</sup> He is right and wrong. The purpose of the play seems rather clear: to entertain an audience at the Inns of Court, or the Globe, or both, with a radically re-imagined vision of a popular story. However, the critical fog that has descended over Shakespeare's Troy, over what such a rivetingly incoherent play can *mean*, is important to note and sort through. Faced with the magnitude of critical diversity and dissension, the critic must return to the divisions and distances the texts

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<sup>101</sup> Yoder 1972 11

<sup>102</sup> For an introduction to this issue, see de Grazia and Stallybrass 1993 and Marcus 1996.

<sup>103</sup> Ackroyd 2005 268

themselves open up between meaning and meaninglessness, representation and presentation, and especially text and performance. Rather than search for meaning or unity that can only be speculated upon, the discomfiting significances created by certain performers and the vibrating instability of *Troilus and Cressida* must become the focus of criticism. Seen as such, the play's volatile, subversive vision is as uncompromising as those of Shakespeare's mature tragedies, with an alienating experimental edge that, like the *Antonio* plays, does not allow one to sink into the illusion of drama, that forces the audience to critically re-engage with conventional dramatic representation.

Yoder observes, "The sick world Shakespeare fashions is like the world of *Julius Caesar* or of *Hamlet*: its ceremonies and formal rhetoric disguise the actual condition of life; the truth...is an unpleasant truth, and so to avoid seeing their world for what it is, Trojans and Greeks cling desperately to the superstructures they have erected to deny it."<sup>104</sup> To rephrase this in the terms of the present study, the play *represents* the bitter exigencies of love in wartime, but the characters *present* ideals and hierarchies that bear little significance in their world. And yet, "their world" is not right, either. *Troilus and Cressida* does not create a mimetic world of the "sweeping events of history," but rather a self-conscious, often bitingly satirical performance highly attuned to the limits of convention, language and ideas in the face of institutionalized violence and death.<sup>105</sup> The "superstructures," to use Yoder's term, called into question by *Troilus and Cressida* are not only mimetic, but also theatrical. Weimann argues that the bifold authority of "word" and "action"

was itself a correlative of collective effort and multiple authority: unlike the Prologue to *Troilus and Cressida*, such intertwining of "action" and "word" must have presupposed the "confidence / Of author's pen [and] actor's voice" (ll. 23-4) alike, a confidence that shareholding

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<sup>104</sup> Yoder 1972 15

<sup>105</sup> Stockholder 1969 539

interests and the institutionalization of diverse faculties appeared fully to vindicate.<sup>106</sup>

Weimann does not pursue the significance of the Prologue of *Troilus*, perhaps because it troubles his argument so profoundly. Nor does he acknowledge that this is precisely why *Troilus and Cressida* is so radical. The experiments of *Troilus and Cressida* – on textual, generic, verbal and performative levels – begin in this disavowal of the conventional *loci* of authority and their reconfiguration, and frequently take place in the distance between representation and presentation. It is the tension along this spectrum that makes the play's possible significances so compelling.

Given that textual and theatrical mimesis are contingent on the materiality of play-texts, the uncertain position of the texts of *Troilus and Cressida* adds a layer of instability that is anterior to questions about the play's representational instability. The confusion begins with a Stationer's Register entry, "The booke of Troilus and Cresseda as yt is acted by my lo: Chamberlens Men," entered by James Roberts on 7 February 1603 as still requiring permission to print from ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps permission was never given – regardless, no edition is known before Bonion and Walley's Quarto edition, entered in the Stationer's Register on 28 January 1609.<sup>108</sup> Elton has proposed that Marston, who was in residence at the Inns of Court from 1595 to 1606, saw the first performance of *Troilus* there in 1601-2. Further, he argues that Marston provided his friend Henry Walley with an unpublished manuscript of the play as a parting gift upon his departure from London in 1609. In one move Marston could have given his friend a text by a leading playwright, "outwit or deprive the lawyers, and pay his last satirical respects to a literary and personal enemy [Ben Jonson]".<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Weimann 1988 405

<sup>107</sup> See Blayney 1997.

<sup>108</sup> *Troilus and Cressida* ed. Bevington 1998 399

<sup>109</sup> Elton 1975 66-8

The proposition is indeed attractive and, paired with the influence of Marston's plays on *Troilus*, would nicely illustrate the complex patterns of engagement between the legal, publishing and theatrical spheres in late Elizabethan London. But Elton likely reads too much of Malevole into Marston, who was ordained in December 1609.<sup>110</sup> Besides, Elton's evidence is entirely circumstantial. That *Troilus and Cressida* was even performed at the Inns of Court is itself a twentieth-century consensus based on literary evidence. In the Epilogue Pandarus says, "Some two months hence my will shall here be made,"<sup>111</sup> which could be read as hinting at an unrealized sequel or as a last acknowledgement of the performance space.<sup>112</sup> Learned allusions in parodic form, like Hector comparing Troilus and Paris to "young men, whom Aristotle thought / Unfit to hear moral philosophy" and the play's lengthy philosophical discussions have been taken as nods to a young, academic audience with a taste for avant-garde theater (II.2.166-7). It is the dissonance between the two "states" of the 1609 Quarto that gives rise to the Inns of Court theory; only the first two leaves are different between the quartos, but it is a striking difference. "Qa" specifies the text is "As it was acted by the Kings Maiesties seruants at the Globe," while "Qb" contains an anonymous epistle describing the play as "never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar, and yet passing full of the palm comical." Especially since the emergence of the "New" bibliography, textual and literary critics themselves have "clapper-clawed" the texts to suit their own ideological ends. The mystery of the relationship between *Troilus's* texts and performances has become, as Jensen drolly has it, "a kind of

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<sup>110</sup> Finkelpearl 1969 257

<sup>111</sup> *Troilus and Cressida* V.11.52. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from *Troilus and Cressida* are from the Arden Third Series edition, ed. David Bevington. References will be henceforward be abbreviated as *TC*.

<sup>112</sup> Jensen 1995 419

Rorschach test[.] Because this problem will never be definitively resolved, attempts to do so tell us more about the observer than the observed.”<sup>113</sup>

The matter itself and critical judgments about it become still more complicated when the text of the 1623 First Folio (F1) is considered. The play, originally to have followed *Romeo and Juliet* in the tragedies, was finally inserted between *Henry VIII* and *Coriolanus*. Now somewhere between history, tragedy, and the comedy advertised in “Qb,”<sup>114</sup> the play’s indeterminate position in F1 further illustrates its ambivalent status, as do the substantive differences between Q and F1 texts, which number about five hundred.<sup>115</sup> The question of the origins of F1’s variations, and their implications for editing and the play’s performance history, has become the prevailing one in textual studies of *Troilus and Cressida*. The most provocative recent argument is Gary Taylor’s. Against the conventional wisdom that the F1 text was based on Shakespeare’s foul papers, Taylor hypothesizes that F1 is based on a copy of the Q text annotated and adapted by Shakespeare and used as a promptbook for a production at the Globe.<sup>116</sup> Significantly, he argues that in the Globe performance Pandarus’ brazen Epilogue could have been cut so as to end on a more conventional note, perhaps with Troilus’ final-sounding couplet: “Strike a free march to Troy! With comfort go. / Hope of revenge shall hide our inward woe” (V.11.30-1). The Folio annotator may have missed or ignored the deletion marks on the annotated promptbook, or in rehearsal the mark may not have been made.<sup>117</sup>

Taylor’s reading is exhaustive and fascinating, but his evidence is scant and his argument based on the same literary judgments he seeks to defer.<sup>118</sup> Jensen explores the

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 420

<sup>114</sup> “Qb” Epistle ln. 3

<sup>115</sup> Muir qtd. in Jensen 1995 414

<sup>116</sup> Taylor 1982 127

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 104

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 100

intricacies of Taylor's seemingly authoritative judgment, expressing special concern that Taylor and Wells' Folio-based Oxford edition moves the Epilogue to an Additional Passages section. Her concern is well founded, but her argument that Taylor's Epilogue omission theory conventionalizes the genre of *Troilus and Cressida* is overstated.<sup>119</sup> Pandarus' wheeze about "bone-ache" certainly destabilizes the solemnity of the scene to that point, but the Epilogue is scarcely the only tonally complex scene in the play. The Epilogue's possible removal stabilizes the final scene, but not the play as a whole; given the radical shifts of the play that has preceded it, ending with Troilus's funeral couplet could disconcert an audience even more. Viewed diachronically across its textual and performance histories, Taylor's theory hardly resolves the play's instability.

Further, Jensen ignores Taylor's most compellingly pragmatic argument for productions of the play both at the Inns of Court *and* the Globe. If the company decided *Troilus and Cressida* was not suitable for a Globe audience, they could have sold the play to one of the children's companies, who "catered to the very 'coterie' audiences for which the play is...so clearly suited." The fact remains that

[the Chamberlain's Men] had in 1602-3 a very particular and strong motive for wanting to put on plays that would compete successfully with the kind of theatrical fare offered by the boys' companies – a requirement ideally satisfied by *Troilus and Cressida* itself.<sup>120</sup>

This is as much speculation as whether the Epilogue was removed for a second production. But whereas the Epilogue theory rests on a solely subjective literary judgment, as Jensen valuably highlights, the Globe production theory makes practical theatrical sense. As will be discussed below, the Admiral's Men bought a play called "Troyelles & cresseda" by Chettle and Dekker a few years earlier, and the lovers' story was ubiquitous in late Elizabethan popular culture. Avant-garde experimentalism or no, most arguments about a Globe audience's tepid reception of *Troilus and Cressida* are

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<sup>119</sup> Jensen 1995 416

<sup>120</sup> Taylor 1982 120

unnecessarily elitist, and besides ignore the radical, experimental qualities of a play like *Hamlet*, which met with popular acclaim in the early seventeenth century.<sup>121</sup> It makes good business sense for the Chamberlain's Men to make the most of their investment by producing a play by a popular playwright,<sup>122</sup> featuring well-known performers probably including Richard Burbage and Robert Armin, about a story that was a commonplace of turn-of-the-seventeenth-century popular culture.

Interceding centuries of editions of *Troilus and Cressida*, with an array of editorial agendas, have compounded the play's considerable ambiguities. To illustrate the significance of the play's textual instability for literary interpretation and performance, I will briefly contemplate a few instances in which editorial practices have obscured or changed Cressida and thus our readings of her. Attention to textual minutiae in some of the editions of *Troilus and Cressida* allows us to "unedit" Cressida in ways that further reveal her unconventionality, and that of Shakespeare's play.<sup>123</sup>

"False" Cressida has found more sympathetic readers in the last half-century. Asp foregrounds the *topos* of performance in the play, uniting Cressida from the "love" plot with Achilles from the "war" plot when, after Ulysses' speech (I.3.75-137), "degree fails as a criterion of worth [and] the observer must rely on performance as an external manifestation of the self."<sup>124</sup> Later, confronted with the reality of her situation – the lecherous contempt of the Greek captains in IV.5 and her inability to extricate herself – she consciously capitulates to Diomedes, who alone shows her kindness. The idea of

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<sup>121</sup> See Gurr 1987 55 on the "exceptional level of literacy, wealth and poverty" of the public theater audience, and Thompson and Taylor's introduction to the Arden 3 *Hamlet*, p. 97.

<sup>122</sup> As evidenced by the use of Shakespeare's name on the title pages of some quarto editions, beginning with *A Pleasant Conceited Comedie called Loues labors lost*, "corrected and augmented" by "W. Shaksper" in 1598.

<sup>123</sup> My method here is modeled on Marcus 1996, especially p. 1-37. My discussion of the play's bibliographical idiosyncrasies is entirely indebted to Taylor 1987 and Bevington's notes to the Arden 3 edition.

<sup>124</sup> Asp 1977 409

being swayed by the performance of another ties back into the “war” plot, to Ulysses’ plan to raise Ajax above Achilles that “demonstrates the comic dimensions of the observer’s power to elicit self-concepts that coincide with staged situations rather than with reality.”<sup>125</sup> Here, Asp follows the example of William Empson, an early defender of Cressida. He identifies the parallels between Achilles and Cressida that Asp expands upon: “her case has to be taken as seriously as the whole war because it involves the same sanctions and occupies an equal position in the play.” Like Achilles, “she is cut off from her tribe and her happiness as much by folly as disloyalty.”<sup>126</sup> Troilus argues against Hector that value *does* dwell in “particular will” (II.3.53), and so value exists in what their love *was*, and they must take the consequences of it.<sup>127</sup> That this “far-reaching and exhausting generosity...is piled up onto the pathos of Cressida” is why Empson cannot damn her as many have.<sup>128</sup>

“Shakespeare,” he concludes impressively, “despises her less than his commentators have.”<sup>129</sup> Empson and Asp’s observations are enhanced by examination of the play’s textual instability surrounding Cressida. The first instance occurs early in the play, when Pandarus is quizzing his niece about goings-on at the palace. In F2 (1632) and a number of subsequent editions, the exchange reads:

*Pan.* What were you talking of when I came? Was *Hector*  
arm’d and gone ere yea came to Illium? *Helen* was not  
vp? was she?  
*Cre.* *Hector* was gone, but *Helen* was not vp.<sup>130</sup>

Cressida’s reply is strictly informational – in performance the actor could play the dutiful niece to her excitable uncle. This emends the punctuation in Q and F1, however,

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* 415

<sup>126</sup> Empson 1950 36

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* 37

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> F2 1632 3 (of *TC*, not overall)

which reads, “*Hector* was gone but *Hellen* was not vp?”<sup>131</sup> The change is slight, but Cressida’s tone is suddenly mocking rather than passive, a moment of puckish comedy in the midst of Pandarus’s fussiness. Cressida has comic lines in the play, but few before the machinations of plot overpower her in Acts IV and V. This defiance, a matter of punctuation merely, allows the interpreter – actor and critic alike – to see a more spirited Cressida, if only for a moment.

This is a small emendation, one that would affect the performances of only two actors. In IV.5, when Diomedes brings Cressida before the Greek captains, an emendation in F1 creates a crux for much of the company. Fifty lines into the scene, Cressida has just been forcibly kissed by the Greek leaders when Diomedes says, “Lady, a word. I’ll bring you to your father” (IV.5.54). Ulysses, flattering a moment before, proceeds to heap scorn upon Cressida and women like her, concluding, “Set them down / for sluttish spoils of opportunity / and daughters of the game” (IV.5.62-4). The Quarto has no stage directions here, and F1 adds an “*Exeunt*” after Ulysses’ abuse. But some editors since Rowe (1709) have inserted an “*Exeunt*” after Diomedes’ earlier lines for him and Cressida, conveniently positioning the object of scorn offstage so the men can speak freely.<sup>132</sup> Ulysses’ lines are dramatic on their own, but an edition or production that stays true to the earlier stage business has the added shock of Cressida, the Trojan noblewoman, being present as Ulysses, the Greek hero, calls her a whore. Dramatic possibilities silenced by Rowe’s emendation are opened up by this interpretation, as are possibilities for the audience to further sympathize with the pathos of Cressida’s situation.

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<sup>131</sup> F1 1623 79

<sup>132</sup> Taylor 1982 113. After IV.5.54 in his edition, Bevington demurs by inserting the stage direction “[*They talk apart.*]” This decision is judicious, but no more satisfying than an “*Exeunt.*”

The final judgment a disillusioned Troilus passes on Cressida is his famous line on reading her letter, “Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart” (V.3.107). Troilus echoes his former lover when he says “my love with words and errors still she feeds” (V.3.110) – error, a scene earlier, is what directed Cressida’s wandering eyes to Diomedes (V.2.116-7). According to Bevington, “error” carries the sense of deceit or vexation, the latter having the more generous connotation that shows both lovers in vexed situations. Generosity is clearly not on Troilus’s mind, however – the reader is not permitted to know what “mere words” Cressida has said, and Troilus’s bitterness segues easily into Thersites’ at the beginning of V.4. This is how V.3 ends in the Quarto edition, and in many subsequent editions (including Arden 3). In F1, however, Troilus’ judgment does not go unquestioned:

*Troy.* My loue with words and errors still she feedes;  
But edifies another with her deedes.

*Pand.* Why, but heare you?

*Troy.* Hence brother lackie; ignomie and shame  
Pursue thy life, and liue aye with thy name.

*A Larum.*  
*Exeunt.*<sup>133</sup>

Pandarus’ protestation is ambiguous, straightforward for so excitable a character, with an imploring quality that is rebuffed by Troilus’s curse. It is no less ambiguous because these lines reappear word for word in F1 V.11, immediately before Pandarus’s Epilogue. The repetition is not dramatically desirable, especially of Troilus’s invocation of Pandarus’s place in the literary tradition. But spoken here, the older man’s pleading with him to listen to Cressida’s “mere words” takes on a plangent quality. In a small way, it reintroduces the idea of performance – Pandarus infers that there is intrinsic virtue in her words, which the play has previously questioned, but by ignoring them Troilus does not allow for the possibility of sincerity. Troilus in Folio is less generous

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<sup>133</sup> F1 1623.

than the Troilus Empson read, though again the pathos of Cressida's situation is further reinforced. Taylor has argued that the F1 text is more authoritative as it contains the author's own verbal revisions.<sup>134</sup> The duplication of these lines in V.11 can be ascribed to compositorial error, but there is a possibility that Pandarus' brief plea on Cressida's part is closer to what Shakespeare was interested in when he revised the play.

These editorial changes, and criticism that dismisses her as callow, have the additive effect of conventionalizing Cressida, in the first example rendering her reaction more passive and in the second not allowing her to react at all. Though she is silenced in all versions of the third, her uncle is not allowed to intervene on her behalf in editions that do not follow F1. Marcus has persuasively argued that editorial changes often reflect ideological difference, and the process of editing Cressida in these three moments has the effect of containing further bad behavior on the part of the legendary adulteress, or silencing the possibility that she may be anything but that. Troilus tells Pandarus to "live aye with thy name," and this invocation calls to mind traditional connotations of Cressida's name by association. By "unediting" Cressida in these moments, the reader is given a more generous view of her situation and for the playful freedom a woman, like a boy or a fool, could embody on the early modern stage.<sup>135</sup> In the Quarto and Folio texts of *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare is, likely with his company's audiences at the Inns of Court and the Globe in mind, experimenting with pathos and the positioning of dramatic tensions. An intriguing palimpsest of textual instability comes to overlay the play's other considerable ambiguities.

Above, I discussed the textual bases for the instability of *Troilus and Cressida* and their significance for interpretation and performance. One of the important levels of instability is, as has been shown, its genre. Between the positionings of the two Q and

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<sup>134</sup> Taylor 1982 127

<sup>135</sup> See Soule 2000 132

F1 texts, the play comes close to becoming the hybridized “tragical-comical-historical-pastoral” type of play Polonius describes in *Hamlet* III.2. Even if a sheet detailing the provenance of the original texts were found folded in the binding of some quarto, answering whether the early editors who variously called it comedy, tragedy or history were right, *Troilus and Cressida* itself would still be protean and radically unstable in generic terms. As the first audiences of *Troilus and Cressida* settled in, expectations for the play’s subject would have been high, no matter who or where they were. In 1598, George Chapman began publishing his *Iliads*, an idiosyncratic translation which is important as the first full “Englishing” of the Homeric epics. Thomas Speght’s edition of Chaucer was published in 1602, again situating the story of Troilus and Cressida at the forefront of literary culture. The story was also a commonplace of popular theater culture. In 1599, the Admiral’s Men likely put on two plays by Chettle and Dekker on similar matter – they were paid £2 on 7 April “in earneste of ther boocke called Troyeles & creasse” and £2, 5 shillings on 30 May for “the tragedie of Agamemnone,” though it is unclear if these are separate plays.<sup>136</sup> In Marston’s *Histriomastix*, also first performed in 1599, Oliver Owlet’s Men perform a version of the story. In plays likely written in proximity to *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare alludes to the lovers in the offhand way accorded familiar figures. In *Twelfth Night*, Feste begs another coin from Viola by saying “I would play Lord Pandarus of Phrygia, sir, to bring a Cressida to this Troilus,” and then, following Henryson, alludes to Cressida as a beggar; in *All’s Well that Ends Well*, Lafeu refers to himself as “Cressid’s uncle / That dare leave two together.”<sup>137</sup>

As in *Antonio and Mellida*, the extra-dramatic introductory matter, in this case a Prologue, is an important center for positioning the audience in the representation to follow. Shakespearean prologues, here and in other plays, function in quite a different

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<sup>136</sup> Foakes ed. *Henslowe* 2002 106, 121

<sup>137</sup> *Twelfth Night* III.1.51-5; *All’s Well* ed. Hunter 1959 II.1.96-7

way than the metatheatrical Induction does in Marston's play. The classic Shakespearean example of this is the Prologue to *Henry V*, which implores the audience to "piece out our imperfections with [their] thoughts," to collaborate with the players to create a mimetically complete imagining of a story with much import for national identity (ln. 23). "Then," the chorus argues, "should warlike Harry, like himself, / Assume the port of Mars" (ln. 5-6). The legendary king will be both "like himself" and play the part of Mars, creating a new spectacle that will situate the audience somewhere between English history and Roman myth.

Warlike kings are also the subject of the Prologue of *Troilus and Cressida*, but there are no straightforward generic cues. The Prologue recounts the story of the Trojan War, and compounds its familiarity by using devices like the naming of the gates of Troy, which imitates catalogues in the *Iliad* (Prologue 15-17).<sup>138</sup> This leads the audience toward interpreting the play's genre as an epic dramatization of a love story in wartime. And yet the inflationary and deflationary patterns of language trouble that interpretation instantly – rather than a dignified word like "warlike," the classical heroes are described as "orgulous," a bloated adjective already old-fashioned when Shakespeare wrote it (Prologue ln. 2). This and other "inkhorn Latinisms"<sup>139</sup> elevate the tone of the Prologue to an absurd level, which is periodically deflated by a colloquial, almost impatient phrase: "Menelaus' queen, / With wanton Paris sleeps; and that's the quarrel" (Prologue ln. 10-11). It is a mode reminiscent of the mixture of high-flown rhetoric and low sexual innuendo in the Induction to *Antonio and Mellida*. The diction could lead the audience to

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<sup>138</sup> The most famous is the so-called "Catalogue of the Ships"; in Chapman's translation, one similar, exactly specific passage reads: "Peneleus and Leitus, all that Boeotia bred, / Arcesilaus, Clonius and Prothoenor led" (II.423-4).

<sup>139</sup> Schwartz 1972 305

expect a satire in which they “are going to see pomposity deflated and pretenses laid bare,” and *Troilus and Cressida* does deliver that in several scenes.<sup>140</sup>

However, this category of satire scarcely covers the withering vulgarity of Thersites’ displays. Rather, the tone of the play’s satire constantly modulates, from the Prologue to Thersites with Ulysses’ sneers and Pandarus’s servility in between. That said, the Prologue does not lie about being intentionally misleading. Rather, in the most radical moment of the scene, the actor playing the Prologue disavows the conventional centers of authority:

...And hither am I come,  
A Prologue armed, but not in confidence  
Of author’s pen or actor’s voice, but suited  
In like conditions as our argument[.] (22-5)

Soule describes a suggestive distinction between the dramatic and the theatrical, despite their conventional use as synonyms.<sup>141</sup> Here, the Prologue eschews the *theatrical* authority of “author’s pen or actor’s voice” in favor of the character’s own, less certain *dramatic* authority. The Prologue – who is somehow aware of expectations swirling around the company, the playwright, and the story – self-consciously highlights the distance between the theatrical and the dramatic, making the audience aware of the possibly unbridgeable gap between expectation and performance. He turns the model of Jonson’s Induction to *Poetaster*, in which an armed Prologue speaks up for the author and the play, on its head (ln. 76-82). It is a far less conventional form of the theatrical *occupatio* that occurs in many early modern plays, as when the Chorus in *Henry V* apologizes for the actors who stand “on this unworthy scaffold to bring forth / So great an object” (ln. 10-11). *Troilus and Cressida* is a play that disbelieves in the greatness of its object; as such, its Prologue is strikingly unconventional. This interrogation of theatrical and dramatic authority is taken up later, especially in the figure of Thersites. The

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Qtd. in Thomson 1997 332

Prologue displays, as Fitzpatrick has noted, a high degree of literary and theatrical self-consciousness that keeps the audience off guard from the start.<sup>142</sup> We are given no easy way into this wholly unsettling play.

Jonson says in *Discoveries*, “language most shows a man: speak, that I may see thee”<sup>143</sup>; surely it is also true that language can just as easily hide him. Antonio says in the Induction to *Antonio and Mellida*, “’tis impossible to be made perspicuous by any utterance” – obfuscation of genuine humor or intention is created through self-consciously distanced, performative rhetoric in these plays (ln. 123). The neologism “perspicuous” is itself a small distancing technique, spoken satirically by a boy actor posing as a young man, which has the effect of making the character and the actor playing him even more inscrutable. *Troilus and Cressida* would not have utilized the same estranging effect of boy actors playing all the parts, though almost certainly Cressida and Helen would have been played by apprentice actors; the celebrative anti-character energies in this play are almost wholly concentrated in Thersites and Pandarus, as will be discussed below. Shakespeare uses techniques, similar to those experimented with in the *Antonio* plays, to create considerable distance between familiar, Homeric characters and their cynical, detached counterparts in the play. Stockholder argues that the primary concern for most of the characters is “the way in which they may see themselves being seen by the world from moment to moment,” and that this is revealed when they try “to achieve personal status in the eyes of those who immediately surround them [by claiming] commitment to historical values (personal and national) in order to achieve this status.”<sup>144</sup> One could have simply said that the characters are themselves *acting*. Though she seems to sense it, Stockholder does not investigate the metatheatricity that gives the play’s rhetorical performances their peculiar edge.

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<sup>142</sup> Fitzpatrick 1995 287

<sup>143</sup> Jonson ed. Donaldson 1985 574

<sup>144</sup> Stockholder 1969 539-40

In a way, Shakespeare is continuing the work begun by Chapman in the *Iliads*, in which any sustained argument for Achilles' heroism is bowdlerized. The council scene in Act I scarcely inspires confidence in the legendary kings' heroism: "The ample proposition that hope makes / In all the designs begun on earth below / Fails in the promised largeness" (I.3.3-5). Agamemnon's contorted syntax and the bathetic emptiness of "promised largeness" betrays that he is, in a sense, taking up the whole of his allotted time without anything useful to contribute. His blustering, which borders on filibustering, would be funnier if, in the world of the play, he were not the leader of a nearly decade-long military campaign. Nestor, the elder statesman, picks up on Agamemnon's theme of the problematics of fortune but adds scarcely more than a highly-wrought image of "shallow bauble boats," complete with empty allusions to Thetis and Boreas (I.3.35, 38-9). Faced with a lack of progress after years of siege, the generals are flummoxed in the face of a stalemate. One begins to understand why the play experienced revivals during the First World War, the Vietnam War, and the War on Terror.<sup>145</sup>

Enter Ulysses, whose rhetoric is the most convincing verbal display of the scene and the most famous set piece in the play. Throughout the critical history of the play, the "degree" speech has won over critics who mistakenly interpret the Ulysses here as the same Ulysses in the Homeric tradition. For Tillyard, Ulysses is the character who "speaks in the full Shakespearean idiom," who,

through [the degree speech], so correct in sentiment yet so exciting to a later age as an epitome of contemporary commonplaces, so lacking in personal passion and yet so enchanting in its golden and leisured orotundity...sets up (as he was to maintain and increase) his preeminence among the Greek leaders.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> See Jamieson 2 and Yoder 16.

<sup>146</sup> Tillyard 1950 75, 58

Cunning is Ulysses' defining characteristic in all of his many guises, a trait based on skilful rhetorical manipulation. However, Shakespeare's Ulysses repeatedly crosses the line between cunning and cruelty, coming closer to the divisive schemer in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and the *Aeneid*, who is punished in Canto 26 of the *Inferno*. Ulysses' rhetoric is cynically detached from his behavior, a performance intended to bolster his position with the audience of his fellow kings and, with a theatrical audience or reader, to create tension between Homeric and other imaginings of him. Agamemnon and Nestor set Ulysses up perfectly to deliver a speech that is as charismatic as it is insincere.

Ulysses begins by praising the two more senior speakers, cleverly concealing two commands ("hear what Ulysses speaks") in windy dedications (I.3.56, 69). Recognizing either the imperative challenge or a rhetorical gesture as insubstantial as his own speech, Agamemnon commands Ulysses to get on with it by challenging his eloquence in comparison to that of "rank Thersites" (I.3.73). Ulysses frames the problem he identifies – the disorder in God-given hierarchy that is the cause of the Greeks' ennui – in performance imagery, first generally and then more specifically:

Degree being *vizarded*,  
 Th'unworthiest shows as fairly in the *mask*.  
 [...]
 With him Patroclus,  
 Upon a lazy bed, *the livelong day*  
 Breaks scurril jests,  
 And with ridiculous and awkward action –  
 Which, slanderer, he imitation calls –  
 He pageants us. Sometime, great Agamemnon,  
 Thy topless deputation he puts on,  
 And, like *a strutting player*, whose *conceit*  
 Lies in his hamstring, and doth think it rich  
 To hear the wooden dialogue and sound  
 'Twixt his stretched footing and the scaffoldage,  
 Such to-be-pitied and o'erwrested seeming  
 He *acts* thy greatness in[.] (I.3.83-5, 146-158) (emphases mine)

The problem, Ulysses argues, is the seditious power of the actor and his audience. The description of Achilles and Patroclus spending "the livelong day" in "scurril jests" could

be directed at the theater audience itself, spending time away from work to engage in the fashionable but problematic practice of playgoing.<sup>147</sup> In this passage, one is reminded that in some editions the play is defined as “historic” – a king can be convincingly represented on the stage, and a persuasive performance, even of “ridiculous and awkward action,” can redefine the interpretation of authority.

The problem as this passage goes on is that the distinction between the concept, hierarchy, and the vizard that disguises it begins to break down. He describes Agamemnon as “nerve and bone” of their host, Achilles as its “sinew and forehead,” and the only thing separating these sets of near-synonyms is unsubstantiated “opinion” (I.3.55, 143). Ulysses, masking his own speech as Achilles’, lampoons Agamemnon, whose earlier speech shows a description of him as “a strutting player” is not far off. A one-off parody of Agamemnon could be innocent enough on its own, but Ulysses proceeds to turn his satiric energies, through Achilles, to Nestor. He combines outright caricature – “Now play me Nestor; hem, and stroke thy beard, / As he being dressed to some oration” – with esoteric allusions to Euclidean geometry and mythological cuckoldry, demeaning the posturing old man’s intelligence and virility (I.3.165-8). Ulysses’ dangling a solution to their malaise opens up a rhetorical space in which he has his on-stage audience in his thrall, allowing him to carry on his supposed reenactment of Achilles and Patroclus’ skits with impunity. He cleverly achieves three aims: enunciating a traditional theory of hierarchy, undercutting Achilles, and satirizing his fellow generals by using Achilles as a mask, a distancing device. The “degree” speech is certainly eloquent, but immediately thereafter Ulysses describes how “imitation,” a rhetorical act, is debased by mere playacting. Ulysses performance as Achilles, then, undercuts his eloquence.

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<sup>147</sup> Self-conscious, veiled mockery of the audience’s dalliance is also present in *1 Henry IV*, when Prince Henry says, “I know you all, and will awhile uphold / The unyoked humour of your idleness” (I.2.189-90).

Another dumb show that unflatteringly “pageants” the Greek commanders is a vital center of destabilizing energy in the play. But before we turn to the scene itself, it must be put in its theatrical context. “None can be called deformed but the unkind,” says another Antonio in *Twelfth Night*.<sup>148</sup> If this statement can be applied to *Troilus and Cressida*, the range of deformity performed in the play is astonishing. But surely the most deformed character, the one that sets the rubric for the others, is Thersites. Unlike the history of the *Antonio* plays’ earliest performances, which is hindered by an understanding of the performers’ identities that is only schematic, there is little critical disagreement that, after Kemp left the Chamberlain’s Men in 1599, the fool parts in Shakespeare’s plays were written to be performed by Robert Armin. Soule has argued that Armin’s arrival in the company hallmarks the growing hegemony of illusionistic drama at the expense of traditional clowning.<sup>149</sup> I would argue that, while Armin was by all indications not a traditional fool, he developed a unique anti-character function that operated on the boundary between old-fashioned folly and a new form of intellectual, self-aware clowning influenced in part by the “verbal idiots” of Marston’s plays. He was, it should be said, both famous for his singing and likely a countertenor, bringing him aurally closer to the boy players.<sup>150</sup> In Armin, Shakespeare had a perfect figure to bridge the gap between the clowning of Kemp and the railing intellectual experimentation of the Children of Paul’s.

Robert Armin – small, ugly and, though very funny, a cerebral presence – “was an intellectual, a Londoner, and as well attuned to Renaissance notions of folly as to the English folk tradition.” The latter was Kemp’s trademark, but “as a mimic and an intellectual, Armin never projected the clown persona of the common Englishman.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> *Twelfth Night* III.4.370

<sup>149</sup> Soule 2000 133

<sup>150</sup> Wiles 1987 159

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* 136

In the first decade of the seventeenth century, while performing with the Chamberlain's (later the King's) Men as Feste in *Twelfth Night* and the Fool in *King Lear*, Armin published three books about foolery and one play.<sup>152</sup> Even as he joined the Chamberlain's Men sometime in 1600, *Foole upon Foole*, published in the same year, is ascribed to “*Clonnico de Curtanio Snuffe*” (Snuff, the Clown of the Curtain Theatre) (A1<sup>r</sup>).<sup>153</sup> This further unfixes Armin's public identity – he is at once the new fool at the Globe and a freelance clown at the Curtain.<sup>154</sup> Upon retirement, in or around 1610, Armin's theatrical and literary success had earned the former goldsmith's apprentice a coat of arms, a status symbol also actively pursued by his collaborator, Shakespeare.<sup>155</sup>

His liminality as a clown and intellectual, an upwardly mobile performer and writer, illustrate the unfixed nature of Armin's public identity – arguably, Armin is an even more protean character than Kemp, who is always constructed as the common man. Armin's persona contains significances that are brought to bear in every one of his dramatic performances. “As aggressive self-promoters,” Johnson notes, “actors in this period cultivated their own individual connection to their audiences almost as a kind of capital.”<sup>156</sup> A performance by Armin, known in literary circles and familiar as a performer in multiple circumstances, makes it “likely that the anti-character function of the player in this performance would have been strengthened by the audience's greater-than-usual awareness of actorly identity.”<sup>157</sup> For the first audiences of *Troilus and Cressida*, at the Inns of Court and at the Globe, the figure who harries Ajax would have been Robert Armin, Snuff, and Thersites all at once. This would have allowed the performer

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<sup>152</sup> Armin's publications include *Foole Upon Foole* (1600, revised and republished as *A Nest of Ninnies* in 1608), *Quips Upon Questions* (1600), *The Italian Tailor and His Boy* (1609), and a play, *The Historie of the Two Maidens of More-Clacke* (1609).

<sup>153</sup> All citations from Armin's work are from *The Collected Works* Vol. 1, ed. Feather, 1972.

<sup>154</sup> Wiles 1987 143

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*; Ackroyd 2005 292

<sup>156</sup> Johnson 2003 5

<sup>157</sup> Soule 2000 119

to represent an illusory character and present a lively theatrical interplay with the audience, a type of performance of which Shakespeare takes specific advantage.

The exchange in II.3, when Thersites, Patroclus and Achilles together mock the Greek generals, is mainly remembered for Thersites' railing insight, "All the argument is a whore and a cuckold" (69-70). Read in context, however, an earlier passage in which the three question each other bears an interesting resemblance to Armin's contemporary writings:

*Patroclus.* Then tell me, I pray you, what's thyself?  
*Thersites.* Thy knower, Patroclus. Then tell me,  
 Patroclus, what art thou?  
*Patroclus.* Thou mayst tell that knowest.  
*Achilles.* O, tell, tell.  
*Thersites.* I'll decline the whole question. Agamemnon  
 commands Achilles, Achilles is my lord, I am Patroclus'  
 knower, and Patroclus is a fool.  
 [...]
 *Achilles.* Derive this. Come.  
*Thersites.* Agamemnon is a fool to offer to offer to command  
 Achilles, Achilles is a fool to be commanded of  
 Agamemnon, Thersites is a fool to serve such a fool,  
 and Patroclus is a fool positive.  
*Patroclus.* Why am I a fool?  
*Thersites.* Make that demand to the creator; it suffices me  
 thou art. (44-52, 58-65)

The method of eliciting questions from the audience, in this case Patroclus and Achilles, is exactly than employed in *Quips upon Questions*. Based on routines Armin likely developed as Snuff at the Curtain, Armin "derives" improvisatory, often paradoxical answers to the audience's questions ("Why barks that dog?", "Who's dead?"), delivering his answers as a conversation between himself and his baton.<sup>158</sup> The result is an odd, multi-vocal act that always ends with a quip returning to the idea of folly, as here:

*A merry man is often thought unwise,  
 Yet mirth in modesty's loude of the vwise:  
 Then say, should he for a foole goe?  
 When he's a more foole than accountes him so.  
 Many men descant on an others wit,*

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<sup>158</sup> For a detailed description of the act, see Butler 2004.

*When they haue lesse themselues in doing it. (C)*

The commonplace *stultorum plena sunt omnia*, invoked in *Antonio and Mellida*, comes to bear again both in Armin and Shakespeare. In order to take advantage of the specific anti-character function of Armin, Shakespeare effectively dramatizes something analogous to his clowning routine, allowing two other actors to share the protean, celebrative energies Armin usually embodies in himself. It is a technique also used in *Twelfth Night*; Feste's multi-vocal performance as Sir Topas is clearly designed to take advantage of Armin's skills in mimicry and pitching voices.<sup>159</sup> In much the same way that Marston manipulates his performers' anti-character functions as choristers to heighten the verbal spectacle of the *Antonio* plays, Shakespeare takes advantage of an audience's knowledge of Robert Armin's unique brand of folly to invest the drama with a specific kind of extra-dramatic satirical comedy. Armin's role as Thersites illustrates the multiplicity and instability of Renaissance folly, and the possibility for experimentation with an early modern audience's double vision of a figure on stage as performer and character at once. Even as he constructs it, Shakespeare uses the double figure of Armin and Thersites to undermine the world of Troy as a stable illusionistic representation.

It is through Thersites and Pandarus that the deflationary space, in which the values and hierarchies of the play are mocked and cheapened, is maintained. Ulysses, though he creates a spectacle of power by deploying insincere rhetoric to flatter his fellow commanders, still has an interest in the "superstructure" he mocks being maintained, as illustrated when Cressida refuses to kiss him in IV.5. He wants what his colleagues got, and his frustrated desire throws him into an uncharacteristic rage (IV.5.55-4). On the other hand, Thersites is only interested in chaos, and Shakespeare enhances the presentational spectacle of the railing fool by harnessing the protean

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<sup>159</sup> *Twelfth Night* IV.2; Johnson 2003 33

energy of Armin's anti-character function. When he and Patroclus perform a dumb show of Agamemnon and Ajax, Thersites mocks the two commanders' capabilities before snarling at Achilles himself behind his back, calling him a "valiant ignorance" (III.3.313). "It was just because of his mixed identity and functions that the clown was particularly important in maintaining a close relationship between performers and audience"<sup>160</sup> – Armin as Thersites manipulates this relationship to ensure that the audience's opinion of the great captains is always deflated, that any attempt at serious illusionistic representation is always frustrated.

Creating spectacle and chaos is Thersites' function in the play, and he goes about it with self-conscious relish. Pandarus, on the other hand, is a far more complicated case – as he goes about orchestrating the illusion of Troilus and Cressida's love, he simultaneously unknowingly undermines it. Here, we return to mimetic desire, which Pandarus creates by inflating the young lovers' desire for each other by engineering the rumor of Helen's lust for Troilus: "I swear to you, I think Helen loves him better than Paris" (I.2.104). "This imaginary desire of Helen is the true incentive, and neither Pandarus nor Cressida pay the slightest attention to any genuine quality in Troilus that would make him intrinsically worthy of love, regardless of who may or may not be in love with him."<sup>161</sup> Here, Pandarus manipulates a complicated web of mimetic desire within the *locus* of the scene and in the *platea* of the theater: just as he uses the idea of Helen, a paragon of lust, to inflate Cressida's desire for Troilus, he uses the audience's desire for the representation of young love to deepen the illusion of the scene. He makes it so everyone present in the theater desires this sexual union as much as he does.

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<sup>160</sup> Soule 2000 131

<sup>161</sup> Girard 1991 122

But even as he does so, he deflates his efforts, quite without self-consciousness. In III.2, when Troilus and Cressida are finally brought together, Pandarus becomes an avatar for the audience's voyeuristic desire, commanding Troilus, "Swear the oaths now to her that you have sworn to me" and, as the scene gathers sexual intensity, "So, so, rub on, and kiss the mistress" (III.2.39-40, 48). He gives voice to the audience's desire to be titillated, but the problem becomes his bodily presence – seeing the actor on stage with the young lovers, potentially as close to them as they are to each other, impedes full imaginative engagement with the love scene. This obstruction of illusionistic gratification also occurs on the verbal level, in which heartfelt professions of love are cheapened by Pandarus's use of commercial imagery: "How now, a kiss in fee-farm?" "Go to, a bargain made. Seal it, seal it; I'll be the witness" (III.2.48-9, 192-3). Pandarus's presence and apparently unintentional verbiage foreground the cheapness of theatrical voyeurism in the audience's mind, providing as it does "gratification and frustration similar to those craved by [him].... The literary pander turns the spectators into addicts of mimetic representation."<sup>162</sup>

In the Epilogue, Pandarus bequeaths his "bone-ache" to the audience, which is the disease of mimetic desire – "Why," he implores, "should our endeavour be so desired and the performance so loathed?" (V.11.38-9) The very idea of desiring the illusion of love to be performed on stage is called into question. Shakespeare's most radical experiment in *Troilus and Cressida* is to make one of the interrogators of the limits of theatrical representation not self-consciously distanced from the representation itself – in fact, Pandarus is its very author. Pandarus becomes a "symbol of the theater and of those who live by the theater,"<sup>163</sup> embodying the creative and destructive energies that exist simultaneously in performers and playwrights, like Shakespeare, who creates an

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* 159

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

illusionistic representation while inserting Thersites and Pandarus to destabilize it. But Pandarus has no way out – when, in the Epilogue, he steps outside the entire burning world of the play to rail against it, everything he has created is truly lost.

#### IV.

The world was becoming utterly different as the applause, perhaps hesitant, faded for Pandarus and Robert Armin's Thersites. In March 1603 the aged queen would die, and that same month, upon the accession of James, the Lord Chamberlain's Men would be granted a royal patent and renamed the King's Men. In the same sweeping movement of the new regime's engagement with London's theater community, the Admiral's Men would be refitted as Prince Henry's Men and the boy's company at Blackfriars as the Children of the Queen's Revels. The Children of Paul's would be conspicuously absent from the new list of companies with royal support, and this moment is convenient for marking the beginning of the company's final decline before they ceased playing a few years later. Marston had by 1602, out of what could have been a sense of professional self-preservation or because his reputation had been damaged by Jonson's satirical attack in *Poetaster*,<sup>164</sup> parted ways with the Children of Paul's. New revenge tragedies of the type of *Antonio's Revenge* would continue to be written by Webster and Ford amongst others, and the older plays would continue to be revived, especially by the boys' companies. Heywood would perpetuate Jacobean interest in the Matter of Troy in his play *The Iron Age* (published 1632), which was strongly influenced by *Troilus and Cressida*, likely staging the play as an inter-company conflict between the King's Men as the Greeks and Queen Anne's Men as the Trojans.<sup>165</sup> But though

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<sup>164</sup> Gair 1982 138.

<sup>165</sup> Hirschfeld 2004 152

dramatists and actors never cease playing with the conventions of their medium, domestic drama and the brilliantly illusionistic plays of Shakespeare's later career ensured that the radical experimentalism of the turn of the century never returned to the early modern stage. The drama that cast the theatrical practices of the day in such a stark, strange light would have to wait four centuries to begin to get its proper due.

Above, I argued for a realignment of critical attentions from exclusively author-centered, textual criticism to a vision of early modern drama that focuses on the energies and ideas exchanged in performances in the repertory companies. In part through a synthesis of the concepts of mimetic desire and the actor's anti-character function, I read the *Antonio* plays and *Troilus and Cressida* together in a particular historical moment, to plumb their play-texts for some indication of the complex and vibrant theatrical community from which they emerged. I did not attempt to elucidate a new theory of influence. Rather, I situated these plays in their contemporary theatrical milieu so as to give a fresh perspective on how Marston and Shakespeare negotiate with the highly charged cultural world of early seventeenth-century English theater. Read together, the *Antonio* plays and *Troilus and Cressida* embody a unique moment when dramatic experimentation in early modern theater was not only a practice, but a self-conscious project. This vision of theatrical and cultural history, and its relationship to the literary interpretation of early modern plays, has wider implications for our conception of dramatic authorship. It is of vital importance that we maintain a vision of the theatrical culture at this moment that is essentially communal, competitive and collaborative, and develop our understanding of the complex dynamics by which dramatic authors engage with performers, performance space, and dramatic conventions. Rather than Romantic reflection, authorship in early modern drama must

be understood as a form of cultural exchange<sup>166</sup> – between the wider culture, repertory companies, playwrights and performers – and dramatic traditions not as a static set of norms, but as ongoing processes of reinterpretation and experimentation.

Word Count: 19904

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<sup>166</sup> In these concluding thoughts, I am very much indebted to Johnson 2003 and Braden 1985.

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