

**DAGGERS OF THE MIND:  
PERCEIVING SHAKESPEARE'S THEATRE**

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*PhD thesis*

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP FORM

I, Susan Sachon, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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ABSTRACT

My research explores the intimate relationship between object, language and perception in Shakespeare's plays. Using an analytical approach inspired by basic principles of phenomenology, I consider how Shakespeare's language influences our perception of real and non-present stage properties and set: how he imbues imaginary objects with an almost palpable sense of presence, and engineers our perception of onstage objects, subtly shaping and augmenting visual stimuli with verbal imagery.

Through close reading centred on five plays, I explore how Shakespeare's fusion of word and object is engineered to evince a vividly visceral response to what we see, hear and imagine. My research poses the following questions: how does Shakespeare prepare the mind of a watching and listening audience to perceive more than may actually appear on stage? How far can illusion, created by language and imagination, supplement what an audience might see? How is language used to blur the boundaries between subject and object, transcending the mere exchange of characteristics?

Textual examples have been selected from Shakespeare's tragedies and histories. My study does not encompass Shakespeare's comedies, for – though they offer rich opportunity for analysis – such work would require a separate approach, geared to this very different genre.

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## CHAPTER ONE

'[A] more visceral affair':<sup>1</sup>

### Perceiving Stage Properties in Shakespeare

This study explores how the presentation of objects in Shakespeare's plays influences our perception – and imaginative reception – of them. It considers ways in which rich linguistic imagery brings objects of the mind vividly to life for us as readers and audience members, and shows how Shakespeare uses language and dramatic structure to enhance our visual perception of objects on stage. Analysis focuses primarily on selected textual examples, although some close study of stage and film performances has been included so that consideration may be given to actual audience reaction, as well as to anticipated audience response.

The analytical method adopted throughout this thesis was chosen as a result of initial textual studies of properties in Shakespeare's plays, from which it became apparent at an early stage that to separate Shakespeare's language from his use of material objects is to ignore a relationship that heightens the impact of both. Indeed, objects in Shakespeare are often not merely related to the text by their use as aids to action, as time capsules charged with cultural, religious or political meaning, or as symbolic signifiers. In Shakespeare, much may be gained by considering objects not simply in their roles as solid material forms on a stage, but through their linguistic

counterparts that live so vitally in the mind's eye, and evoke sensory and tactile responses in the body.

The chapters that follow are therefore concerned with examining Shakespeare's considerable skill in manipulating our perception of objects in his plays, as readers and members of an audience. As readers, envisioning the action as it unfolds before the mind's eye, Shakespeare's language brings imaginary objects vividly to life through subtle appeals to our store of sentient and tactile memories: helping us to anticipate the feel of an object within the body as well as the mind. As audience members, stage properties – although viewed from a distance – may be brought instantly within the realm of our intuitive experience through a combination of potent description and onstage action. For both reader and audience, rich metaphor can stimulate the mind and senses, endowing objects of the mind with an almost palpable sense of presence. In Shakespeare's plays, language is used to set scenes and create evocative mood and atmosphere as imaginative backdrops for action that are deeply kinaesthetic in their quality. How Shakespeare achieves these effects is the focus of this study.

The method of close-reading taken throughout this work encompasses both textual and performance analysis. Textual study considers the plays as blue-prints for possible performances, alive with poetic language that ignites our imaginations both as readers and as members of an imagined audience. Whilst time and available space do not permit a detailed performance history, each of the five case studies that follow Chapter Two supplements textual analysis of selected examples from one of Shakespeare's histories or tragedies with a brief consideration of a film and stage production of the same play. In this way, the study is able to explore how directors' and

actors' interpretative choices can also influence our perception as viewers or members of an audience. Such discussions generally take place at the end of the textual analysis in each case study, so that the initial perceptual journey through the text can remain clear. In just a few instances, however, performance examples may be discussed as part of the textual analysis, in order to support a particular idea or argument where applicable.

The nature of the close reading undertaken in this thesis is necessarily subjective and descriptive. It is therefore narrative in form, describing my response to Shakespeare's plays as both reader and audience member, or viewer. Textual analysis is accomplished from my own perspective as a reader able to explore potential performance possibilities by projecting myself into an imaginary audience. Where I am specifically describing my own response to a live or recorded performance, this is made clear. Performance analysis is undertaken through close study of Shakespeare on film, and DVD recordings of live stage productions (to allow for the possibility of re-playing key moments where necessary). DVD recordings of performances at the Globe Theatre also usefully offer the opportunity of observing and hearing audience reaction in some instances. Where I have also attended live performances, this is specifically mentioned.

The above perspectives highlight a number of interesting differences and similarities in the way we perceive Shakespeare's plays as readers, viewers or audience members, some of which are briefly outlined in the discussion below. It should be made clear, however, that restrictions of time and space do not permit a detailed study of the differences between audience and reader perspectives at this point. This thesis rather aims to offer a subjective close-reading that encompasses both textual examples and excerpts from performances, through which differences or similarities between reader

and audience experiences may naturally become evident. What is immediately apparent from this approach, however, is that whereas textual study offers more time to absorb and revisit particular examples, a staged performance draws its audience into a shared space with its actors, where spoken word and visual impact create their own unique, very physical experience of a play for its audience. As audience members, we use our readerly skills in response to auditory cues. Conversely, as readers, we are able to view the play text in terms of imagined performance.

The reader and audience member respond to Shakespeare's descriptive imagery in different and similar ways. Both may be affected by the sound, metre and texture of language, whether rehearsed in the mind, when there is no actor present to give an emotional and physical portrayal, or heard through the medium of the actor's voice. The reader anticipates the sound and the feel of words in much the same way as the audience member, watching an onstage actor reaching out to grasp an object, anticipates tactile contact with that object. The visual stimulus of an actor closing his fingers deliberately around the hilt of a dagger, stroking a soft fur or stretching his fingers out towards a fiery blaze can evoke an intuitive apprehension of his tactile experience within an audience, to the point where individuals might even shudder or cringe at his portrayal of pain. As Bruce R Smith explains, the actor's physical and emotional portrayal of the scene can create a 'desire to touch an illusion and to be touched by it.'<sup>2</sup> In reading, a similar intuitive process is called into play by language, triggering a sentient, tactile or emotional response within the reader that can bring the text vividly to life in the mind and senses. In performances of Shakespeare's plays, the combination of visual display and potent description, with its rich sounds and textures, can enhance what an audience



sees through what it hears: the sensuous quality of language can therefore work to heighten a performer's physical and emotional portrayal, intensifying an audience's overall experience of the play. That experience will also of course be affected by numerous external conditions, such as lighting and sound effects, temperature and odours, the colours and textures used in setting the play, the qualities of the actors' voices: even the theatre building itself, and the physical impact of being part of an audience body. Health, mood, comfort and state of mind are also major influences on an audience member's reception of a play (though the latter points can also arguably affect a reader's response to the text). As the following case studies make clear, directors' and actors' particular interpretations of the text can influence an audience's response to a play in many ways: for example, through movement, colour, sound, costume and characterisation, and the actors' vocal delivery. The reader may not see or hear such a plethora of visual and auditory detail, but nonetheless his experience of the play can be intensely vivid in the way it is sensed and felt.

Textual close-reading is sometimes apt to slide quickly over stage directions that suggest visual display – moments that are often extended in performance. Shakespeare's descriptive language draws its reader intimately inside the world of the play in a number of ways: readers may inhabit characters, or observe them from without – at times, it seems, almost simultaneously. At other moments, the reader can become part of an imaginary audience, watching the action unfold before the mind's eye. The director, reading the text with a particular cast in mind, may even imagine hearing the lines spoken by these actors, or visualise them moving about the stage. A watching and listening audience is of course also able to perform such imaginative feats in response to

a play's rich linguistic imagery. Indeed, for both audience and reader, Shakespeare's language draws on our sensory, tactile and emotional memories, so that we are able to experience objects of the mind and of the stage with visceral keenness. It is the aim of this study to examine techniques used by Shakespeare to stimulate the intuitive perception of both reader and audience in this way.

As stated earlier, the texts chosen for close-reading have been selected from Shakespeare's tragedies and histories. No attempt has been made at this stage to encompass Shakespeare's comedies, although they also offer rich opportunity for such analysis. This would, however, necessitate a detailed approach geared to this very different type of play, and due to time constraints, would need to be the subject of a separate work. Though tragedies and histories are distinguished by their slightly different approaches to their audiences, in that tragedies draw on audience empathy through their main protagonists, while the histories tend to focus on wider political concerns, both genres afford plentiful examples for close reading, where war, murder and dismemberment are key themes. Since this study is particularly concerned with the visceral effect of Shakespeare's language, and his complex blurring of subject and object boundaries, the texts selected for investigation are eminently suitable for study.

In the light of the subjective and descriptive nature of the analysis to be undertaken, and its consideration of both text and performance, phenomenology offers a most helpful framework in which to situate this work. Chapter Two therefore provides a brief background on this broad subject, outlining my particular methodology in detail and explaining how and why it has been inspired by the work of early twentieth-century and modern phenomenologists. At this point, however, a brief sketch of

phenomenology's aims and general principles, as it is understood in this work, will help to orientate my approach and to position it within the current critical field.

Put simply, phenomenology is first and foremost a method of describing experience. As twentieth-century phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains, phenomenology 'tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide.'<sup>3</sup> The phenomenological attitude encourages us to experience the world around us in a different way, and to record our own immediate impressions of it. Phenomenological close-reading requires a concentrated focus of attention on the object or example to be studied. It encourages us to put aside any preconceptions we may have concerning an example, in order to allow ourselves to encounter it as though for the first time. The aim is to note down our initial intuitive, cognitive, physical and emotional reactions as they occur: to apprehend the pure essence of a phenomenon, rather than to consider it in terms of prior knowledge or assumptions. Phenomenology teaches us to look again: to look deeply, and differently. It offers a way of perceiving and absorbing, rather than of immediately judging. As Merleau-Ponty explains, to perceive 'is not to judge, it is to apprehend an immanent sense in the sensible before judgement begins.'<sup>4</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, as Don Ihde observes, 'first phenomenology often yields an early appreciation of the *richness* and complexity of experience.'<sup>5</sup> To the phenomenal gaze, an object is not simply a material mass, or a visual stimulus, and our reaction to it is more than a series of messages fired by neurons in the brain. Phenomenologists understand an object – and our reaction to it – as part of a whole, fused experience. As we study an object our

apprehension of its essential qualities becomes bound up with our experience of perceiving it.

A similarly fluid sense of transfer between object and subject characterises Shakespeare's presentation of objects in his plays. In Shakespeare, an object is often deeply embedded in its dramatic role in the play, through the semantic and textural layering of language. The sound and rhythm of words can heighten an audience's experience of an onstage object. In such cases the object seems to invade the mind and senses, and becomes, not a separate entity, removed and distant, but part of the subject's own response to it. A phenomenological study stresses the fluid, intuitive and imaginative nature of our perceptual response to objects. The subject's immediate, intuitive experience becomes of primary importance as evidence. The subject does not therefore bring any preconceived beliefs or heavily structured analytical frameworks to bear on the phenomenon under scrutiny, into which or with which it must fit or conform. Instead, the phenomenon becomes the object of deep focus, while the subject notes his or her immediate response to the experience. In a phenomenological investigation, the method is, in a sense, transparent, and the example – and its impact on us – of prime importance.

This explanation of phenomenological methods is necessarily brief at this point, but is intended to clarify phenomenology's subjective, narrative and descriptive nature, which again makes it eminently suitable for intense close-reading that aims to encompass as many aspects of each example as possible. The advantage of such an approach is that it can be used to consider objects that are both visually present, and those that exist only in the imaginative perception, conjured by language. A

phenomenological reading encompasses the intuitive and kinaesthetic aspects of our perceptual responses to both material and imaginary objects: an area of study that particularly concerns this thesis. Chapter Two explains in more detail why phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's study of perception is a particularly suitable reference for this work. It also considers ways in which the emerging disciplines of cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics share some of phenomenology's ideas and concerns. Each of the five case studies that follow focusses on a single play, examining, through selected examples, the methods Shakespeare uses to engineer our imaginative and visual perception.

The aim of this chapter is to locate my investigation in the current critical arena, showing, through discussion and textual close reading, how it differs in its approach and methodology from much of the existing critical work in the field of stage properties in Shakespeare. A general survey of secondary reading in this critical field reveals extensive research in the areas of semiotics, symbolism, iconography, historicism and cultural materialism. For many critics, objects have lives and histories of their own, beyond the stage and their roles in Shakespeare's plays. In such cases, objects are often located firmly in the past, and can therefore provide valuable insights into the social, cultural and political background in which Shakespeare lived and worked. Research of this kind is extremely valuable in its own right. Jonathan Gil Harris informs us, for example, that objects in the Renaissance may – through their association with artisanal guilds – have helped to articulate a sense of social and communal belonging that could have influenced how Renaissance audiences perceived them on stage. Harris explains that medieval guilds were allowed to advertise their skills through local pageants,

organised on religious themes (a form of what Harris terms early 'product placement'),<sup>6</sup> linking church, community and business through spectacle and performance. During parades or pageants, properties were used to demonstrate and advertise skills or products: 'the stage property was the fulcrum upon which the guild's corporate property of skill was interarticulated with the bodies of history, church and community.'<sup>7</sup>

Harris suggests that such associations may have survived into the Renaissance, and could have been re-kindled through the use of objects in the theatres and playhouses. For a Renaissance audience, stage properties may have thus been infused with significance beyond that communicated by their theatrical roles. For Harris, the use of stage properties in pageants promoted an awareness of the object in its combined roles in performance and in everyday life:

[a] crucial precondition for this interarticulation was the cycle play spectators' awareness of the stage property's social life – that is, their recognition that the prop was not simply an object belonging to and defined by the dramatic illusion of the pageant or play, but also a real product with a distinctive offstage history, function and owner.<sup>8</sup>

Harris's insightful study, although it deals with a past that cannot necessarily be recovered for a modern audience, does imply an intimate relationship between theatre and community that is still current today, as his observations remind us.

The use of guns bearing the name 'Swords' in Baz Luhrman's film of *Romeo and Juliet*,<sup>9</sup> for example, communicated the play's concern with gang violence to a youthful modern audience with stunning effect, as the employment of a religious or artisanal object may have done in Shakespeare's time.

However, as this thesis aims to reveal, objects in Shakespeare also need to be considered in terms of the language that is an integral part of their dramatic impact on

stage, and/or in the mind. This is not to say that historicist or cultural materialist criticism or valuable work in the fields of semiotics and iconography cannot be acknowledged by such a study. An object's cultural history or symbolic significance, our sensory experience of it as part of our world, our ability to imagine it in a multitude of possible roles: all form part of our perception of it. This valuable store of memories and experience is called into service when we become readers of Shakespeare's texts, or members of a theatre audience, as it informs and fuels our imaginative and intuitive response. Shakespeare's skill in manipulating our perceptual abilities, in utilising our lived experience, reveals a deep awareness of the complex way we understand our world. It may appear to us – as Bruce R Smith's quotation at the start of this chapter infers – that Shakespeare and his contemporaries saw the world very differently from us. Smith observes that we understand the acts of seeing and hearing in very different ways. Although we 'recognise that sound *touches* us: it invades our bodies and, if loud enough, reverberates in our gut',<sup>10</sup> we do not acknowledge a similarly physical relationship with vision. 'If we think about it at all', he writes, 'we realize that colors and shapes are the result of reflected light waves forming an image on our retinas.'<sup>11</sup> For us, objects are material masses that exist separately from subjects: they are entities that, as Smith observes, seem to 'stay *over there*'.<sup>12</sup> While sound waves travel, surround us, even permeate our bodies, 'we don't think much about the light waves as having direction and force.'<sup>13</sup> He points out that vision – for Shakespeare, his fellow actors and audiences – was 'a more visceral affair' than for us (see Note 1). These comments locate Shakespeare's work as part of a particular past, yet his plays continue to impact vividly on modern audiences and readers. This fact suggests that, although attitudes may have

changed in many respects over the centuries, the visceral quality of Shakespeare's work continues to affect his audiences on a deeply intuitive level, prompting us in our unceasing endeavours to uncover its secrets. This study aims to show how that 'visceral affair' with objects is indeed still very much a part of our response to Shakespeare's plays.

In the Renaissance, Smith claims, the subject/object relationship was seen as more complex, more intimate, in terms of the way objects were perceived. Vision and sound operated as part of a unified response, located in both body and mind. As he explains, Shakespeare and his contemporaries inherited from Aristotle a

ground plan of the psychology they used to explain what was happening when they sensed things outside their bodies, felt those things in their hearts, thought about those sensed and felt things with their minds, and acted upon those sensed, felt, and thought-about things with arms and hands. According to Aristotle, it is not just language that distinguishes humankind from other animals, but an exquisite sense of touch.<sup>14</sup>

The above comments suggest that to encounter an object was, for Aristotle, an experience of both mind and senses: to perceive was also to anticipate touch.

Interestingly, limbs are described in this instance as mobile extensions of the mind and tactile senses. Thought, touch, sense and feelings are inextricably bound up in our experience of the world around us, and in our emotional reaction to it and within it.

Smith observes that experiential immediacy – the acknowledgement of our initial, intuitive response to a phenomenon – is thought by Francis Bacon to be a vital starting point for philosophical observation. He notes Bacon's proposal that '[a]dvancement in learning depends on the observer's moving forward in a deliberate, disciplined, and thorough way from direct observation to hypotheses to general principles. But firsthand



experience is the starting point.<sup>15</sup> For Bacon, as Smith explains, knowledge may be passed directly from teacher to student through a transfer of spirit, and the observation of an object can have 'visceral effects',<sup>16</sup> causing a subject to react physically to what he sees. As this study illustrates, Shakespeare's plays also reflect a preoccupation with vitality and tactility: they imply that objects can be intuitively experienced, without the need for actual physical contact – a concept that seems to echo both Bacon's and Aristotle's intense interest in the visceral effects of linguistic and visual stimuli. A reader of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or an audience member watching and listening to that play, for example, does not need to witness Titania's flowery bed to apprehend its essence through the senses. Oberon's hypnotic description evokes a wealth of sense-related responses:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine.

*(A Midsummer Night's Dream, 2.1.249-52)*<sup>17</sup>

The imaginatively perceived scene is not only filled with heady fragrances from a selection of sweet-smelling wild flowers, it is also infused with a sense of movement that can be felt as well as envisioned. The words stimulate memories of summer breezes, of how they feel against the skin, as well as the appearance of flowers when stirred by a soft wind. Although the 'wild thyme blows', we know there is no harsh movement, for the violets' 'nodding' is a gentle action. 'Overcanopied' conjures a feeling of heavy, pleasurable enclosure, and helps us to imagine Titania sleeping beneath a flowery awning, drenched with natural perfume. The repeated spondees in 'wild thyme blows', and their long vowel sounds – the echo of 'I' from the beginning of the line in 'wild'

and 'thyme' – give the first line of the speech a rather hypnotic quality, that is further enhanced by the end-rhymes of each pair of lines. The lilting lift and dip of the description 'sweet musk-roses', with its soft then harder sibilants that pull the lips forward when they are spoken, and its alternating long and short vowel sounds, underscores the concept of a gentle breeze stirring the heads of flowers. Metre, sound, syntax and rhyme therefore combine to give the scene '[t]he quiet voice of reminiscence or experience, the muted tones'<sup>18</sup> that George T Wright feels is transferred from the 'tone and movement' of the Sonnets to the 'living stage'.<sup>19</sup> The speech goes on to appeal directly to our sense of touch:

And there the snake throws her enamelled skin,  
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in.       (255-6)

The Collins English Dictionary glosses 'enamel' as 'a coloured glassy coating on the surface of articles made of metal, glass or pottery'.<sup>20</sup> The adjective therefore draws on our tactile and visual memory: the snake is shiny and smooth, possibly colourful – and if we think of glass enamelling, then the play of light on the coloured coating may also be part of our intuitive, imaginative perception of the snake as it twists and turns in the light. Decorative enamelled or varnished items often evoke a natural desire within us to touch or stroke their surfaces: the metaphor therefore appeals to our tactile senses. Enamelled glass in turn suggests the patchwork of ridged surfaces that make up stained glass windows, forming a texture that seems again to invite us to trace its variations with an outstretched finger. Similar patterning, and indeed vibrant colouring, may also be discerned on the skin of some reptiles. The snake's gender links it subtly with the curvaceous female body, as the throwing or casting away of the skin as a 'weed' – or

used garment – may infer a feminine preoccupation with clothing. Alan C Dessen and Leslie Thomson, in their '*Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580 – 1642*', gloss 'weeds' as 'an alternative to *apparel*', but point out that 'most examples [are] linked to *disguise*'.<sup>21</sup> The choice of 'throws' is therefore particularly apt, since according to Dessen and Thomson, one of the most popular usages of this word was in 'the *throwing* off of a disguise'.<sup>22</sup> Thus Shakespeare implies the secretive nature of these borrowed robes. The alliteration on 'weed' and 'wide', and their long vowels, convey a sense of luxurious stretching, as though to illustrate the feel of the garment as it is put on, and the action of the fairy in doing so. We gain an impression of the fairy's size by this image: although in a stage production the actors playing fairies may be adult humans, through Oberon's words we retain an image of the tiny creature able to envelop itself in the snake's skin. Once again, heavy vowels in 'weed' and 'wide' add to the hypnotic quality of the speech, their longer sounds suggesting the shape and movement of the snake, with 'wide' a subliminal echo of 'glide'.

Shakespeare's ability to bring a scene or an imagined object to life in this way, in the mind's eye and in our senses, through appeals to memories of our lived experience – forms an important part of the focus of this study. Using selected examples, such as the one above, it explores the techniques he uses to enhance our perception of objects: to supplement what we see on stage, or to create objects of the mind that we also anticipate, in a tactile way, within the body. It considers how Shakespeare draws on our own memories of touch, sense and emotion, intensifying our experience of his plays through our visual, aural and imaginative perception. With the aid of potent language, objects may be stroked, grasped, held or cradled in the intuitive imagination. As Smith

comments, Shakespeare's plays 'are rife with fantasies of touch'.<sup>23</sup> This point is illustrated by the following discussion of key points in Cleopatra's death scene in *Anthony and Cleopatra*. The scene that Shakespeare creates for Cleopatra's death is woven from sensuous language that draws the play's audience into a heady atmosphere, where the presence of a real snake is not in fact necessary for maximum theatrical effect. Indeed, the visual impact of a live animal onstage at this point might conceivably prove an unwelcome distraction within an audience, momentarily opening up a gap between immediate reality and the world of the play. If the scene is sensitively staged, the snake need never actually be evident, whether in the form of a live animal or a stage property. Cleopatra's words themselves evoke the sense and feel of the asp, so that her reaction to the snake's presence, and its bite, become the most important aspect of audience perception. Moreover, the language used to describe the snake's bite is powerfully infused with Cleopatra's desire for her dead lover:

The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch  
Which hurts, and is desired. (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, 5.2.294-5)<sup>24</sup>

With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate  
Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,  
Be angry, and dispatch. (5.2.303-5)

Peace, peace!  
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,  
That sucks the nurse asleep? (307-9)

The iambic rhythm underscores the rocking, lullaby quality of the final lines, with their repeated use of soft sibilants in 'breast', 'nurse' and 'asleep'. Concepts of life and death are fused in the physical cradling of a venomous asp that is nursed like a baby, drawing

the milk of life from its mother, as it simultaneously infuses her blood with its poison. The mood is so heavily sensuous, that when Cleopatra 'applies another aspic to her arm' (312) before death, her last, passionate cry seems to apply to Anthony, as well as to the snake: '[a]s sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle. | O Anthony! Nay, I will take thee, too' (310-11). Her dying moments thus anticipate a physical reunion with her lover, turning the act of death itself into a sensual climax. The actress's reaction to the snake, whether a property is used or not, and the potent terms in which she speaks of its effect on her body, are able to create an atmosphere in which death and sensuality are intertwined as sinuously as the asps that an audience will readily imagine writhing in the basket onstage.

In Shakespeare's time, as Smith observes, it was accepted that the force of passion from an actor's body could be physically transferred to his audience. Indeed, the actor believed that his job was 'to communicate those passions to the bodies of his viewer/listeners.'<sup>25</sup> Such a vital driving force is vividly present in Shakespeare's texts – as blueprints for performance and as literary works. It continues to operate powerfully on audiences and readers in our own time, not only in the words that convey characters' emotions, but in the intensely subtle and complex way the text communicates characters' experiences of the world within the plays. The presence of bodies and objects on stage creates a powerful visual impact, particularly when we watch objects being physically manipulated by the actor. As the above close-readings illustrate, however, descriptive language can also carry an imprint of the way an object feels, smells, or sounds, so that its very essence is sensed within the individual watching and listening to or reading a play. Through the intensely effective language that Shakespeare

uses to interweave the material of the object with the material of the text, therefore, an object's onstage impact may be considerably heightened. The audience of a Shakespeare play can experience, through a combination of visual and verbal presentation, more than the sum of these separate 'parts' of performance.

An object does not need, therefore, to be materially present on stage for an audience to feel the visceral impact of its existence in a Shakespeare play. Macbeth's words create an illusory dagger that has an almost palpable presence – a feeling that is enhanced for an audience by Macbeth's action, in reaching out to grasp it, since we have all experienced what it feels like to close our fingers around an object and possess it, squeeze it, experience its texture, weight and temperature. We understand, in a highly physical sense, the dangerous potential of a sharp knife, held in our grasp, and the actions that may be carried out by such a weapon. The murder taking shape in Macbeth's mind is thus communicated to his audience through his description of the illusory object that hovers before his gaze, its felt presence evoked for the play's audience by his halting words and hesitating movements. That audience may instinctively anticipate, or rehearse in the mind and senses, the natural properties of the dagger as Macbeth reaches into the air to touch it: the keenness of the blade, the coldness of the metal, its mass and density. When Macbeth produces the real dagger, therefore, the visual stimulus merely acts as a confirmation of what an audience has already traced in the mind and body. Macbeth's action in taking hold of the real dagger is a confirmation of his decision to murder Duncan: in seizing the real weapon, he merges illusion with reality. The action of grasping the real dagger thus places the responsibility for the murder directly and quite literally in his hands, the momentous

decision embodied in the solid object, and his possession of it. Whereas the illusory dagger is, to some extent, a product of every individual's imagination, through which an audience is subtly made aware of its own power to act or withhold action, the real dagger belongs only to Macbeth. Sharing the initial illusion with Macbeth draws the audience into the intimacy of the play's atmosphere, into the realm of possibility, as Macbeth opens his thoughts to those inside the enclosed space of the theatre, bringing actor and audience together in the intimacy of intuitively sensed experience.

The case studies that follow clearly show the vital role of language in shaping our perception of objects in Shakespeare. At times, as Chapter Five on *Henry V* illustrates, language alone is used to create illusion, without the need for physical set or properties. Potent description brings objects vividly into the realm of our imaginative perception, setting scenes for the play's action that are vividly intense. Shakespeare's language lifts the play's action from the limitations of the stage into the realm of the mind, drawing on our store of sentient memories to vitalise our experience of his plays. Merleau-Ponty explains that we are 'sentient subject[s]', each of us containing 'sediments left behind by some previous constitution', so that we are 'stocked with natural powers'<sup>26</sup> from past experiences that may be drawn on to enhance our perception in the immediate present. The case studies below investigate how Shakespeare taps into that sediment of sentient memory, reconstituting our experience of touch and movement through the perceptual process itself. The case studies show that language is the key, not just to an audience's understanding of a play, but to its emotional participation and suspension of disbelief. Thus the Chorus of *Henry V* urges his audience to 'work' their thoughts before the battle scenes,<sup>27</sup> knowing and fearing the practical limitations of

visual display: a mere handful of actors to represent an army, for example, armed '[w]ith four or five most vile and ragged foils, | Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous' (4.0.50-1). His words conjure an army of yeomen, who 'stand like greyhounds in the slips' (3.1.31), with 'noble lustre' in their eyes (3.1.30). The image powerfully conveys an energy that can barely be restrained: of vital living creatures, bent on a righteous ('noble') cause. Here, language is used in advance of spectacle, to prepare the mind for the limited visual stimuli it is about to receive.

The brief examples of phenomenological readings given so far in this chapter illustrate the way this study of objects in Shakespeare differs from a great deal of past criticism in the field. As stated above, recent research has tended to stress the important role of onstage objects in Renaissance drama as icons or emblems, or as powerful signifiers of their time, with their own cultural and social history. In Shakespeare's plays, however, the role of the object does not confine itself to that of a material mass in space and time. Language repeatedly suggests a fluid relationship between the solid object and its counterpart in the imagination: one made possible by the power of our intuitive and imaginative perception. Time and again, Shakespeare's work encourages us to question what we see, or do not see. Yet our modern attitude to our world shows a tendency to isolate objects from our bodily experience of them – to categorise sense, feeling and emotion purely as products of our brains. The birth of such ideas may be traced back, Smith points out, to the studies of René Descartes. Descartes, Smith explains, 'turns inward to consider the thinking observer', rather than 'outward toward the phenomena of the world',<sup>28</sup> as Bacon does. Edmund Husserl, however, considers the object as part of our own perceptual experience. When we encounter an object, '[w]hat



is there before us is a unity, something which has physical and sensible properties intertwined',<sup>29</sup> explains Barry Smith. The subject therefore apprehends an object in a vividly visceral sense. Bruce R Smith observes that Husserl's phenomenological method of analysis is one 'in which the subject sits at the center of a teeming, ambient world, that must be experienced with the senses before it can be thought.'<sup>30</sup> This comment stresses the intuitive nature of a phenomenological reading, which makes phenomenology an apt partner for this study's analysis of objects and language in Shakespeare. Like Bacon, Husserl recognises the value of recording the initial impact of immediate experience. As Chapter Two will explain in more detail, my own study adopts a similar method of close-reading textual and performance examples, in order to explore how Shakespeare engineers our perception of objects in his plays, and to attempt to encapsulate what it is that often lends his presentation of them such vital immediacy.

A survey of criticism in the field suggests, however, that a phenomenological approach to the study of stage properties in Shakespeare is unusual. Few critics have adequately stressed the vital role of language linked to objects in the plays. Indeed, Frances Teague feels that there has been too little written on the subject of properties in general, for while 'no-one doubts the utility of studying Shakespeare's costumes or his stage or performance techniques', she writes, 'critics often ignore the properties'.<sup>31</sup> Objects are frequently linked with subjects, however – a concept also explored extensively in this study – and a good deal of writing has focused on what it perceives to be a growing preoccupation with possession and identity in the Renaissance. Margreta de Grazia, for example, provides a useful insight into the development of our understanding of Renaissance values, and illustrates the complex relationship between

subject and object in her discussion of *King Lear*: 'removing what a person *has* simultaneously takes away what a person *is*.'<sup>32</sup> In giving away his power and land (symbolized by crown and map), she implies, Lear reduces himself to a helpless subject in his older daughters' eyes. Smith, however, recognizes the vital importance of language in shaping the role of objects in *King Lear*. For him, the map becomes a visible aid in 'the play's display of the controlling power of language'.<sup>33</sup> As a significant symbol of the kingdom Lear currently controls, it is visibly manipulated according to Lear's orders, as the kingdom itself is subsequently partitioned to satisfy his own whims and desires. As Smith notes, however, Lear's command may bring the map momentarily into his hand, but language subsequently takes on a power of its own that evades his control. In fact, he concludes, 'the subsequent play undoes all attempts to put words and actions into separate categories and keep them there. *King Lear* is full of verbally threatened cruelties that become physical realities.'<sup>34</sup> For Smith, language therefore precipitates as well as illustrates the play's gruesome events.

For a number of critics writing about stage properties in Shakespeare, character and object are often powerfully linked. Objects represent characters, or embody subjective qualities or characteristics such as fertility or treachery. Douglas Bruster observes, for example, that '[c]loth, magical and otherwise, had of course long been connected with normalizing concepts of female sexuality and domestic conduct.'<sup>35</sup> He goes on to note the view of spinning as a 'correct and desirable household activity', as illustrated in Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, 'where, as part of a symbolic chastity test, spinning is contrasted with female freedom.'<sup>36</sup> Bruster also notes that, elsewhere in Renaissance literature, the physical act of spinning 'frequently carried with

it the innuendo of copulation',<sup>37</sup> and he therefore sees the handkerchief in *Othello* as a symbol of Desdemona's sexuality: something that may be given away to other men for their enjoyment. As a result, Othello sees his wife's body as – like the handkerchief's embroidery – something that may be put into common circulation. As Bruster notes, in implying that the work can be copied, the play 'articulates a rationale for Othello's anxiety: the fear that he can be replaced sexually.'<sup>38</sup> In her essay 'Women's Theatrical Properties', Natasha Korda provides valuable evidence that women were extensively employed in the second-hand clothing trade, and in the 'networks of commerce surrounding early modern theatrical production'.<sup>39</sup> Women were therefore closely associated with the making of, working with and wearing of cloth. Once again, criticism in this area is seen to be grounded in historicism or cultural materialism.

Douglas Bruster and Paul Yachnin both discuss *Othello*'s obsession with the handkerchief as a material object, and what Yachnin describes as the play's registering of 'theatre's participation in English society's fetishized trade in textiles.'<sup>40</sup> Bruster sees the handkerchief as 'a patently personal object composed of and defined by social valuation',<sup>41</sup> and as such, an object that 'traces its fetishistic roots to the dynamics of the Renaissance market.'<sup>42</sup> From these insights, a direct link is discernible between the Renaissance obsession with the ownership of objects, and women as both commodity and producer. Bruster sees the theatre not as socially marginalised, but as an active part of the Renaissance trade in commodities. At the same time, he suggests, it was also an arena for the mirroring of contemporary anxieties and concerns in a changing economy. For Bruster, like Arjun Appadurai, owner anxiety portrayed in Renaissance plays mirrors an intense preoccupation with ownership in a growing and changing capitalist

society. People were beginning to identify themselves increasingly through ownership, and this was reflected in turn in the theatre of the time. Playwrights acknowledged 'the primacy of material over the ideal' in their work';<sup>43</sup> conversely, *loss* of property could mean loss of identity, in a world where subject and object seemed to take on each other's characteristics. Shakespeare echoes this idea in *The Merchant of Venice*, when Shylock is literally erased from the play once his property has been forfeited as a result of the court's judgement against him.<sup>44</sup>

My own study focusses on a different aspect of the relationship between subject and object in Shakespeare. It explores the seamless fusion of objects' material qualities with subjects' bodies in selected examples from Shakespeare's tragedies and histories. In *Henry V*, for example, Henry's words to his soldiers at the siege of Harfleur stimulate disturbing mental images of the men's convergence with the very weapons they are about to fire:

Then lend the eye a terrible aspect,  
Let it pry through the portage of the head  
Like the brass cannon, let the brow o'erwhelm it  
As fearfully as does a gallèd rock  
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base      (*Henry V*, 3.1.9-13)

Here, the human face becomes the cannon casing: the frowning brow takes on both the essential properties of the gun (with its fearful purpose) and of rugged, immovable rock. The eye is no longer the mirror to the soul, but is the lens spying through the weapon's casing, with one aim in view: the slaughter of its victim. Its human properties are 'overwhelmed' by the properties of the object encasing it: we imagine an expression of fierce, immovable determination cast simultaneously in brass and stone. Through this fusion of human features with the forbidding, inflexible qualities of the canon, Henry

shapes his men's perceptions of themselves, in order to prepare them for the bloody business of warfare. He is also aware of the raw and savage energy that his soldiers will need in order to sustain an attack on Harfleur. He therefore urges them to embody the characteristics of the tiger: an unparalleled, savage and merciless hunter. He instructs them step-by-step in this physical process, so that for the audience and reader, as well as for the soldiers, human features are transfigured in the mind to suggest a fusion of man and beast:

Then imitate the action of the tiger.  
Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood. (3.1.6-7)

Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide. (3.1.15)

Both of the above examples from *Henry V*, while illustrating the power of a consummate speaker and motivator, also subtly suggest the ugliness of human disfigurement, both physical and mental, brought about by war. In his speech to the Governor of Harfleur, Henry vividly evokes the image of those same human beasts in action within the town, should Harfleur refuse to surrender:

If not – why, in a moment look to see  
The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand  
Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters. (3.3.113-15)

Here, the double alliteration on 'blind' and 'bloody' helps to powerfully link the two words, suggesting an excess of blood that obscures sight, and the metaphorical blindness of insensitivity brought about through repeated acts of savagery. Shakespeare uses alliteration and assonance in 'shrill-shrieking' to skilfully evoke the sense of the young women's screams in the imagination.

These examples illustrate how language is used to merge a subject (the character) with various imaginary objects (the cannon, stone and tiger) in our perception, through appeals to the mind and senses. In the following example from *Romeo and Juliet*, objects are seen to take on subjective qualities, subtly suggesting human presence through absence:

What mean these masterless and gory swords  
To lie discoloured by this place of peace? (*Romeo and Juliet*, 5.3.142-3)<sup>45</sup>

This complex speech highlights the fluid relationship between object and subject in Shakespeare. It also illustrates the subtle power of language to shape our perception of onstage visual presentation. The words 'masterless' and 'gory' suggest more than use and abandonment: they imbue the swords with the human quality of servitude. The choice of 'master' over 'owner' adds a human dimension to our perception of the object. Our perception of the weapons is modified by Shakespeare's particular choice and order of words. The swords become servants or accomplices to the imagined events currently taking place in the tomb below: a visual connection that evokes a powerful feeling of foreboding. The speech suggests that the swords themselves may have had some motivation for their actions, yet conversely, the evidence of their abandonment simultaneously underscores their roles as inanimate objects. The Friar's words, however, imbue them with a sense of helplessness that seems to defy their roles as objects. The swords' motionless state therefore becomes a result of helplessness, rather than an aspect of their inanimate quality, lending them a human characteristic with which we are able to empathise.

For these strange servants, being 'masterless' is a state of abandonment brought about by death. The choice of term subtly conveys a sense of bereavement, as though these servants now lack ownership as well as direction. Friar Laurence strengthens their link with humanity when he speaks of them having their own sense of purpose: he asks what reasons the swords have to 'lie discoloured in this place of peace?' The question casts the objects in an intelligent role, as though the swords themselves have chosen to lie abandoned on this spot. The boundary normally separating object from subject in our perception is therefore subtly dissolved. 'Discoloured' evokes the unsavoury sense of tainted gravestones, and of blades stained by needless bloodshed. The gentle alliteration in 'place' and 'peace' strengthens the impact of the second word, stressing the importance of the concept of peace, and highlighting the sense of defilement conveyed by 'discoloured'. As in the examples from *Henry V*, the above speech from *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrates Shakespeare's consummate dramatic and linguistic craftsmanship in merging the concepts of subject and object, as he shapes our perception of objects through an intimate borrowing of human characteristics.

In some areas of Shakespeare criticism, however, the separation of subject and object into neat categories is seen as desirable, or even necessary. Such an approach can prove problematic, as Andrew Sofer – exploring the role of stage properties through the study of semiotics – confirms. Sofer highlights the fluidity of the relationship between subject and object in performance, within the context of semiotic analysis:

From a semiotic perspective, it is hard to draw a firm distinction between subjects and objects on stage, since subject and object alike function as volatile theatrical signs.<sup>46</sup>

In semiology, the process of classification, of 'assigning signs', also leads to confusion, for

if anything on stage can in principle stand for anything else, and if any given signified can be conveyed by any sign-vehicle on stage, including light and sound, the distinction between object and nonobject dissolves into a free play of signs.<sup>47</sup>

Sofer in fact struggles to pin down a simple definition of the stage property amid the constraints of semiotics. He eventually describes it as a manipulated material object, with the meanings that evolve from its use in the play a '*temporal contract* established between the actor and spectator for the duration of performance.'<sup>48</sup> The language he uses here is practical and even legal in flavour – perhaps reflecting the logical nature of semiotics as a system that seeks to locate and list the property in a controlled manner. The property is thus reduced to its purely material form, separated from the meanings that emanate from it – meanings that form 'part of a tacit agreement between actor and audience.'<sup>49</sup> As Sofer recognises, a semiotic reading of stage properties can ultimately lead to confusion in any attempt at categorisation, with objects and subjects merging into a general dissolution of materials into signs. This study's phenomenological reading of objects in Shakespeare reveals an intriguing sense of fluidity between subject and object, material and imaginary in a different way. Objects borrow from, or are fused with subjective characteristics through the language that shapes our imaginative and visual perception of them.

Sofer notes the various efforts of critics to adequately classify the role of the stage property, and concludes that, while Jean Alter regards properties as 'vehicles for actorial virtuosity and hence spectatorial pleasure',<sup>50</sup> cultural materialist criticism takes



the view that 'everything that appears on its stages is not only a theatrical sign but a commodity offered for the consumer's visual consumption.' The danger of focussing heavily on this approach, as he points out, 'is that we will lose sight of how objects worked, and continue to work, on stage as part of a discrete theatrical event'.<sup>51</sup> He ultimately rejects semiology as a useful way of understanding stage properties. In his eyes, the importance of the property is in its onstage role: '[t]he prop must mean in the moment'.<sup>52</sup> Semiology, he implies, is an outdated and unhelpful method of categorizing stage objects. He notes that it historically reached 'a plateau in 1981' when Shoshana Avigal and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan decided to locate 'the object through its function as a "lexeme"<sup>53</sup>: a sign that could be recorded in a dictionary, thus making the potential list of stage objects immense, and confusingly dissolving all boundaries between subject and object in a way that ignores the powerful impact of deliberate boundary blurring, so evident in Shakespeare's writing. Sofer's insistence that the property must continue to work 'in the moment' draws attention to the importance of the stage property in presentist and phenomenological terms. As a working onstage item, aided by its intimate relationship with the language of Shakespeare's texts, the stage property can potentially create a powerful sense of experiential immediacy, electrifying performances of his plays for modern audiences.

This view of the stage property as a vital connection between Shakespeare's plays and today's audiences is in sharp contrast to historicist and cultural materialist criticism that regards objects in Shakespeare as an important part of establishing identities in and through early modern drama. Douglas Bruster's study of the theatre as a marketplace commodity, for example, discusses drama as part of early modern cultural

industry and as a tool to investigate what he terms 'nascent capitalism' and its effect on society.<sup>54</sup> For Bruster, the theatre was 'deeply implicated in a narrative of institutional development.'<sup>55</sup> Objects became central to dramatic life as a means of identifying or quantifying power and status in early modern society. Bruster, like de Grazia, also detects an identity transition in the Renaissance: a growing preoccupation with identity through possession. 'That the plays of this period should manifest such a heightened, fetishistic interest in commodity', he writes, 'only replicates a larger social fascination with the material'.<sup>56</sup>

Shakespeare certainly reflects a preoccupation with objects and possessions in his plays at times: for example in the Rude Mechanicals' obsessive need to create their theatrical world through properties in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The workmen are obsessed with the plays' properties. The first job that Quince undertakes, after casting, is to draw up 'a bill of properties such as our play wants' (1.2.93-4), and before rehearsals can commence, the vital business of staging moonlight and bringing in a wall must be thoroughly canvassed and resolved. Even as the play gently laughs at the hapless craftsmen for impersonating stage properties, however, it subtly weaves the concepts of subject and object together in the characters of the Mechanicals themselves, through their professions and identities. The laboured construction of the language in 'Pyramus and Thisbe' may be part of a skilled comic device, but it also encapsulates the artisans' attempts to approach drama and poetry as craftsmen of objects, not of language. As characters, they seem inseparable from their professions. As Holland notes, their very names are suggestive of their jobs: '[a] "bottom" was the core on which the weaver's skein of yarn was wound' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Note 1.2.16). 'Quince' relates

to “quines” or “quoins”, wooden wedges used by carpenters’ (Note 1.2.8) – therefore, as Holland suggests, Bottom’s recommendation that Quince ‘grow to a point’ could well have been a pun (Note 1.2.9-10). Flute’s name suggests ‘the piping voice of an organ worked by the bellows he mends, appropriate to his role as Thisbe’ (Note 37). Starveling was so called, because ‘[t]ailors were proverbially thin’ (Note 53). ‘Snug’ means ‘close-fitting, as joiners’ work should be’ (Note 57), a fact no doubt present in Quince’s mind when he announces immediately after casting Snug: ‘and I hope here is a play fitted’ (1.2.57-8). ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’ is indeed fitted together, but in the sense of joining with visible seams.

Elsewhere in the play, however, Shakespeare contrasts the Mechanicals’ concentration on the practical, with highly effective verbal scene setting. Their comic representation of properties by people, such as Starveling as ‘the man i’th’ moon’ (5.1.240) is set against Oberon’s famous ‘[i]ll met by moonlight, proud Titania’ (2.1.60), and with Lysander’s poetic

Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold  
Her silver visage in the wat’ry glass,  
Decking with liquid pearls the bladed grass. (1.1.209-11)

The creamy colour and texture of pearls exactly reflect the qualities of the moon. Early morning dew would have been sparkling, transparent – as a diamond, perhaps.

Diamonds also shimmer and therefore convey a sense of movement, but here, the use of “liquid pearls” suggests the opaque density of the moon, and its round shape. These qualities of density and solidity lend a sense of stillness to the imaginatively perceived scene. The ‘liquid pearls’, as tiny orbs of light, are perfect reflections of the moon, and as such they encapsulate its apparent motionless tranquillity. In this example,

Shakespeare sets his moonlit scene in advance of the action, infusing the atmosphere with its qualities, and allowing the audience to experience its sweetness and stillness without the need for material properties, or painted set. The presentation of objects in Shakespeare is thus shown to be more complex in its appeal to our imaginative perception, than a semiotic, historicist or cultural materialist reading might suggest.

The obsessive fetishization of objects that Bruster detects in Shakespeare's plays, and Appadurai's exploration of how the exchange of goods in the Renaissance and the evolution of a 'complex cultural system'<sup>57</sup> have affected our perception of our world are both informative studies in our understanding of the political, cultural and social grounding of Shakespeare's work. Once again, however, such studies still tend to focus solely on material objects, ignoring those vividly sensed objects of the mind that are conjured by language. More recently, Catherine Richardson, also studying objects in Shakespeare from a social and cultural perspective, recognises the vital role of language in conveying meaning. She feels, however, that we also need to understand how the 'distinctive world of goods' operated at a national, social, political and religious level, in order to appreciate how the plays functioned – how they 'negotiated meaning between words and things'.<sup>58</sup> For Richardson, 'there can be no doubt that objects spoke in early modern England',<sup>59</sup> but for her, their language evolves from their form and shape, their decoration and the materials from which they were formed. Their language is, in effect, essentially a visual mode of communication. Richardson's study of properties does move beyond a consideration of ownership, or an object's religious, emblematic or iconic significance, however, to investigate a more complex relationship between object and subject, exploring the visceral effect of an object's presence on stage. Yet as the

above examples from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* illustrate, in Shakespeare's plays, objects do not necessarily need to be present on stage to powerfully affect us in a strongly experiential sense. In focusing purely on the material objects in Shakespeare's play texts, there is a danger of ignoring the vital role of linguistic imagery in stimulating our imaginative perception. As the case studies in Chapters Three to Seven illustrate, Shakespeare repeatedly demonstrates, with consummate ease, how an audience's perception can be created and shaped through the combined use of word and object: a radical skill that can be as effective for today's audience as it doubtless was in his own time. Reclaiming objects into a verbal world that aligns them more with aesthetics than with cultural materialism or historicist concerns lends them a vital role in communicating with modern audiences, as this study shows.

Whereas Richardson claims that objects could communicate directly with early modern audiences through form and design, John Doebler writes of 'a language of images' known to the 'average Renaissance Englishman [...] whether he encountered those images in graphic form, in literature, or on a stage.'<sup>60</sup> Doebler offers 'scholarly and critical investigations' as to how the study of iconography 'can be used to enrich our understanding of verbal and especially stage imagery'<sup>61</sup> in Shakespeare's work. His study is concerned with a 'critical reinterpretation' through 'an historical awareness of the conventions of Renaissance iconography, especially as those conventions affect our understanding of stage event.'<sup>62</sup> While his study is interesting in its inclusion of both visual and verbal imagery, much of the dialogue that he detects between objects and audience is unfortunately likely to be lost on the majority of current readers and audience members. John King's *Tudor Royal Iconography* also detects a dialogue

between textual and visual imagery.<sup>63</sup> King stresses the importance of seeing texts as not simply confined to the written word, but inclusive of the visual arts. His study examines the fusion of religious, empirical and royal images in Tudor England, and emphasises the vital role of iconography's dialogue with other texts as it traces the development of Tudor royal iconography from a pre-reformation mixture of religious and Roman empirical imagery to post-reformation images of the monarch as both political and religious ruler. Similarly, Stephen Orgel examines the creation of the British Royal Self in the Renaissance. He considers the merging of religious and empirical imagery, pointing out the 'endless adaptability to conflicting, and often diametrically opposed, ideologies' in Renaissance symbolic art.<sup>64</sup> Unlike King, however, he treats comparison with other texts with caution, pointing out that the choice of texts (and what we regard as a text) is entirely subjective.

These studies, although useful historical backgrounds to the plays, locate objects and images within a framework of understanding that is now largely inaccessible to modern audiences. When reading a text through such a definitive lens, there is a danger of ignoring other factors that might suggest subtle deviations from the accepted norm. In such analytical processes, once the framework has been established, the outcome of the reading is already, to some extent, pre-ordained, whereas the aim of a phenomenological study is to set aside as many pre-existing assumptions as possible, in order to consider the full impact of the example on the investigating subject. Whereas a study of emblems in Shakespeare sets out to discover examples that fit into its established framework, a phenomenological investigation explores the many outcomes of the subject's perceptual encounter with the text or performance.

Shakespeare's presentation of objects and images complicates our attempts to locate his approach within a specific framework. As David Bevington notes, although 'emblems and emblematic devices in Elizabethan public pageantry tended to emphasize the symbolic and stereotypical',<sup>65</sup> Shakespeare often makes use of such imagery as a departing point for the destabilisation of the expected or anticipated. The complexity of Shakespeare's use of stage properties, therefore, can make it difficult for them to be neatly categorized under the headings of emblems or symbols. Frances Teague, in her discussion of the emblematic and symbolic use of objects in Shakespeare's work, recognises the vital link between object and language in the plays, and illustrates this through a discussion of Yorick's skull in *Hamlet*. She points out that Hamlet's comments on death and his tender memories of his childhood relationship with the skull's owner, linked to the skull's presence on stage at the time of Ophelia's burial, imbue the object with a significance beyond that of a 'conventional, safe symbol of mortality'. Instead, she notes, the skull becomes 'a stinking reminder that death has taken Ophelia and will soon take the rest of the court.'<sup>66</sup>

More recently, Lina Perkins-Wilder also rejects the idea of Yorick's skull as 'just a memento-mori'. For Perkins-Wilder, who explores the role of memory and memory theatre in Shakespeare, the object is 'a physical revenant',<sup>67</sup> an embodiment of Hamlet's memories of his tactile contact with his beloved childhood friend. 'While recollection is undoubtedly conceived of as a bodily process in Shakespeare's plays', she writes, 'conceptually, and sometimes actually, these plays construct recollection as a series of relationships between external physical objects and between such objects and the rememberer.'<sup>68</sup> As Hamlet holds Yorick's skull, therefore, memories of his bodily

contact with the living Yorick are replayed through his perception of the object. His senses are overpowered by its physical properties of smell and touch. The result is a feeling of revulsion. She observes: 'we see Yorick's skull, not the lips that Hamlet remembers kissing'.<sup>69</sup> My point, however, is that we may see Yorick's skull, but we simultaneously process the sensation of kissing in our own tactile memories, prompted by Hamlet's words. Hamlet's revulsion is most effectively communicated to, and shared with an audience because his commentary fuses that audience's visual response to the skull with his description of, and reaction to its appearance, smell and feel. At the same time, his words conjure the sensation of kissing living flesh. The memory of the living, processed through the stark, practical evidence of the dead, is for Hamlet, as for his audience, unbearably repugnant. The play does not give a detailed image of the living Yorick: Hamlet's description is designed to appeal to the senses, rather than to create a vivid mind-picture. Even for Hamlet, sentient memory invades and gruesomely warps the face he once remembered. For an audience, the actor playing Hamlet becomes a tactile guide. His physical and emotional reactions are able to trigger a sense of revulsion that is in turn intensified through the audience's kinetic response to his description of the skull.

Perkins-Wilder's preoccupation with the vital role of memory in Shakespeare's plays makes her study a useful reference for my own work, since memory is a vital component of our perceptual process. Although once again, her analysis differs from my own in that it is rooted in materialist and historicist studies, she combines this with a cognitive approach that recognises, in the above example, the impact of vital immediacy on both reader and audience that Shakespeare achieves through the use of word and



object. My own analysis, however, is more intensely concerned with the sentient quality of our perceptual response. To remember the action of kissing is to rehearse or anticipate the physical, tactile experience that is drawn from our sentient memory.

Also recently, Richard Meek's *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* explores visual representation from a textual perspective, focussing on the way Shakespeare brings scenes alive through narrative in his poetry and plays. Like Orgel, King and Doebler, Meek is interested in what he perceives to be an interchange between text and visual art in Shakespeare, but one that is vitally presentist in its approach. He draws attention to Shakespeare's use of ekphrasis (particularly vivid verbal representation of painting) and enargeia – a use of language that impacts vitally on the mind's eye, bringing the object described almost into the presence of the listener or reader. Meek comments: 'the extraordinary verisimilitude that critics often locate in Shakespeare's plays is often produced by the interplay between different modes of mimesis, rather than through any innate superiority of dramatic representation'.<sup>70</sup> Meek's analysis of ekphrasis in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* leads him to discover an artistic exchange between art and poetry: '*Venus and Adonis* appears to "borrow" visual immediacy from the ultra-realistic artwork that it describes.'<sup>71</sup> For Meek, Shakespeare's vivid description of Adonis's horse manages to convey that it 'is the product of nature rather than art.'<sup>72</sup> This comment implies a fluidity of exchange between the senses in our intuitive perceptual response: a concept that also underpins this study. Meek seemingly echoes one of Merleau-Ponty's principal concerns, in fact, when he points out that '*Venus and Adonis* implies that sensory exchange is necessitated by the inadequacy of each individual sense'.<sup>73</sup>

Meek notes how the poem is seemingly calculated to make us unable to look, with Venus, at Adonis's mortally wounded body, for as her eyes are 'metaphorically "murdered"', then the 'reader's eyes, we might say, are murdered too.'<sup>74</sup> The power of metaphor, however, and the way our imaginative perception works, does ensure that we can never remain imaginatively sightless, even if it is the 'dark cabins' inside Venus's head that we see.<sup>75</sup> The use of 'cabins', implying small, enclosed interiors that are often dark, possibly stuffy and a little claustrophobic, vividly evokes an apprehension of blindness by taking us into the world we see behind our own closed eyelids. At the same time, it also recalls an exterior view of dark, sightless eye sockets. From a reader's perspective, we are both inside Venus's head and viewing her simultaneously from without, in a dream-like fluidity of consciousness that intuitively senses as it visualises. Shakespeare's work thus illuminates the perceptual agility of the reader: a skill that can of course also be exercised by a play's audience in response to his rich verbal imagery.

As this chapter has shown, for some critics in the field of stage properties, the very nature of the solid, material object locates it firmly in time and place. In the field of cognitive studies, however, Arthur Kinney explores aspects of the complex and intimate relationship between object and linguistic imagery as they affect modern audiences and readers. Kinney's *Shakespeare's Webs*, although essentially a study of semiotics in Renaissance drama, discusses audience perception of onstage visual presentation in terms of individual experience (although Kinney also recognises that some responses may find a common basis among audience members).<sup>76</sup> His work is therefore geared to modern audience expectations in this respect. Kinney explores cognitive theories of learning and association in order to illuminate the possibilities of a complex range of

signifiers we may receive from a single object on stage. The subjective nature of his investigation is therefore similar in this way to this study's phenomenological approach.

While Kinney analyses our intellectual responses to stimuli, however, phenomenological readings seek to describe the subject's experience of the object or example through the mind and body: to explore the way we respond through a fusion of recall, imagination, sense and emotion in our response to Shakespeare's work. However, as noted earlier, recent developments in cognitive science and linguistics have brought the new studies of cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics into a shared arena with phenomenology, through their common interest in our embodied response to language. In terms of this study, cognitive poetics, with its focus on literary analysis, is of particular interest. For Peter Stockwell, cognitive poetics 'understands language as being in a continuum with biological embodiment.'<sup>77</sup> He admits, in his final chapter, that if his book were to have an instruction manual, the reader would be told to 'plug in [his] central nervous system, and engage [his] mind.'<sup>78</sup> This recognition of the important role our senses play in our response to language is an exciting step forward in cognitive linguistic and cognitive poetic studies. Stockwell also acknowledges the fluid relationship between material and imagined objects: '[i]n the philosophical tradition known as *phenomenology*, a distinction has been made between objects which exist in the world in their own right (**autonomous** objects) and objects which only come into being when engaged by an observing consciousness (**heteronomous** objects).'<sup>79</sup> For Raymond W Gibbs Jr., meaning construal is not 'a matter of understanding what words mean', but of 'how language evokes the perception of physical objects, physical events, the body, and other people in interaction.'<sup>80</sup> These comments suggest a similarity in the

general principles underlying the disciplines of cognitive studies and Merleau-Ponty's study of perception.

However, since my own research is centred on objects as part of Shakespeare's theatre as a whole: theatre as it is organically composed of object, language, dramatic structure, and conditions of performance, phenomenology remains the most useful and flexible study to underpin my analysis of both textual examples and performance excerpts, as Chapter Two explains more fully. Although an interesting point of reference for my work, cognitive poetics operates by applying one or more of its numerous but specific strategies to the example, whereas a phenomenological analysis focusses on recovering the experiential immediacy of an encounter with an example. It allows the example itself to impact on and be absorbed by the subject, so that findings may be noted down for subsequent reflection and closer analysis. Phenomenology is therefore an adaptable method for analysing all aspects of theatre: for considering both objects of the stage and of the mind. Stockwell observes that 'explorable patterns [...] appear in language' as a result of our 'embodied cognition'.<sup>81</sup> This comment highlights language as an *outcome* of activity in the mind and body. My own primary interest is in the way Shakespeare in fact reverses this process: he uses highly charged linguistic stimuli to reawaken the mental and physical experiences that produced language patterning in the first place. In other words, through language, he reconstitutes our embodied memories, so that our past experiences – sensory, emotional, and intellectual – may be used to vitalise our perception of his plays.

My study of objects in Shakespeare will therefore depart from the areas of historicism, cultural materialism, semiotics and iconography, in which a great deal of

recent research has been grounded, since it is in effect a study of our perception of objects in Shakespeare. As such, it will draw instead on the work of twentieth century phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose research is centred heavily on the role of the body in the way we perceive – both visually and imaginatively. It will also refer to the research of modern phenomenologists Bert O States, Don Ihde, Bruce R Smith, and Richard Kearney to the work of Lina Perkins-Wilder, and to Elaine Scarry's fusion of cognitive psychology, philosophy and literary criticism in *Dreaming by the Book*. Although the work of Smith and Perkins-Wilder is still very much rooted in historicism, their interest in our physical response to visual and verbal stimuli provides a useful frame of reference for my own study. Smith's analysis is a synthesis of historicism and phenomenology that embraces a return to aesthetics and explores our reaction to art in terms of sensation and emotion. Just as Perkins-Wilder points out that 'even the seemingly presentist theatrical medium of improvisation, is as deeply involved with memory as history is',<sup>82</sup> my own work acknowledges the grounding of all subjects and objects in their own histories. It must be accepted that we, and the objects that fill our world, all have pasts that influence our present. It is with our present, however, that this study is concerned: with the impact of that 'visceral affair' between text and object, audience and reader, that continues to make Shakespeare's work vital and exciting in our own time.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### Shakespeare and Phenomenology

Here we are in the presence of a miniscule phenomenon of the shimmering consciousness. (Gaston Bachelard)<sup>1</sup>

This chapter aims to clarify the process of phenomenological enquiry as it is understood by this study, and to illustrate my own methodology, using examples from Shakespeare's texts, and noting why Merleau-Ponty's work on the phenomenology of perception has been found particularly useful in underpinning this investigation.

Phenomenology is concerned with the way we experience everything that surrounds and stimulates us: for example, objects, other subjects, words, sounds, and colours. This chapter outlines some general principles governing phenomenology – as it is understood in this study – and explains how and why its ideas underpin my analysis of Shakespeare's plays. It then goes on to explain and illustrate my methodology in detail through the examination of textual examples, showing how the work of both early twentieth-century and modern phenomenologists inform my approach to close-reading. The chapter closes with a brief discussion on the similarities between phenomenological investigation, and literary analysis through the emerging studies of cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics.

Stanton B Garner Jr classifies phenomenology as 'an observational stance and set of theoretical strategies associated with the philosophical tradition founded by Edmund Husserl.'<sup>2</sup> Its wide and varied area of study, as he observes, has encompassed the arts, literary study, education and social sciences, and it might therefore 'be more accurate to speak of "phenomenologies"'<sup>3</sup> than of a single discipline. Yet despite differences in approach between major thinkers in the field, all forms of phenomenology have the same general aims. As Richard Kearney explains:

all its variations share the virtue of inviting us to think again, to go back to beginnings, to question anew. This has the methodological advantage of enabling us to ask what things *mean* – as if we were asking for the first time. We no longer take 'things themselves' for granted. We enter an attitude of methodic unknowing where things cease to be facts, data, objects, possessions, and become *questions*.<sup>4</sup>

Merleau-Ponty writes: 'in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it.'<sup>5</sup> Ihde similarly describes phenomenology as 'one attempt to step back from certain types of involvement with the world and direct our attention to specific features of our experience of the world'.<sup>6</sup> For Ihde, it is a way of 'making interpretations stand out in such a way that their distinction from the phenomena become evident.'<sup>7</sup>

As Chapter One indicates, therefore, phenomenology is, above all, a way of seeing – or more precisely, a particular way of experiencing our world. For the purposes of this thesis, a phenomenological attitude is adopted to study textual examples, or excerpts from performances where stage properties – real or imaginary – become the objects of focus. The primary aim of such analysis is to record the impact of linguistic and visual stimuli in such instances, in order to explore the strategies that Shakespeare

employs to influence our visual and imaginative perception of objects in his plays. The secondary focus is a consideration of how these findings may enrich an understanding of the plays as a result.

The above comments from Kearney, Ihde and Merleau-Ponty suggest that a phenomenological attitude means consciously attempting to set aside what we think we know about our world, in order to come to know it differently. In order to perceive it differently, however, we must also use our imaginations to vary or supplement what we see. Shakespeare's plays constantly challenge our perception, and require us to engage our imaginations in a variety of ways. Through language, he galvanises our imaginations in order to supplement our visual perception. In *Macbeth*, for example, he creates an atmosphere of uncertainty for his audience, as Macbeth perceives the illusory dagger, 'in form as palpable | as this which now I draw' (*Macbeth*, 2.1.41-2).<sup>8</sup> Like Macbeth, the audience may question what he sees or does not see, but it nevertheless responds intuitively and imaginatively to his words. An initial imaginary perception of the dagger is therefore varied or supplemented by Macbeth's description: '[a]nd on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood, | Which was not so before' (2.1.47-48). The almost tangible image, with its vivid colour and inference of action (the 'gouts' infer the spraying of blood as the dagger plunges into a warm, living body) is fused with the audience's visual perception of the stage property, and the potential action that the object suggests to the imagination. The visual stimuli of both the real dagger, and its bloody, illusory counterpart, appeal intuitively to our store of sentient memories. It is possible to sense the sharpness of the blade, rehearse the feel of the smooth metal through tactile memory, or feel fear, excitement or revulsion in anticipation of its use, for 'every variety of object

has a certain sort of conscious act correlated with it.'<sup>9</sup> This brief example demonstrates how the visual presentation of the dagger, together with Macbeth's words, can shape and create perception through appeals to the mind and senses, supplementing what is seen by what is heard.

As Kearney points out, perception aided by imagination gives us a superior experience of an object: it provides 'an *intuition* of the object',<sup>10</sup> as well as a visual response. In order to access this unique quality, or essence, of the phenomena that surround us, a phenomenological enquiry attempts to set aside all established traditional assumptions of how the world is made up. Phenomenologists consider that empirical analysis in the past has often left many phenomena unexplained. They therefore prefer to rely directly and solely on their own physical and intuitive experiences, rather than on established scientific fact and theory. This setting aside of previous assumptions is known as bracketing, or 'reduction'. Richard Kearney clarifies Husserl's phenomenological 'reduction', in fact, not as a narrowing of perspective, but as a 'leading back to (*re-ducere*) the essential structures of phenomena.'<sup>11</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, 'reduction' is 'the determination to bring the world to light as it is before any falling back on ourselves has occurred, it is the ambition to make reflection emulate the unreflective life of consciousness.'<sup>12</sup> This explanation implies that a phenomenological attitude reaches somehow into the intuitive life of the subconscious, to grasp at a reaction that is felt before it can be put into words. The difficulty is then to express that primal experience. Phenomenology, therefore, is a method of close study that involves contact with our own innermost senses: one that recognises the constituting power of imagination as a vital factor in the process of perception. In this sense, it is rather an

opening up of the mind, body and senses, rather than a process of closing down or exclusion. As Bruce R Smith writes:

[t]o say that phenomenology starts by setting aside all axioms but one – that you cannot know anything apart from the way in which you come to know it – is not to say that phenomenology does away with other axioms altogether. It is just careful about how and when axioms get formulated and acted upon.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of this study, phenomenological reduction does not in fact involve a denial of all previous knowledge or experience of a phenomenon. As Chapter One makes clear, objects and subjects come with their own histories that inform our understanding of them. Indeed, Shakespeare draws on our stock of memories and associations to vivify our experience of his plays. The aim of this study is therefore to explore my own initial response to the rich linguistic and dramatic stimuli his work offers, recording the immediacy of this impact in an intuitive, rather than a structured way. This means clearing the mind of other methodologies or frameworks that might impinge on that process, allowing the example to be of prime significance.

Husserl calls the setting aside of previous assumptions *epoché*, a term explained in *Exploring Phenomenology* as ‘a questioning of presuppositions until they could be established on a firmer basis.’<sup>14</sup> Kearney describes *epoché* as a process of ‘bracketing or neutralizing the normal “perceptual” relation to things’ by which ‘we enter an imaginative perspective from which the teeming flux of consciousness may be apprehended in all its possible permutations.’<sup>15</sup> The process of *epoché*, or bracketing, also infers a certain amount of de-focussing from the way one normally sees a phenomenon, in some cases a shift from background to foreground, so that the now more sensitive gaze allows an object's essential properties – its ‘essence’ – to be

apprehended. The imagination can then be used to supplement one's initial response: to vary the object that we perceive in all its future possibilities. Kearney explains that for Husserl, essences are 'idealities constitutive of the "things themselves" – ideal possibilities to which the most direct access is provided by imagination.'<sup>16</sup> This comment infers that for Husserl, essences represent the closest one can come to apprehending an object's natural qualities. It also reiterates that the process of perception is intimately interwoven with the intuitive ability to imagine.

Stanton B Garner Jr terms phenomenology as 'the study of givenness [...] of the world as it is lived rather than the world as it is objectified, abstracted and conceptualized.'<sup>17</sup> 'Givenness' therefore suggests an intuitive or sensed experience of the world, rather than one gained through scientific fact or theoretical knowledge. To give also implies an invitation to take, and this dual flow of experience encapsulates the phenomenological gaze. We do not simply view an object and assess its qualities: those qualities are fused with the very act of perception. Husserl calls this fusion of particular experience 'intentionality': 'an activity of consciousness which is identified with the meant object.'<sup>18</sup> Kearney also notes that in Husserl's view:

[t]hings are apprehended in their essence (*eidōs*) [...] when they are grasped not only in their actuality but also in their possibility – the latter being the special preserve of imagination.<sup>19</sup>

For Husserl, then, the imagination plays a vital part in our apprehension of essences, as Kearney explains:

[i]t is because what is possible has priority over what is actual when it comes to revealing essences, and because phenomenology sees its primary task as the disclosure of essences, that the imaginative power of fiction is hailed as the life force of the eidetic way of knowledge.<sup>20</sup>



The 'eidetic' way of knowledge is, for Husserl, one gained through the apprehension of essences.

The first stage of phenomenological analysis, then, is grounded in the power of the imagination to aid perception. The experiencing subject places an object or example under intense scrutiny, and records the experiential immediacy of his encounter with it.

In noting the evidence, the subject includes every aspect of his experience.

Apprehending the essence of a table, for example, suggests much more than noting its visual impact. One might anticipate how the material object will feel: rehearse the smoothness of the wood, perhaps, through the tactile memory, and imaginatively explore its inflexibility. The object might even stimulate the recall of a particular scent or smell of certain woods, such as pine, or trigger memories associated with a past encounter with a particular desk or table, in a particular time and place. Gaston Bachelard describes how he can return through memory to a cupboard in his childhood that still evokes 'that unique odor, the odor of raisins drying on a wicker tray.'<sup>21</sup> An odour itself can act as a powerful trigger in the memory, recalling whole scenarios in the mind, and stimulating a plethora of sentient and tactile associations. After noting an initial encounter with an object, the subject may imaginatively vary an object's appearance at will. As Husserl explains:

[v]iewing the front side of the table we can, whenever we like, orchestrate an intuitive presentational course, a reproductive course of aspects through which the non-visible side of the thing would be presented to us.<sup>22</sup>

In this study's approach to analysis, textual examples may be imagined in terms of possible performances. Performance excerpts can also be imaginatively varied, in order

to explore alternative staging effects, and their projected impacts. The main aim of secondary analysis, however (the evaluation of initial experience), is to investigate the techniques that Shakespeare uses to shape visual and imaginative perception, and to consider how these findings enhance experience and understanding of his play texts.

Stewart and Mickunas explain that the term 'phenomenology' is rooted in the ancient Greek words meaning 'appearance' and 'reason' or 'word': phenomenology may therefore be understood as 'a reasoned enquiry which discovers the inherent essences of appearances.'<sup>23</sup> This interpretation reflects the two stages of phenomenological enquiry: the initial response to the object, with careful noting down of the experience in detail, as described above, and the second stage of returning perception of the phenomenon to the broader context of its world, considering it within 'the fullness of its encounter with its environment',<sup>24</sup> but with a new, enriched appreciation of both the object and its contextual surrounding. As Ihde observes, 'phenomenology allows us to belong to our experience again but hopefully in a more profound way.'<sup>25</sup>

For Husserl, as Stewart and Mickunas explain, anything that one is conscious of constitutes a phenomenon. Both writing table and mathematical theorem are 'objects of consciousness and have a reality of their own irreducible one to the other.'<sup>26</sup> Although Husserl could not agree with empirical science's view that consciousness and the world are two separate entities, he sought to describe experience of phenomena by keeping his methodology within the same scientific lines with which he was familiar. For Merleau-Ponty, who developed Husserl's ideas and whose work is most useful and apt to underpin this study, perception of objects is irrevocably bound up with a bodily

experience of the world: 'appearances are always enveloped for me in a certain bodily attitude',<sup>27</sup> he writes. As Hammond, Howarth and Keat explain, Merleau-Ponty rejects intellectualist theories that see subjective experience of the world as purely 'mentalistic', and proposes 'that the true subject of action and perception is an essentially "bodily" one.'<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty also rejects what he terms the 'hermetically sealed self'<sup>29</sup> of the transcendental phenomenology practised by Husserl, for whom the world exists only as it is experienced through the human ego. Husserl claims that we possess a higher imagination or ego, a 'telos' that transcends the here and now, in some way pre-figuring ordinary imagination, and able to reflect on consciousness. Kearney explains: 'Husserl's notion of the telos as possibility calls for a free decision on the part of each consciousness to break through to the transcendence of the telos'.<sup>30</sup>

In Merleau-Ponty's view, however, perception is an 'inhering of my consciousness in its body and its world'.<sup>31</sup> His theory of perception, of how we respond to the world through vision, sound, sense and intellect, in a simultaneous fusion of experience, is therefore more sympathetic to this study's text and theatre-based methodology than Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, and Martin Heidegger's studies in ontology, which aim, as *Exploring Phenomenology* explains, to bring 'Western philosophy back to the question of Being, which he considers the most fundamental question in philosophy.'<sup>32</sup> For Heidegger, '[B]eing is [...] the ground of all possibilities and the horizon for the interpretation of all entities.'<sup>33</sup> Consequently, where Husserl's descriptive methods involve progressively 'bracketing' the outside world from the object under observation, Heidegger's entail 'the gradual loosening up of calcified interpretations',<sup>34</sup> in order to allow the objects' qualities to emerge. Merleau-Ponty's

existential phenomenology recognises a world of objects that exists separately from the subject, whereas for Husserl, the world exists only through the subject's experience of it. '[T]he world [...] is no longer the visible unfolding of a constituting Thought',<sup>35</sup> claims Merleau-Ponty, rejecting Husserl's claims for a superior ego, or 'telos'. For Merleau-Ponty, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology fails because of its tendency to solipsism – the inability to recognise another 'self'. 'The plurality of consciousness is impossible if I have an absolute consciousness of myself',<sup>36</sup> he observes. This is again an important point for this study, since plays, in both textual and performance modes, rely on reader and audience empathy, and call for close reading from a number of perspectives.

For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not simply 'inhabited by consciousnesses'.<sup>37</sup> He sees the relationship between body and world as so intimate, that he describes it as a 'saturation' of his 'phenomenal body onto the primordial world':<sup>38</sup> a term encapsulating his own interest in the medical profession, and implying the stitching of the body to a world that is almost seen as another form of that body. The suturing of flesh secures a bond of such permanence that it may in time only be evident under scrutiny from a faint scarring of tissue. In Merleau-Ponty's view, therefore, to be is not simply to think: 'the subject that I am [...] is inseparable from this body and this world'.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the body is 'a synergic system',<sup>40</sup> that responds in union with the mind to visual, aural and tactile stimuli. The senses must be understood in terms of 'their never-ending integration into one knowing organism'.<sup>41</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's interest in bodily experience of the world makes his work ideally suited to this study's particular focus on the visceral effect of Shakespeare's

language, and its consideration of objects in performance. Although Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the separate existence of objects within the world, he describes a complex relationship with them that is grounded in bodily experience: '[m]y actual contact with the thing [...] awakens within me a primordial knowledge of all things.'<sup>42</sup> This reference to a deeply intuitive, but physically recognised contact with objects is again of prime importance to this study's exploration of our perception of objects in Shakespeare. As the case studies in Chapters Three to Seven illustrate, Merleau-Ponty's ideas in this area can help to articulate the intimate relationship that Shakespeare forges between word and object in his plays, and the complex appeals he makes to his audience's sentient understanding and experience. Merleau-Ponty's particular interest in the vital role our body plays in perception also helps to illuminate the complex physical and perceptual interaction between actor, audience and object during performance. The following discussion enlarges on this idea, suggesting how Merleau-Ponty's work can be used to inspire and illuminate analysis of Shakespeare's plays.

Merleau-Ponty feels that it is a mistake of intellectualism to divorce bodily and motor skills from thought and knowledge. As Hammond, Howarth and Keat explain, he believes there is a process inherent in the human being which combines intellectual and motor skills: 'a motor intentionality'<sup>43</sup> that enables a subject to react or respond correctly with the body to a demand for abstract movement. He observes that bodies seem to communicate directly with other bodies. 'A baby of fifteen months opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it', he writes – yet, as he points out, the baby has not yet seen its face in a mirror, and has no teeth. 'It perceives its intentions in its body, and my body with its own, and thereby my

intentions in its own body.<sup>44</sup> His study of sense perception is centred on the body's vital role in intuitively experiencing an object. In his first, general encounter with an object, he views it through a 'natural attitude of vision in which I make common cause with my gaze and, through it, surrender myself to the spectacle.' In order to attempt to experience a 'separate sensory impact'<sup>45</sup> of the example, he takes up a particular form of focus, fixing his gaze upon it – perhaps even looking through a frame or a matchbox lid, which helps to separate 'the region under scrutiny from the rest of the field'.<sup>46</sup> The response he experiences is not simply a result of 'natural transactions between my sight and the world', but 'the reply to a certain kind of questioning on the part of my gaze, the outcome of a second order or critical vision which tries to know itself in its own particularity.'<sup>47</sup> Although this stage suggests the conscious act of questioning, it also infers a strongly intuitive experience, where critical response is bound up with an instinctive awareness of the object's impact on the mind and body. This is reflected in his comments on the next stage of the encounter. The third stage of experience, he explains, reverberates in the body, as the 'object speaks directly to all the senses'. His comments infer a sense of absorption of the object's essence in the mind and body, as a unity. It becomes 'difficult to limit my experience to a single sensory department', he writes, as 'it spontaneously overflows all the rest'.<sup>48</sup>

As Shakespeare's texts demonstrate, and the following chapters show, Theatre provides exciting opportunities for creating and shaping audience perception, through the stimulation of an audience's intuitive responses in mind and body. Merleau-Ponty's interest in a physiological as well as imaginative and linguistic approach to phenomenology make his *Phenomenology of Perception* an excellent resource for

analysing the way Shakespeare's blueprints for performance – his play texts – seek to tap into an audience's complex perceptual abilities. Merleau-Ponty, like Shakespeare, perceives a fluid relationship between metaphor and the material world. As Hammond, Howarth and Keat note, Merleau-Ponty 'is inclined to insist that what objective thought regards as metaphorical should instead be taken as literally true of the lived world.'<sup>49</sup> A 'dreary' landscape cannot be separated into noun and adjective in the process of perception: in Merleau-Ponty's view, dreariness is a state that is constitutive of the landscape itself, and part of his own experience of it.

Bruce R Smith's approach to phenomenological analysis, although grounded in historicism, nevertheless provides an excellent model with which to clarify my own method. 'First', he writes, 'you choose an *it*, an object of study'.<sup>50</sup> In my case, this would be a textual example or excerpt from a live or recorded performance. 'Then', he explains, 'like Husserl in his study, you should ground yourself with respect to the sensations represented in the object of study or implied by it.'<sup>51</sup> This stage is, in the case of my analysis, one of intense close-reading or study: an experience that allows the example to permeate or saturate mind and body, rather than an observational exercise. The procedure is, as noted earlier, necessarily subjective, since it draws on personal memories and associations.

This first stage of phenomenological study involves recording all aspects of experiential immediacy as they occur: auditory, visual, cognitive, sensory, intuitive and imaginative. In the case of Smith's historicist study, an example may be framed by social or cultural considerations, and contextualised through other historical documents. He also poses a number of questions in order to 'ground' his analysis, such as: '[d]o you

only see when you read? Do you hear? How do you coordinate seeing with hearing? Reading with remembering?'<sup>52</sup> In the case of my own analysis, as for Smith, 'framing' the close reading is achieved by defining my perspective, and examining the context within which the example is studied. My examples are framed within the context of the play from which they are taken: this is the horizon in which I first encounter them. Grounding takes the form of reasoned questioning, during which all aspects of the experience are considered. This conscious reasoning, as Merleau-Ponty infers, is often prompted instinctively by the act of perception itself, as 'a reply to a certain kind of questioning on the part of my gaze' (see note 47). Such questions might include the following considerations: what do I visualise, or see and hear? How do I experience or imagine sound? Did the example stimulate any anticipation of touch, taste or smell in the body or senses? If so, in what way does it draw on my memories or associations with other objects or experiences? Does the rhythm or sound of the language affect my sentient response? And if so, how and why does it achieve this reaction?

As Merleau-Ponty literally frames his object within his gaze, Smith sees textual framing as a way of positioning the subject, and of defining the perspective from which analysis is taken. In my own study, there are a number of possible perspectives to investigate. With performance excerpts, for example, there is a need to take a whole range of practical considerations into account: for example, the physical conditions of the theatre, staging and audience; the actors' emotional and physical portrayals; the positioning and manipulation of the object; the tone and timbre of the actors' voices, and their dramatic delivery of the lines. In both film and stage examples, directors' and actors' interpretative choices need to be explored when contemplating the reasons for a



particular response. When watching a play or film, for example, our perceptual response to an object may be shaped by an actor's physical contact with it. Costume, setting and sound effects can also impact heavily on our experience of a performance. In the case of film productions, the director decides how much or little of the action is revealed to an audience's gaze, and for how long: and this is a further point for consideration. These areas of analysis are discussed as they arise in the case studies that follow.

Merleau-Ponty's three stages of sense-perception, as described above, appear to encapsulate a step-by-step recording of experiential immediacy, through which questioning naturally arises. Smith's approach to phenomenological analysis seems to consist of two clear stages: the noting of the subject's immediate intuitive experience, and the subsequent consideration of those findings through contextualisation. Smith describes this process as a 'reader/sensor ↔ world paradigm'.<sup>53</sup> In the case of my own analysis, there are also two clear stages of study: the recording of my initial immediate response to the example, and a second-stage of reflection and contextualisation that encompasses an exploration of Shakespeare's dramatic techniques and skill in creating the initial perceptual impact. This process includes a consideration of how the exercise of close study has affected my understanding and appreciation of the text as a whole. It is during the second stage of analysis that consideration may also be given to future performance possibilities, reflecting Husserl's idea that an important part of the phenomenological attitude is our ability to imaginatively vary our perception: '[f]or if we were confined to our immediate perception we could not imagine instances where this might not be so.'<sup>54</sup>

In common with Don Ihde's *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, therefore, my research appropriates 'some aspects of techniques known broadly as phenomenological'<sup>55</sup> that it considers to be eminently suitable to Shakespearean analysis. As Stanton B Garner Jr explains, 'phenomenology is less a systematic set of methodological aims than a particularizing mode of attention.'<sup>56</sup> In this study, therefore, phenomenology provides access to a particular way of close-reading Shakespeare, on the page, stage and on film. It also helps to illuminate the way Shakespeare imbues objects of the imagination with intensely visceral qualities, considering how objects of the mind in Shakespeare's plays are conjured through language that appeals directly to the senses, and to our embodied memories of sentient and tactile experiences. We respond to his rich metaphorical language using a similar process to that used in visual perception, when multiple senses are also involved in our apprehension of phenomena. According to Merleau-Ponty, as Hammond, Russell and Keat explain, the more senses that are involved in the act of perception, the more intense our experience: '[i]f one perceives an object with only one sense, it may appear less real than if one could perceive that same object with more senses.'<sup>57</sup> Merleau-Ponty describes how an object's properties are apprehended by the body, as well as visually perceived: 'one sees the springiness of steel, the ductility of red-hot steel, the hardness of a plane blade, the softness of shavings', he writes, and 'the form of a fold in linen or cotton shows us the resilience or dryness of the fibre, the coldness or warmth of the material.'<sup>58</sup>

In the same way, he sees bodily experience as inseparable from our intellectual or psychological responses: the body is not merely a machine driven by a set of neural networks, but part of our way of experiencing our world. Consciousness is not a 'pure

being-for-itself', but 'a perceptual consciousness'<sup>59</sup> in which tactile experiences can take place. His study of patients suffering from what he terms 'phantom-limb' syndrome – where actual sensations continue to be felt by the patient after amputation in the spatial area where the limb was once located – show, in his opinion, pre-programmed actions by the body, rather than psychological decisions to move or feel. For Merleau-Ponty, such a patient identifies himself with his world through the meaning of his body, so 'to have a phantom arm is to remain open to all the actions of which the arm alone is capable; it is to retain the practical field which one enjoyed before mutilation.'<sup>60</sup> The body is therefore pre-conditioned in some way with what Merleau-Ponty describes as a 'body schema' that connects it intuitively and kinaesthetically with the world. In this way, the phantom limb of an amputee 'is not a recollection, it is a quasi-present and the patient feels it now [...] with no hint of its belonging to the past.'<sup>61</sup> The experience stimulated by memory in this case is far more vital than that produced by a simple recall. 'The memories called up before the patient induce in him a phantom limb, not as an image in associationism summons up another image, but because any memory reopens time lost to us and invites us to recapture the situation evoked.'<sup>62</sup> What Merleau-Ponty is stressing, here, is that memory is not purely an intellectual process. The memory may be stimulated by thought, but 'it would not be memory if the object which it constructs were not still held by a few intentional threads to the horizon of the lived-through past.'<sup>63</sup>

For Merleau-Ponty, then, the body is not 'conceived as an object of the world, but as our means of communication with it.'<sup>64</sup> For Shakespeare, a way of communicating with his audience in the most direct sense is by activating this intimate

relationship between body, memory, and lived experience. He achieves this through complex and powerful linguistic stimuli, appealing to the imagination, which in turn galvanises our store of sentient memory. These transfers of memory are conduits between past and present, connecting us to bodily experience through 'intentional threads' that vivify recall. Shakespeare uses this phenomenon to enhance visual stimuli for his audience, by employing language to trigger a quasi-sensible response through imagination and memory. To give an example of how this works: if we are gazing at a blanket lying folded on a bed before us, we may know it is blue or grey, but our past experience of the object can also evoke an anticipation of how the blanket will feel against the skin: its properties of thickness, denseness or roughness. If we have ever held a similar object in the past, part of our perception will be a sense of its weight. In addition, as previously noted, it is possible for us to imaginatively vary our perception of the object: to lift it, move it or rotate it in the mind. Although the blanket may be folded, we are aware that it will appear much wider, but thinner, when spread out on a bed. Add to this phenomenal power of visual perception the stimulation of rich metaphorical language, which galvanises our imaginative powers, and we are able to experience a mass of complex responses that can in turn redefine or transfigure the way we perceive the object. It becomes part of a new experience, in fact, to be added to our store of memories culled from previous associations with the object. Thus we continually extend our lived experience, and enrich our store of sentient and tactile embodied experience. Husserl suggests that perception is not simply about the reception of 'images or sense-data'. What we perceive are, in fact, '*real transcendent properties*' of an object.<sup>65</sup> This seems to imply that we do more than see and make assumptions about the object: in

some way, we experience its qualities, or its essence, through the imprint of our prior contact with it, and through our ability to intuitively recall sensations or emotions we associate with it. This ability is what enables us to feel fear at the sight of a murderous weapon on stage, or to empathise with a character's longing to wrap himself in a warm and comforting blanket: we anticipate the feelings and sensations such an object can stimulate.

Shakespeare employs this intuitive potential to outstanding effect, utilising our perceptual 'toolkit' to help us vividly experience objects in the realm of consciousness, through our embodied memories of previous contact with their real counterparts in the material world. There is a fascinatingly fluid and complex relationship between language and material in Shakespeare's work. Close study reveals that text and object cannot always be separately categorized. As this study illustrates throughout, Shakespeare weaves the concepts of objects' material qualities into the meaning and structure of language, using metaphor, sound and rhythm to embed those qualities, and their semantic loadings, within his words. As Simon Palfrey notes, 'what he often does do is tap into the physical sources that underlie even the most abstract figure of speech.'<sup>66</sup> This is aptly illustrated by Palfrey's analysis of Lady Macbeth's speech in which she begs heaven not to peep through "'the *blanket* of the dark'" (*Macbeth*, 1.5.52).<sup>67</sup> For Palfrey, the blanket 'evokes at once the desire to hide from self-truth (in sleep or deception), and an unavoidable summons to the restless recapitulations of insomnia or sleepwalking.' It represents 'a childlike cocoon of safety, warmth, sleep – or of course amnesia.'<sup>68</sup> The object's properties of heaviness and density, mentioned earlier, are also linked to the qualities of night and darkness. A blanket can be used to

deaden sound (associated perhaps with the 'dead' of night), and can smother as well as hide. This is not to say that an audience member, hearing the metaphor for the first time, will consciously make all these associations. But in our instantaneous perceptual response, some at least of these aspects will be intuitively recognised and fused with an imaginative perception of night. For the reader and scholar, of course, there is time to absorb and consider the complex metaphors Shakespeare employs. For the audience member, the theatre offers a more immediate and physical experience, and the presence of the actor enhances our appreciation of the text in a different way. One of the advantages of attending a live performance is that we may also experience the physical reverberation as well as the tone and timbre of the actors' voices (although later chapters comment on our ability to rehearse sound in the intuitive imagination). Shakespeare's language attacks our senses on a variety of fronts, and the use of particular combinations of sound and rhythm is a vital part of the perceptual experience for the reader or audience member, who may respond to them in an intuitive sense in both instances. We imaginatively sample sound in the mind, body and senses, in the way we might anticipate the flavor of a delicious food when it is laid before us, or vividly described.

Shakespeare uses the complex relationship between mind, sight and senses to swell an audience's perceptual experience of his plays. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the actor playing Romeo is required to force open Juliet's tomb in full view of his audience. However the tomb is represented on stage, to Romeo – and to his audience – it becomes a 'womb of death | Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth' (*Romeo and Juliet*, 5.3.45-6). Romeo forces its 'rotten jaws to open' (5.3.47) with a 'mattock' and 'wrenching iron' (5.3.22): tools surely more associated with burglary than with entry

into a sacred resting place. Even for an audience, confronted by a carefully constructed, realistic representation of a tomb on stage, verbal imagery can supplement what is seen: 'rotten jaws' simultaneously conveys an image of decay and a sense of feeding and devouring. Romeo's descriptive accompaniment to his action of forcing open the tomb suggests sexual violation, an idea borne out by his words when he sees Juliet's body: 'Shall I believe | That unsubstantial death is amorous' (5.3.102-3). The tomb is thus associated with the bridal bedroom, echoing Juliet's earlier words: '[m]y grave is like to be my wedding-bed' (1.4.248).

For an audience, then, perception is not limited to a single perspective of the on-stage tomb, even for those with a restricted view. Romeo's words aid the mind and senses, transfiguring an audience's perception of the physical object to a 'womb of death' in the imagination: an opening to be entered and impregnated with new life. The metaphor fuses the concepts of darkness, birth and death, stimulating a sense of expectancy of the combination of life and death that Romeo is to discover within. To the audience, the vault (normally associated with death) is simultaneously a womb capable of bearing life, for it is apparent that Juliet still lives. Furthermore, the image of 'rotten jaws' links this living tomb with horrific beasts of myth and nightmare, intensifying the atmosphere of fear and darkness that Shakespeare conjures in this scene. In this one example, an audience's perception of an onstage object may be transfigured by the skilful use of metaphor, resulting in a complex sensual and intuitive adjustment of what it finally experiences as the tomb. As readers, the fusion of images of tomb and bestial jaws takes place effortlessly in the mind, as one image fluidly distorts or shapes another.

Watching a play enacted on stage, part of the experience is an anticipation of actors' movements and behaviour. When Macbeth reaches to clutch the illusory dagger, or Romeo prises open the tomb, this anticipation is grounded, for the audience member, in both mind and body. It is possible to anticipate the feeling of the knife's cold metal, and what it is like to close our fingers around its hilt. The weight of the stone Romeo is trying to move becomes apparent from his actions and from his words. Merleau-Ponty explains this anticipation of movement as an experience of our 'phenomenal body' rather than our solid or 'objective body': 'our body, as the potentiality of this or that part of the world, surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them'.<sup>69</sup> We therefore intuitively sketch movement, sensing it in the body, in the flash of anticipation before actual movement takes place. This experience is brought about through visual stimuli: by watching an actor moving on stage, for example. It can also be motivated purely by language. The following discussion illustrates both of these scenarios.

The first example is a small case study, taken from a drama class observed by the writer of this study. It demonstrates how emotions and senses are affected through visual stimuli alone. The exercise called for two blindfolded students to search on the floor for a set of car keys, which had been placed around the perimeter of a circle of about fifteen students seated on chairs. The exercise was carried out in silence; if a blindfolded student appeared to be colliding with a seated student, the latter moved him or her gently away to continue searching. The aim of the exercise was to promote careful listening for movement. The blindfolded students took quite some time to locate the keys, and afterwards confessed to amazement at the disorientation they had experienced within a space they were ordinarily quite familiar with. However, they gradually began to



develop a method of sweeping the floor area with their hands, in an attempt to locate and grasp the keys. What was interesting was the response of the watching students, whose sense of frustration grew rapidly as their blindfolded classmates continually missed touching the keys. Those observing began involuntarily to mime grasping movements, silently and physically demonstrating their pent-up emotions when the fingers of a searching participant narrowly failed to locate the objects. The exercise illustrated – in purely physical terms – the sense of anticipation we experience in our bodies in response to a powerful visual stimulus: a factor that Merleau-Ponty regards as a vital component of our perceptual toolkit. As he explains, ‘each stimulus applied to the body of the normal person arouses a kind of “potential movement,” rather than an actual one’.<sup>70</sup> In this instance, the frustration created from observing another’s fruitless action led to actual mimed physical responses from the audience. The exercise clearly demonstrates the way visual stimuli can provoke an intensely physical response. The next example, taken from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, shows how language alone can create a vivid sense of physical presence and atmosphere that appeals to both reader and theatre audience.

The Chorus’s speech in 4.0 sets a scene of almost palpable atmosphere on the evening prior to the battle of Agincourt, through its subtle and complex appeal to the senses. The scene follows a short and somewhat boastful exchange between the French nobles, in which the latter prematurely congratulate themselves on their assured victory. The Chorus pans his audience’s imaginative gaze away from the French camp and across towards the English, ushering in the damp darkness with vivid accuracy:

Now entertain conjecture of a time

When creeping murmur and the poring dark  
Fills the wide vessel of the universe. (*Henry V*, 4.0.1-3)

The mood is suddenly subdued and gentle: the active verb – ‘entertain’ – is more of an invitation than a command to imagine. The scene changes slowly, in almost filmic fashion. ‘Creeping murmur’ transmits the ‘hum of either army stilly sounds’ (4.1.5) and the sense of stealthy movement, of both creeping sound and oncoming darkness.

‘Poring’ suggests a liquid action, and density of substance. Gary Taylor notes, ‘the darkness makes the observer “pore” or strain his eyes to see’ (Note 4.0.2). Shakespeare uses this concept again in *Macbeth*, when ‘light thickens’ (*Macbeth*, 3.2.53). The suggestion of movement is quietly insistent: atmosphere itself is travelling, gradually filling every available space. This sense of motion is all-pervading: felt in and around the body as a ‘creeping’ force. The concept of the ‘wide universe’ subtly introduces an anticipation of breadth and depth, while at the same time the image of the ‘poring dark’ conveys the impression of thick fluid fused with the dense quality of darkness. By posing the universe as a container to be filled by the ‘poring’ action of the night, the image seems to stretch and bulge imaginatively, evoking a sense of density and substance. The container then mutates into a ‘foul womb’ (4.0.3), harbouring the as yet unborn battle: a birth that can only result in death. Shakespeare uses a similar metaphor in Romeo’s description of Juliet’s tomb as a ‘womb of death’, as discussed above (*Romeo and Juliet*, 5.3.45).

The Chorus positions his audience centrally between the French and English camps, and his words evoke sounds and images from both: a back and forth action that

recalls the tennis match, linked with the concept of war, in Henry's speech to the French ambassador in 1.2.

From camp to camp through the foul womb of night  
The hum of either army stilly sounds,  
That the fixed sentinels almost receive  
The secret whispers of each other's watch.  
Fire answers fire, and through their paly flames  
Each battle sees the other's umbered face.  
Steed threatens steed, in high and boastful neighs  
Piercing the night's dull ear. (4.0.3-11)

These words succinctly encapsulate the night's stillness, its atmosphere of subdued, patient waiting, and the low murmur of voices punctuated suddenly by the sharp sounds of horses neighing. Sound itself draws attention to the lack of movement in the scene: the hum of voices seems to hang in the air, in its dull monotone, and reflects the mood of the English soldiers, awaiting their fate. The closeness of the camps is established by the proximity of the watch, and the unforgettable image of the 'umbered' faces discernible through the camp fire flames. 'Umbere' is glossed by Collins Dictionary as '1) a type of dark brown earth containing ferric oxide (rust)' and '2) dark brown to reddish-brown'.<sup>71</sup> The image is arrestingly pictorial, with the faces lit by the glow of the fire and the bodies otherwise engulfed or framed by darkness. The metaphor implies that the soldiers are looking up and through the flames; their faces appearing burned or charred from the fire's glow, while the pale tips of the flames make them visible. In this moment, there is no difference between the common French and English soldiers, as they mirror each other in the flames. The choice of 'umbered', a colour from the earth itself, links both sets of faces with vulnerable mortality. Although Shakespeare does not include a scene showing the lives of the French rank and file, whose 'mercenary blood'

is to soak their Princes on the morrow (4.7.71), he does offer, in this quiet instance, a glimpse of their existence. The English may be '[l]ike sacrifices, by their watchful fires' (4.0.23), but it is the French who are actually slaughtered in their thousands on the morrow.

The concept of sound plays a vital role in the creation of this scene's atmosphere, engendering an appreciation of the fearful task awaiting the English. The Chorus has already established the dullness and stillness of the air, therefore the sounds of '[t]he armourers, accomplishing the knights, | With busy hammers closing rivets up' (12-13) also stand out in the imaginative perception. The armourers' steady, metallic hammering, in 'dreadful note of preparation' (14), suggests the image of a gallows being erected, piece by piece, with the prisoner unable to escape from his appointed execution yet condemned to listen to the inexorable construction of his place of death. In such a tense atmosphere, a single sound can be all pervading. The image resonates with Henry's awareness of '[h]ow dread an army hath enrounded him' (36). Added to these sounds come the crowing of cocks and tolling of clocks, which name 'the third hour of drowsy morning' (16), marking the hours till daylight. Language slows down the passage of time in our perception, by conveying us unhurriedly from scene to scene, and introducing an imagined background of sounds which accentuate the deadened foreground atmosphere. Long vowels, such as those in 'note', 'crow', 'toll', 'drowsy' and 'name' help to draw out the spoken sounds, and the feeling of tired, slow movement is personified in the 'foul and ugly witch' of night, 'cripple tardy-gaited', who 'doth limp | So tediously away' (20-22). Here, time itself is deformed, and becomes incapable of its normal speed and action.

The above reading reveals a poetic technique that draws an audience into the intimate space of individual perception, while still ensuring a sense of inclusion as a member of the audience community. It also demonstrates a different type of perceptual experience to that of the students watching the key hunt in the classroom: one that relies only upon language. Once again, it should be noted that, as listening audience members, our experience will necessarily be influenced by our physical presence as part of the body of an audience, as well as through the choices the director makes in presenting the scene and by the actors' movements, voices and expressions as they deliver the lines. However, the point to be made here is that Shakespeare uses both the potential of physical theatre, and the power of evocative language to shape his audience's perception. The rich metaphors that evince an apprehension of physical and tactile experience in the reader also work in the same way to vitally supplement an audience's visual perception of onstage action.

The above discussion highlights the vital role of the body in the way the world is perceived. Both visual and linguistic stimuli can elicit visceral responses, reinforcing Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body exists 'in the realm of the potential'<sup>72</sup> as well as the physical, and it is in this potential that physical movements may be rehearsed by an audience member watching and listening to a play. Merleau-Ponty observes that when patients lose the ability to imaginatively project their bodily actions, they also lose what he sees as the vital unity of the senses. He notes one injured patient, for example, who was unable to describe the position of his arm without first manipulating it. Instead of movement being an instinctive reaction via tactile recognition and perception, the patient had to substitute 'a laborious decoding of stimuli and deduction of objects'.<sup>73</sup>

The vital link between the body and intuitive imagination that had enabled him to both visualise himself moving, and kinaesthetically sense the movement spatially, had somehow been damaged or severed. Merleau-Ponty's studies of such problems serve to underline the complexity of the way perception functions in a holistic sense, and the inseparable connection between bodily senses and imagination. He describes the problems of Schneider, a World War One patient whose sight was seriously (but not totally) impaired by a shell wound at the back of the neck. Although Schneider could see a fountain pen held before him, if the clip was turned away from him, he could not grasp the idea that it was a pen. Instead, he tended to list its qualities in order to deduce its function: '[i]t is black, blue and shiny [...] There is a white patch on it, and it is rather long; it has the shape of a stick [...] It shines and reflects light. It could also be a coloured glass.' Merleau-Ponty notes, '[t]he sensory givens are limited to suggesting these meanings as a fact suggests a hypothesis to the physicist.'<sup>74</sup> He concludes that visual impairment seems to have attacked 'the symbolic function' of Schneider's imagination. What is damaged is his 'power of apprehending simultaneous wholes, and in the matter of motility, that, so to speak, of taking a bird's eye view of movement and projecting it outside himself.'<sup>75</sup> Merleau-Ponty recalls that another patient could knock on a door if he was put within reach of it, but 'could no longer do so if the door [was] hidden or merely out of reach.'<sup>76</sup> In other words, he was unable to trace or mime the act of knocking, without contact with the real door. Again, these strange problems illuminate the organic way human perception links bodily senses with imagination, intuition and memory.

Merleau-Ponty sees the subject's experience of objects as part of a projection of the body into the world. The physical sense of projection that he describes is, as understood by this work, a sense of anticipation experienced by a subject, prior to his physical contact with the object. For example, in reaching out to grasp something, the body-subject intuitively senses the contact a micro instant before it physically takes place. He anticipates – through instantaneous interaction between memory, sense and imagination – how a carpet is going to feel, or how heavy the telephone receiver will be in his hands. Taking this a step further, a similar reaction may be stimulated through descriptive language, which can access memories of physical contact stored within the body, as the above example from *Henry V* shows. This sense of anticipation – the body's spatial and tactile awareness of its world – is of integral importance to the way Shakespeare's plays galvanise his audience's intuitive perceptual abilities, and evoke a complex response to visual and linguistic stimuli.

At times, the body itself becomes an object to the perceptual gaze: a phenomenon that is discussed particularly in Chapters Four and Six, on *Titus Andronicus* and *Macbeth*. For Bruce Wilshire, the physical presence of objects and bodies is vital for the creation of a vivid sense of presence. He argues that '[t]he more nearly immediate perceptual sense of things is rendered by theatre, while analysis and synthesis of the concepts embedded therein are rendered by philosophy. Both are essential for revealing; they are interdependent.'<sup>77</sup> This study suggests, however, that 'analysis' and 'concept' cannot be neatly and purely classified in the realm of philosophy, and '[t]he more nearly immediate perceptual sense of things' simply categorised under the heading of live theatre. What is perceived, and the way it is

perceived are, as Wilshire indeed also recognises, interdependent with analysis and thought, and as Shakespeare's work amply shows, both live performance and textual reading rely on an intuitive perceptual set-up within the human body-subject, that needs to be accessed if the individual is to be drawn into the world of the play. Although the reading experience and the audience experience will ultimately differ in various ways, the point here is that Shakespeare employs techniques that call upon the same intuitive and imaginative powers that draw on our stored sentient memories as well as our intellects, in studying a text or listening to and watching a play. That process can both vivify a reading of the texts, and deeply enhance visual perception for an audience. Chapters Three to Seven will scrutinise Shakespeare's engineering of this intricate procedure through examples from page, stage and film.

Before moving on to these case studies, however, I would like to conclude by exploring certain similarities between the general principles underlying a phenomenological approach to analysis, and those governing studies in cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics. As mentioned earlier, these are emerging disciplines that have developed through the influence of cognitive science and psychology on the field of linguistics. As Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green explain in *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*: cognitive linguistics 'differs from other approaches to the study of language' in that 'language is assumed to reflect certain fundamental properties and design features of the human mind'.<sup>78</sup> Cognitive linguists relate the systematic function of language to the way the mind is structured. The structure of language therefore sheds important light on the way the mind works. The interesting link between this new discipline and phenomenological analysis is the stress placed on the vital role



of the body in terms of our perception. At the heart of much research in cognitive linguistics is the 'embodied cognition thesis': '[t]his thesis holds that the human mind and conceptual organisation are functions of the ways in which our species-specific bodies interact with the environment we inhabit.'<sup>79</sup> Like Merleau-Ponty, cognitive linguists do not believe that the body and mind should be treated as separate entities: cognitive linguistics 'takes its inspiration from traditions in psychology and philosophy that emphasise the importance of human existence, the centrality of the human body, and human-specific cognitive structure and organisation, all of which affect the nature of our experience.'<sup>80</sup> Perceptual and conceptual systems are still very much seen as bound together, and language is the catalyst that evokes a 'mental representation of reality, as construed by the human mind, mediated by our unique perceptual and conceptual systems.'<sup>81</sup>

Cognitive linguists see the way language is organised as a direct reflection of the way we respond to our world: through the mind and body. There are two main categories of experience: sensory experience, which 'concerns perceptual data derived from the external world', and '**introspective** or **subjective** experience', that concerns 'emotion, consciousness, and experiences of time such as awareness of duration, simultaneity and so on.'<sup>82</sup> Cognitive linguistics therefore 'emphasises the role of meaning'<sup>83</sup> rather than grammar, although they are not seen as separable.

Cognitive poetics applies principles taken from cognitive linguistics to literary criticism, focussing on meaning rather than grammatical aspects of the text. It is therefore of interest to my own study of Shakespeare in this respect. Gavins and Steen clarify that cognitive poetics offers more than 'an academic's sheer individual interest in

a particular text': it 'ties the study of literature in with linguistics, psychology, and cognitive science in general.'<sup>84</sup> Gavins and Steen explain that the changing presentation of art forms via media are altering the way literary art is viewed, and are therefore shaping a new approach to literary criticism. They also observe that '[n]ew approaches in cognitive anthropology, psychology, linguistics, and artificial intelligence have led to a completely new set of concepts, theories and insights'<sup>85</sup> that may be utilised by the student of literature. 'Part of this undertaking', they point out, 'are associations, images, feelings, emotions and social attitudes',<sup>86</sup> that have hitherto not played a large part in the study of linguistics. Peter Stockwell notes that '[t]he traditional dominant view of western philosophy has regarded reason as a product exclusively of the mind, and the rational mind has been treated as being separate from the material body.'<sup>87</sup> However, cognitive science argues 'that reason (as well as perception, emotion, belief and intuition) are literally **embodied** – inextricably founded in our bodily interaction and experience with the world.'<sup>88</sup> This grounding of intellect, emotion, sense and intuition within the body echoes the work of Merleau-Ponty, who sees the body as a 'synergetic system',<sup>89</sup> an integrated site of activity that fuses imaginative forces with physical, sentient, intuitive, emotional and cognitive abilities.

For Gavins and Steen, cognitive poetics is not 'just an offshoot of cognitive science,' but is 'first and foremost a new brand of poetics':<sup>90</sup> a poetics that is interested in defining the conditions of meaning – again, throwing light on the way that understanding is formed, rather than simply interpreting the text. As such, this new form of poetics has a number of things in common with this study's approach to the exploration of language in Shakespeare's plays, in that it focusses on reader response to

the text. Gavins and Steen explain that cognitive linguistics assumes 'a close connection between experience, cognition and language.'<sup>91</sup> According to Friedrich Ungerer and Hans-Jörg Schmid, cognitive linguists believe that '[o]ur shared experience of the world is also stored in our everyday language and can thus be gleaned from the way we express our ideas.'<sup>92</sup> They thus analyse language in order to recover these threads of experience.

A very simple example of the different analytical approaches of cognitive poetics and phenomenology is as follows. In *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics*, Ungerer and Schmid analyse a simple statement: 'Susan's going to London next month'<sup>93</sup> in terms of a 'Motion Event' that foregrounds the final/goal destination, while leaving out her present position or state (known as the 'source'), and the intermediate 'window' or 'state': the travelling itself. Omitted windows are labelled as 'gapped'.<sup>94</sup> Describing the concept of movement towards a goal in metonymic terms, Susan's movement towards the goal can be seen as the intended action. The predicted state (the achievement of the goal), is seen as being in London. The various states of being or intention are therefore defined and labelled, to facilitate our full understanding of the way the sentence works. A phenomenological reading of the same example takes a different approach, focussing on the projected movement of Susan's body. In such an analysis, the reader does not simply visualise Susan's projection towards London. I would suggest, for example, that there is a strong sense of intentional movement that is apprehended in the reader's body, even though the journey is not to take place until 'next month'. In fact, as the statement is read, the journey seems to take place immediately within the imaginative perception, so that Susan's transfer to London is

visualised and sensed in the moment of reading, even though it has not yet actually occurred. There are no details of the mode of transport, but they are unnecessary. The surge of movement itself is in some way traced, or rehearsed, within the mind and body. The use of the present tense, 'is going', rather than the future, 'will go', brings the future into the present amid a sense of continuous being.

Both analyses above show a concern with the way time and motion are presented in the sentence, but express them in different ways. There are many different analytical methods within and connected to cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics, some of which rely heavily on structural approaches, and others more nearly allied to close-reading methods employed in literary criticism. Peter Stockwell explains that cognitive poetics, using general principles governing cognitive linguistics, is '[c]oncerned with literary reading', but 'with both a psychological and a linguistic dimension',<sup>95</sup> and is based on the view that 'all forms of expression and forms of conscious perception are bound, more closely than was previously realised, in our biological circumstances.'<sup>96</sup>

Although there are some similarities in the underlying principles that govern cognitive poetics and phenomenological analysis, the difference in the initial approach through phenomenology is fundamental, in that it relies entirely on the subject's immediate experience of the text or performance. As Ihde notes, phenomenology does not appear to be 'vastly distinct from some contemporary philosophies, except that it takes as its primary evidence the region of fulfillable experiential immediacy as a starting point.'<sup>97</sup> In addition to the consideration of how language shapes perception in Shakespeare, this thesis explores the relationship between object, language and audience – both the audience as anticipated by the reader, and through actual audience

experience. In this way, the study encompasses a broad scope that is aptly served by the flexible approach of phenomenological close-reading. Having said this, general principles underlying the discipline of cognitive poetics may offer some interesting insights in terms of the second stage of analysis, during further exploration and contextualisation of my initial response to linguistic stimuli. Any such comments, therefore, are noted at appropriate points throughout the case studies, where similarities and differences in approach between cognitive poetics and phenomenological enquiry can be usefully illuminated. Due to limitations of space, however, a more detailed discussion on this topic would need to be the subject of a separate work.

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### CHAPTER THREE

#### Something From Nothing: Weaving Words and Worlds in *Othello*

It is not words that shakes me thus  
(*Othello*, 4.1.41)<sup>1</sup>

As the first of five case studies that investigate Shakespeare's use of language and object to create and shape reader and audience perception in his plays, Chapter Three focuses on *Othello*, taking for its primary example that most famous of stage properties, Desdemona's handkerchief. *Othello* is a useful place to begin these studies, since Shakespeare uses its central characters to demonstrate, with consummate skill, how perception may be influenced and even transfigured. This chapter therefore begins by looking at Othello's important role in shaping Desdemona's – and our – perceptions of the handkerchief. It explores Iago's manipulation of the object, and his skilled use of language, through which he moulds Othello's perception of Desdemona. The discussion includes analysis of highly visceral images that impact vividly on both characters and audience, and considers how language is used to subtly imbue the handkerchief with highly subjective qualities. It also briefly considers – through examples taken from Wilson Milam's 2007 production at Shakespeare's Globe, and Oliver Parker's 1995 film – how choices made by actors and directors can affect audience perception of the play in performance.

In its literary afterlife, Desdemona's handkerchief has inspired a wide range of critical readings: symbolic, iconic, cultural and political, psychological and emblematic: exciting attention that is almost as obsessive as Othello's own preoccupation with it in the play. Frances Teague, for example, sees the handkerchief as an 'index to character', and notes that Othello regards the object as a 'symbol of himself'.<sup>2</sup> She also suggests that the object may be viewed as a magic charm that represents Othello's parents' marriage 'and its product, himself', so that 'the handkerchief has the magic to maintain his own marriage.'<sup>3</sup> Finally, Teague links the object symbolically with Desdemona's wedding sheets, which become 'another version of the handkerchief.'<sup>4</sup>

The handkerchief's remarkable influence over the play's action, however, is due as much to its absence, as to its material presence. Catherine Richardson regards it as a present-absence and absent-presence that 'ultimately speaks loudly about memory and grief as a desire for presence.'<sup>5</sup> It therefore encapsulates the poignant loss of Desdemona's life: a connection that continues in the famous object's literary afterlife. For Lina Perkins-Wilder, the object is 'an emblem of all that is invisible in this play':<sup>6</sup> a link with hidden secrets and spun stories within the text. Its absent presence is caught up in the web of words that create and shape characters' perceptions of themselves, the world they inhabit, and of each other. Caroline Chillington Rutter labels the handkerchief 'Shakespeare's fatal diva of semiotic virtuosity',<sup>7</sup> inferring the complexity of its role as signifier, and its vital existence as an additional cast member. The object inspires this interesting reaction through its mutating roles in the visible and non-visible world of the play. Rutter notes that in performance the handkerchief 'begins life incognito, doing humble housework' as a napkin.<sup>8</sup> Its sinister production history is not

known until after its disappearance from Desdemona's possession. Othello then spins a chilling tale of its manufacture: one associated with death and religious sacrifice that already disturbingly presages Desdemona's fate:

'Tis true, there's magic in the web of it.  
A sibyl that had numbered in the world  
The sun to course two hundred compasses,  
In her prophetic fury sewed the work;  
The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,  
And it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful  
Conserved of maidens' hearts. (3.4.71-7)

Othello reports that the handkerchief was a gift to his mother from an Egyptian, who 'was a charmer and could almost read | The thoughts of people' (3.4.59-60). It is identified by Othello as a site of immense power, an object capable, in fact, of governing the behaviour of his parents: '[t]would make her amiable and subdue my father | Entirely to her love' (3.4.61-2). The handkerchief therefore has the power to evoke a constant state of anxiety in the woman who possesses it: the object must be kept safe, for its loss threatens marital love and support. From this perspective, the recipe for a successful marriage is entirely in the hands of the female, embodied by an object which, as the obsessive focus of her attention, begins to control her behaviour. The handkerchief becomes, in fact, a surrogate for her husband, who thus ensures that his wife's attention is in some way always fixed upon him. Harry Berger Jr comments: the handkerchief symbolises 'first the wife's sexual power over her husband and then the chastity that the husband demands as an always-inadequate place-holder for the virginity she lost when she subdued him to her love.'<sup>9</sup> Rutter notes that the object not only acts as a 'reminder (something that makes [Desdemona] remember *now*)', it also 'dredges up the past'. It recalls memories of Othello's mother and father, its own magical

production, 'Brabantio's hysterical ravings back in Venice',<sup>10</sup> and Othello's recollection of his own wooing, a tale that recounts and illustrates the bewitching power of words. Othello uses the object as a powerful threat: '[t]o lose't or give't away were such perdition | As nothing else could match' (3.4.69-70). His words imbue the handkerchief with a value beyond that of life itself. As Rutter writes, Othello's story of its production 'constructs it an unforgiving God with a death-wish, terminal perdition.'<sup>11</sup>

The link between the handkerchief and Desdemona's chastity is strengthened by a reference to the dye in which the material has been steeped; the use of 'mummy, which the skilful | Conserved of maidens' hearts' (3.4.76-7), implies the sacrifice of virgins in the production process, and infuses the handkerchief with bodily significance. 'Mummy' is glossed by Honigmann as 'medicinal liquid, supposedly made from embalmed bodies' (Note 3.4.76). Such an implication effectively creates an air of life-threatening power surrounding the object that, although couched in terms of the magical and supernatural, nevertheless threatens Desdemona's happiness and safety in very real and practical terms. The suggestion of embalmed flesh in connection with the handkerchief – and by association, with Desdemona's body – is an uncomfortable one. The act of embalming infers a chilling desire to unnaturally preserve or sanctify. Othello's ability to charge a small, otherwise insignificant object with a mass of complex meanings that radically alter the way both he and Desdemona perceive it is a reflection of disturbingly ominous patriarchal control within the marriage. It is also a testimony to Othello's powerful command of language, the only power he claims to have used to subdue Desdemona to his love: '[t]his only is the witchcraft I have used' (1.3.170) – and here employed as a terrifying threat.

Well before Othello describes the supernatural powers of the handkerchief – even before its physical appearance on stage – the play introduces the concepts of alchemy and witchcraft to its audience. These magical powers are, however, initially associated directly with Othello. In the first scene, Brabantio uneasily questions Roderigo:

Is there not charms  
By which the property of youth and maidhood  
May be abused? Have you not read, Roderigo,  
Of some such thing? (1.1.169-72)

In Scene 2, he openly accuses Othello of bewitching his daughter:

For I'll refer me to all things of sense,  
If she in chains of magic were not bound. (1.2.64-5)

and

Judge me the world if 'tis not gross in sense  
That thou hast practised on her with foul charms,  
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals  
That weakens motion. (1.2.72 – 5)

Here, admittedly, there is a sense that Brabantio may be clutching at straws: unable to accept that his daughter could love 'such a thing as' Othello (1.2.71), Brabantio prefers to resort to belief in witchcraft. Whether or not an audience accepts Brabantio's words at face value, the link between Othello and the supernatural is nevertheless irresistibly made through Shakespeare's words. Othello may be able to pass off eloquent descriptions of his youthful sufferings with: '[t]his only is the witchcraft I have used' (1.3.170), but the web of words that he constructs in order to reshape Desdemona's, and the audience's perception of the handkerchief is ominous proof of the potentially bewitching and dangerous properties of language. Merleau-Ponty points out

that when we listen to a story, we are 'possessed by it'.<sup>12</sup> During the telling, a powerful tale can affect the body and senses, and leave a residue in our past that becomes part of our lived horizon of experience. The story becomes a memory, in fact, and as such may be confused, over time, with memories of real past events. Shakespeare subtly weaves this idea into his play: Othello's description of the handkerchief, 'dyed in mummy', uncomfortably recalls a memory of an earlier, real event: Brabantio's accusation that Othello has 'abused' his daughter's 'delicate youth with drugs or minerals'. The object that becomes so intimately linked with Desdemona's sexuality in Othello's perception is, as Elizabeth Hanson puts it, '[l]iterally imbued with the body's hidden substances'.<sup>13</sup> In Othello's account, the fluid, drawn from virgins' hearts, is utilised as a form of magical drug to control sexuality and prevent adultery. This would tend to support Brabantio's claim that Othello, through his family, is connected with witchcraft. The magical power of the object lies not so much in its material production, however, but in the fabrication of its description. When Othello explains that he has used no power other than story-telling to win Desdemona's love, he confirms the potency of words. He uses that same power to recreate an object from his past, into a powerful threat in the present.

Michael C Andrews finds it difficult to believe that the handkerchief's exotic history is an unpremeditated improvisation: '[t]here is no indication that Othello is lying, nor is he elsewhere characterized as an able dissembler.'<sup>14</sup> This observation implies that the tale of the handkerchief's supernatural production might be true. Othello's power as a story-teller is remarked by the Duke early in the play, however: 'I think this tale would win my daughter too' (1.3.172). Whether or not Desdemona believes in the handkerchief's magical powers (and her shocked questioning seems to



indicate that she finds difficulty in accepting such an account), the reader or audience member is still uncomfortably aware that she has, in the past, had no difficulty in accepting Othello's traveller's tales as truth. As Calderwood points out, 'Desdemona is ravished not by Othello but by his rhetoric.'<sup>15</sup> There can be no doubt, however, that she understands the ominous threat behind Othello's description of the object, or his warning against its loss: '[t]o lose't or give't away were such perdition | As nothing else could match' (3.4.69-70). Whether or not audience members or readers are disposed to accept Othello's story, there is little doubt of the very material power this object now wields – through its absence even more than its presence. Whether or not the story of the handkerchief's production is true, there can be no doubt that Othello reconstructs Desdemona's and our perceptions of the object, from harmless love-token to a weapon of ominous conjugal control.

The handkerchief's journey through *Othello* is therefore both physical and perceptual. While the material object is passed from character to character, helping to advance and develop the plot, the object we ultimately perceive is woven into and from the fabric of characters' perceptions, attitudes and values that make up the material of the text. Perception of the material object is fused with imaginative and intuitive perception of that object as shaped through language. The play seems obsessed with the idea of crafting or shaping: characters construct their own fictional worlds for the edification of their onstage audiences, so that the offstage audience is deliberately made aware of that manufacturing process. As Alan Sinfield writes, 'all the characters in *Othello* are telling stories, and to convince others even more than themselves.'<sup>16</sup> The 'others' they strive to convince are their onstage auditors; the offstage audience is

therefore in the privileged position of hearing and observing the effect of skilled rhetoric on the play's central characters, but is itself simultaneously vulnerable to the suggestive imagery evoked by those same speeches. States points out that it is difficult not to react to the suggestion of a particular image: 'if I say to you, "[d]on't think of a furry little kitten" you're obliged to think of one, if only to reject the thought.'<sup>17</sup>

Iago's success as a linguistic manipulator is partly due to his understanding of Othello's character: of the way Othello constructs himself through narrative. As Stephen Greenblatt points out, 'Iago knows that an identity that has been fashioned as a story can be unfashioned'<sup>18</sup> and that Othello's 'identity depends upon a constant performance [...] of his "story"'.<sup>19</sup> Patricia Parker notes the power of 'Iago's manipulation of evidentialia (vicarious substitute for ocular "evidence")' in the play, for example the 'imagined bedding'<sup>20</sup> of Othello and Desdemona, with which he taunts Desdemona's father: '[e]ven now, now, very now, an old black ram | Is tuppung your white ewe!' (1.1.87-88). The images conjured by this speech are immediate and inescapable, however unwelcome they may be. As Perkins-Wilder notes, 'Iago makes matter out of the unreadable past, and he associates this act of invention with the act of generation'.<sup>21</sup> 'Tuppung' vividly suggests generative action specific to sheep, biddable animals kept largely for breeding as well as for their wool. Their mating is normally controlled by the farmer or shepherd, arranged at his convenience, and involving his choice of ram. The image conjured by Iago's words therefore suggests an unplanned, unwelcome mating, which may produce undesired black lambs, and infers a shepherd who is not in control of his flock. The choice of verb animates the image in a particular way that awakens our intuitive bodily grasp of the movement, bringing the image vividly to life. As Merleau-Ponty points out,

'[a]esthetic expression confers on what it expresses an existence in itself.'<sup>22</sup> The use of strong colour contrasts also vitalises the image, particularly as the action of 'tupping' implies that the black ram is partially covering the white ewe with his body. Elaine Scarry proposes that 'brushing one image across the surface of a second image'<sup>23</sup> lends a sense of solidity to what we visualise: a theory she illustrates through a number of detailed examples. I would posit, however, that in the above example, it is the specificity of the verb that roots this act of 'perceptual mimesis',<sup>24</sup> as Scarry terms it, in the body, and can lend it such extraordinary vivacity. Brabantio's revulsion and disbelief, so markedly evident in the text – and therefore normally portrayed thus in performance – is designed to supplement the reader's or audience member's response to Shakespeare's imagery. Visual perception is therefore fused with imaginative perception.

The bestial mating image is a stark contrast to the romantic aura that surrounds Othello's public account of his wooing and Desdemona's open proclamation of her love for him. In her own mind, Desdemona seems to figure as the contented wife of the romantic and noble traveller. As Lynda E Boose writes, '[i]n part, she falls in love with romance itself, as culture has implicitly trained her to do'.<sup>25</sup> In Othello, Desdemona creates an ideal from a story-book world, and she sees herself in that world at his side as supporting wife and lover. Her euphoric reaction to his skill as a story-teller is tinged with an underlying conflict, however, as Othello's words recall: '[s]he wished she had not heard it, yet she wished | That heaven had made her such a man' (1.3.163-4). The first wish expressed here – that Desdemona had never been exposed to Othello's stories – is one that her father clearly echoes. It is also a suggestion that continues to resonate for the play's audience, as Desdemona is drawn inexorably towards her death.

Desdemona therefore perceives no more than a projection of her husband's self-image: 'I saw Othello's visage in his mind' (1.3.253) and because of this, she fails to fully understand him. Iago is more successful in assimilating Othello's character: '[t]he Moor is of a free and open nature | That thinks men honest that but seem to be so' (1.3.398-9). He views Desdemona in a practical and unromantic light: '[t]he wine she drinks is made of grapes' (2.1.249-50), in direct contrast with the way Othello, Cassio and Roderigo see her. Clearly perceiving the weaknesses in the latter's characters, Iago turns his intuitive knowledge to destructive use. Of Cassio, he vows: 'I will gyve thee in thine own courtesies' (2.1.169-70), and of Desdemona:

So will I turn her virtue into pitch  
And out of her own goodness make the net  
That shall enmesh them all. (2.3.355-7)

In the study of cognitive poetics, Desdemona's propensity to project herself into a recognisable romance could be viewed as a form of 'parabolic projection', a term that explains 'how the notions of story and narrative, previously thought of as merely literary, are in fact essential to our everyday mental activities, and even our physical existence and social survival.'<sup>26</sup> Michael Burke explains that parabolic projection is a method through which 'readers use their everyday experience to reach an interpretation of the text and then go on to project that interpretation back onto their own lives.'<sup>25</sup> This is a helpful way of understanding how Othello, in particular, constructs his self-perceived image from a series of parabolic narratives: the foreign adventurer, the suffering outcast, the brave and respected commander, and the cuckolded husband. This final role is a projection that is shown to be entirely fabricated by Iago's tissue of lies and inferences, given substance by Othello's vulnerable imagination.

In order to fully appreciate the handkerchief's mutating role throughout the play, it is primarily important to understand this tendency of the play's central characters to construct their own narrative identities, and Iago's skill in reshaping the way characters perceive each other, themselves and the worlds they inhabit. Iago, grasping the fragility and vulnerability of these fashioned personas, knows that he can 'ensnare as great a fly as Cassio', through the simple power of suggestion: '[w]ith as little a web as this' (2.1.168-9). Iago's understanding of other characters' interiorities is one unaided by – or as he would perhaps view it – not constricted by conscience. As Stephen Greenblatt observes, Iago's ability to understand his victims is not a form of empathy, but more an improvisational grasp of how empathy works. Iago is able to perceive how empathy functions as part of a social framework, and prey upon what he sees as the weaknesses it creates within certain personalities. Greenblatt suggests that Iago 'does not need a profound or even reasonably accurate understanding of his victims'<sup>27</sup> in order to shape their perceptions of each other, and of events. Instead, he perceives a recognised system of behaviour, and of character types, and uses this knowledge to take calculated risks. For example, Greenblatt notes how Christian doctrine has embedded itself in Othello's narrative, revealing an underlying anxiety that Othello's and Desdemona's excess of sexual enjoyment could be regarded as sinful. Iago perceives this set of values, and utilises them, ensuring that Othello's jealous rage is tempered with 'the fear of pollution, defilement, [and] brutish violence that is bound up with his own experience of sexual pleasure'.<sup>29</sup>

Following the above exploration of the way characters' perceptions of themselves, each other and the handkerchief are shaped by language in the play, making

them vulnerable to manipulation, the discussion below tracks the handkerchief's journey through the play and illustrates in detail Iago's skilled manipulative tactics. The handkerchief's journey is intimately bound up with Iago's machinations: its absence proving, for the most part, more important than its presence. In 3.3.291, Othello even fails to notice that Desdemona negligently drops what he later declares to be such a precious object. When Desdemona, eager to ease the pain in Othello's forehead, offers to bind his brow with it, he pettishly replies: '[y]our napkin is too little. | Let it alone. Come, I'll go in with you' (3.3.291-2). They exit together, but not before the stage directions have implicitly noted Desdemona's action in dropping the 'napkin'. Emilia's words cast the napkin in its first new role, as a treasured love-token: 'but she so loves the token | – For he conjured her she should ever keep it' (3.3.297-8). Only in the light of Othello's later description of the object, and of the previous scene in which Iago insinuates Desdemona's unfaithfulness, does the second line of this speech sound ominous. Shakespeare's subtle use of 'conjured' recalls the first scene in Act I, in which the Moor was accused of using magic powers to bewitch Desdemona. For Emilia, the handkerchief is simply a token, a 'thing', as she later terms it (3.3.305). In Iago's hands, the love-token becomes both a political tool to gain advancement, and a weapon to exact revenge. He gradually sets the scene in which it will play its role as supposed evidence of Desdemona's infidelity. He begins by gaining Othello's confidence: by posing as a loyal and trusted friend, while at the same time filling his General's mind with torturing images. Shakespeare illustrates Iago's recognition of the potentially dangerous power of language over the body:

The Moor already changes with my poison:

Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons  
Which at first are scarce found to distaste  
But with a little art upon the blood  
Burn like the mines of sulphur. (3.3.328-32)

This speech highlights the slow and subtle, at first barely recognisable impact of inference. The reference to taste and the acrid smell of sulphur liken Iago's plotting to a chemical 'art' that sets the blood on fire.

Iago adopts generally accepted modes of social behaviour to shape the image of himself in Othello's mind as loyal friend and servitor. He tailors his utterances to express the care and devotion that a loyal servant might reasonably be expected to feel for his master, and at the same time, he introduces an air of anxiety into his conversation that quickly communicates itself to Othello's fertile imagination. The textual patterning of the characters' speeches at this point illustrates Iago's careful tactics:

*Iago*                      My noble lord –

*Othello*    What dost thou say, Iago?

*Iago*                      Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,  
Know of your love? (3.3.93-5)

Iago's hesitant questions are designed to irresistibly prompt another: to engender and sustain in Othello a thirst for answers that will eventually give way to the overmastering desire for material evidence of Desdemona's supposed guilt. The deliberate pauses and hesitations with which he precedes or intersperses his questions or statements give the impression that he is in possession of information that he is reluctant to disclose.

Iago's first tentative suggestion that he is withholding '[s]ome horrible conceit' (3.3.118), apparently too unpalatable to disclose, lends it the sense of an unpleasant truth that is extremely difficult to impart. The more Iago appears to resist interrogation, the

more Othello feels the need to uncover the concealed knowledge. Having introduced a suggestion of doubt into Othello's mind, concerning Cassio's relationship with Desdemona, Iago fuels the Moor's kindling suspicion in a few short, skilfully crafted lines that, in their apparent vagueness and evasiveness, leave a world of possibility open for Othello to explore:

<i>Iago</i>	Indeed.
<i>Othello</i>	Indeed? Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught in that? Is he not honest?
<i>Iago</i>	Honest, my lord?
<i>Othello</i>	Honest? Ay, honest.
<i>Iago</i>	My lord, for aught I know.
<i>Othello</i>	What dost thou think?
<i>Iago</i>	Think, my lord?
<i>Othello</i>	Think, my lord! By heaven, thou echo'st me As if there were some monster in thy thought Too hideous to be shown. (3.3.101-11)

Iago's tantalising repetition of the key word in each question is designed to increase Othello's thirst for answers. The puzzled manner in which Iago reiterates the words 'think' and 'honest' serves to destabilise their meanings: they become elusive quarryies that Othello must hunt for in the darkest corners of Iago's mind, if he is to discover what he perceives to be the truth behind Iago's use of them. As if to reassure himself, and terrified of discovering the 'monster' that he perceives lurking in Iago's thoughts, Othello presses for tangible evidence: '[s]how me thy thought' (3.3.119). His command stresses his reliance on visual confirmation that will enable him to easily distinguish



fiction from reality, and his craving for material proof is strengthened by Iago's hesitancy, which he perceives as evidence of honesty: '[a]nd for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty | And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath' (3.3.121-2). Iago tailors his speech to fit a generally popular perception of the loyal friend: '[m]y lord, you know I love you' (3.3.119).

For Othello, Iago's words are given weight simply because he hesitates to speak them, and because he conforms so well to a perceived social type. For Othello, whose tendency is to construct his perceived world through narrative, such social stereotypes are to be expected. He therefore accepts Iago's performance without suspicion. Iago has no difficulty in interpreting Othello's self-image. Othello sees himself as a strong and noble leader whose rank naturally commands loyalty, and engenders awe in his subordinates. Iago reinforces this idea by appearing reluctant to disclose some unpleasant truth to his General, therefore subtly managing to convey the idea that he is fearful of Othello's wrath. He then adopts the behaviour of the honest servant, who only has his master's welfare at heart, giving the impression that he is much better informed than he actually is. In this way, Shakespeare allows us to monitor, step by step, Iago's success in manipulating Othello's mind. Othello's thoughtful aside demonstrates the success of these tactics: '[t]his honest creature doubtless | Sees and knows more – much more – than he unfolds' (3.3.246-7).

Later, in 4.1, Iago employs similar techniques, but here it is Othello who becomes the echo, eagerly seizing on Iago's suggestions and materialising them in the mind as real events, suggesting his increasing vulnerability to Iago's machinations. Iago

is careful to pepper his speech with terms that suggest bodily activity, thus vividly appealing to Othello's (and our) imaginations:

*Iago* Will you think so?

*Othello* Think so, Iago?

*Iago* What,  
To kiss in private?

*Othello* An unauthorized kiss!

*Iago* Or to be naked with her friend in bed  
An hour or more, not meaning any harm? (4.1.1-4)

This scene opens as continuous action, the dramatic structure suggesting activity beyond what is immediately evident. The speech patterning reflects Iago's increasing control over Othello. The former assumes yet another well-recognised role: that of fair-minded mediator, while his words conjure images that the tortured Othello cannot help but imaginatively perceive:

Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on?  
Behold her topped? (3.3.398-99)

and

Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,  
As salt as wolves in pride. (406-7)

Iago's remark to Othello: '[i]t is impossible you should see this' (405) is richly ironic, for the images evoked by his words involuntarily invade Othello's mind and senses. They are bestial public scenes of procreation, the language appealing strongly to the senses of touch and taste with its references to heat and salt: inferring noise and energy, evoking a viscerally vivid chaos of coupling. The scene may be a fantasy, but the linguistic stimuli have a real and immediate impact on the senses. Rutter labels this

type of 'remembering' by Iago 'the pornographic cinema he has been unreeling to Othello's watch-full imaginary'.<sup>30</sup> Although this comment underlines the visually imaginative power behind the similes, it also infers a sense of experiential immediacy in the body. If, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, 'every habit is both motor and perceptual',<sup>31</sup> then perception is inextricably bound up with movement, or anticipated movement. In other words, we intuitively feel and sense what we are about to touch: reaching out for it in a kind of sensory projection, with what Merleau-Ponty terms our 'phenomenal body', that 'surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them'<sup>32</sup> in our kinaesthetic imagination, before we touch them in reality. This intuitive, tactile and sentient response is stimulated both by visual perception and through language. Merleau-Ponty's work with subjects in this area leads him to illustrate this as follows. 'If a word is shown to a subject for too short a time for him to be able to read it', he writes, 'the word "warm", for example, induces a kind of experience of warmth which surrounds him with something in the nature of a meaningful halo'.<sup>33</sup> He goes on to explain: 'the warmth which I feel [...] is not an actual warmth. It is simply my body which prepares itself for heat and which, so to speak, roughs out its outline.'<sup>34</sup> Using the same perceptual structure, auditory stimuli may produce similar effects.

Smith recognises the way both the written and spoken word can cue our tactile senses: '[w]e read, silently usually, verbal cues on the page that conjure up richly stocked visual worlds in our imagination'.<sup>35</sup> Yet, 'just as touch may be combined with vision, so may touch be combined with sound'.<sup>36</sup> He points out that hearing 'a friend's story of how a knife slipped in his hand and sliced his finger' induced him to imagine 'the feel of my flesh being sliced'.<sup>37</sup> Audience members or readers therefore 'rough out'

the images for themselves in terms of experiential immediacy in the body, reacting to the mention of heat, and anticipating the riot of noise, colour and activity associated with the wolves and monkeys described by Iago. Each individual's response to Shakespeare's language is also shaped or supplemented by Othello's reaction: his gaze is taken into account with our own. Drawing on lived experience, we anticipate his response, and this in turn heightens our reception of the image.

The animals in the similes are more vividly conveyed to our imaginative perception by the movement inferred by 'prime' and 'hot', and by their suggestions of energy and temperature. In performance, an actor's physical and emotional portrayal can heighten audience response to such language. Actors may writhe, recoil, cry out or even physically perspire, displaying actual bodily over-heating. The actor's body on stage stands in for that of the audience member: therefore signs of physical distress can arouse anticipations of heat, pain or energy for those listening and watching. Merleau-Ponty points out that 'words have a physiognomy':<sup>38</sup> they 'extract, and literally express the emotional essence'<sup>39</sup> of things. Shakespeare's careful crafting of Iago's speeches elicits a strongly visceral response by accessing what Scarry terms our 'deep structure of perception',<sup>40</sup> that fuses intuition with intellect, thought with sense and feeling. As readers and audience members, therefore, we respond to the speeches on a subjective level, while understanding their effect on Othello, and appreciating Iago's – and Shakespeare's – linguistic virtuosity.

For Othello, language and thought become almost as material forms, to be grasped, possessed, pursued into the darkest corners of Iago's mind, while Iago uses them as weapons against Othello that torture the latter's mind and body. Othello's

obsessive raking of Iago's mind for evidence takes the form of insistent questions and demands: '[w]hy of thy thought, Iago?' (3.3.98); '[w]hat dost thou think?' (107); '[s]how me thy thought' (119); and '[b]y heaven, I'll know thy thoughts!' (164). His desperation to separate image from reality is expressed in highly physical terms: '[m]ake me to see't' (3.3.367). Iago's assault on his General's imagination is progressively degenerating: for Othello, speech becomes disjointed, and he is seized by fits of uncontrolled bodily action as Iago's 'pestilence' (2.3.351), poured into his ear, runs its course.

Once the idea of Desdemona's adultery has taken a firm hold in Othello's mind, Iago sets about providing the proof that Othello so ardently fears and desires. The first step in this process is to lend his fiction an undoubted air of authenticity. He therefore presents his story of Cassio's dream as an apparent eye-witness account. Although not material evidence in itself, the dream subtly suggests the concept of evidence to Othello's mind. It thus prepares Othello to readily accept the handkerchief as material proof of his wife's infidelity. Iago's tale is couched in terms of a report: he tells how he 'lay with Cassio lately' (3.3.416), and how Cassio, in the throes of a dream, mistook him for Desdemona, kissing him '[a]s if he plucked up kisses by the roots | That grew upon my lips, lay his leg o'er my thigh' (425-6). Iago subtly juxtaposes the image of Desdemona and Cassio 'as prime as goats' with the reported story, deliberately muddying the boundaries between imagined and supposedly real happenings in Othello's consciousness. In this way, although the report of Cassio's dream is also a fiction, Iago manages to imbue it with a strong sense of reality. Dreaming is an experience common to all, and something Othello is easily able to envision; dreams are

often seen as portentous, and can therefore be linked as much to waking life as they are to fantasy. Furthermore, the physical closeness Iago describes between the two men lends the story a sense of tangible reality: particularly to a man whose senses and emotions are already painfully alert, and who is becoming increasingly unable to distinguish story from truth. In the story, Iago becomes the conscious witness to Cassio's unconscious confession. Othello's impassioned response: 'O monstrous! monstrous!' (3.3.428) reveals how vividly the images appear to him: fiction and reality are hopelessly blurred in the intensity of his intuitive experience. Iago assumes the role of fair advocate to Othello's 'jealous husband', his reasonable remarks carefully calculated to inflame the Moor's emotions still further. He tests the efficacy of his tactics with the suggestion, '[n]ay, this was but his dream' (3.3.429), and Othello's reaction confirms their success: '[b]ut this denoted a foregone conclusion' (430). The use of the past tense of 'denoted' shows that Othello instantly accepts the events in Cassio's supposed dream, and Iago's apparent witnessing of them, as real events already rooted in the past.

In this part of the scene, Iago does most of the talking, and Othello responds either with eager desperation for proof of his wife's guilt, or with outbursts of barely controlled rage. Iago, maintaining an attitude of calm reason, strengthens his hold on Othello's mind by slipping suggestions into his own discourse that are couched in the form of assumptions, or foregone conclusions:

'Tis a shrewd doubt, though it be but a dream,  
And this may help to thicken other proofs  
That do demonstrate thinly. (3.3.431-3)

Iago's concession that some of his 'proofs' appear somewhat weak, deflects attention from the obvious point: there are in fact no actual proofs. By imbuing the fictional 'other' proofs with a characteristic quality, Iago casually implies their existence. Once again, Othello accepts Iago's insinuations without question: 'I'll tear her all to pieces!' (434). Iago, however, continues to play the role of cautious mediator: '[n]ay, yet be wise, yet we see nothing done, | She may be honest yet' (435-6). The repetition of 'yet' in the first line serves to pointedly remind Othello that, up until this moment, he has not actually witnessed his wife's infidelity. 'Yet' does not simply denote immediacy, however: it hints at postponement.

Iago's deliberate reminder to his General that 'yet we see nothing done', is a bold tactic, but his next words reveal the reason for this sublime confidence in his power over Othello. At last, he is able to introduce the concept of material evidence, comfortable in the knowledge that the handkerchief is already in Cassio's possession. Immediately following his suggestion, '[s]he may be honest yet', Iago unfolds his case for Desdemona's destruction:

Tell me but this,  
Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief  
Spotted with strawberries, in your wife's hand? (3.3.436-38)

Othello's response is eager, for the object is still fresh in his memory, and is something he can instantly accept as a form of physical proof: 'I gave her such a one, 'twas my first gift' (3.3.439). Iago is careful to initially describe the object so that it cannot be mistaken for another 'such a one', but thereafter he treats it with a studied nonchalance:

I know not that, but such a handkerchief,  
I am sure it was your wife's, did I today  
See Cassio wipe his beard with. (3.3.440-2)

Cassio's casual use of the handkerchief in the imagined scene implies an intimacy, even a homely domesticity, between Cassio and Desdemona. Such minor detail makes the suggested scene easier to accept as a real event. The very carelessness of Cassio's perceived action – the appropriation of Othello's precious gift as a cloth for cleaning sweat or food from his wife's lover's beard – is calculated to inflame Othello's jealousy, the physical action bringing the image vividly alive in its sense of intimate bodily contact. Once again, Scarry's theory, that the passing of one image over another can help to vivify an image, could apply to this example,<sup>40</sup> but it is the actual movement itself, the anticipation of bodily contact, that is important in a phenomenological reading – for this is the intuitive thread that connects the image with the reader or audience member in a strongly visceral sense. Iago's description links the handkerchief with male grooming, but conversely implies the sully of the object in a physical, as well as symbolic sense.

Once Othello imaginatively perceives the handkerchief in Cassio's possession, he is prepared to accept visual confirmation without question:

*Othello*            If it be that –

*Iago*                If it be that, or any that was hers,  
                          It speaks against her with the other proofs. (3.3.442-4)

As Honigmann aptly remarks, '[w]hat proofs?' (Note 3.3.444). Once again, through his casual mention of 'other proofs', Iago deflects Othello's attention from the fact that as yet the Moor has never actually witnessed the handkerchief in Cassio's possession. By the time the handkerchief is physically produced onstage, Othello does not regard it as the sole material evidence of Desdemona's infidelity: its appearance is conclusive of



guilt, rather than suggestive. 'Now do I see 'tis true', admits Othello (447).

Transformation of implied knowledge to confirmed truth leads in turn to the transfiguring of Othello's self-image. He begins to fashion his self-image into the perceived stereotype of avenging husband:

Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell,  
Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne  
To tyrannous hate! (3.3.450-2)

Once more, as Greenblatt recognises, Othello's 'identity depends upon a constant performance [...] a loss of his own origins, an embrace and perpetual reiteration of the norms of another culture.'<sup>41</sup> These 'norms' include the Christian values the Moor has absorbed, and now regurgitates in speech worthy of the Protestant pulpit. Fully aware that Othello prides himself on his resolution, Iago assumes the role of merciful moderator, knowing that such tactics can only reinforce Othello's self-image. Othello perceives inflexibility and constancy as vital characteristics of his persona, and he cements this idea in his own mind through poetic narrative:

Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea  
Whose icy current and compulsive course  
Ne'er keeps retiring ebb but keeps due on  
To the Propontic and Hellespont. (3.3.456-59)

Desdemona fails to realise that Othello is now not the man she saw 'in his mind' (1.3.253). Her perception of him never alters significantly; he, on the other hand, attempts to match Desdemona's appearance and behaviour to his new image of her as a 'cunning whore of Venice' (4.2.91). Seeking evidence for her adultery that may be visually confirmed, he detects a physical change in her. Desdemona's hand has become '[h]ot, hot, and moist' (3.4.39): a sign of 'an amorous nature', as Honigmann observes

(Note 3.3.36). Desdemona refuses to admit that he is capable of jealousy: '[w]ho, he? I think the sun where he was born | Drew all such humours from him' (3.4.30-31). Their different reactions to the mislaid handkerchief illuminate the widening gap between Desdemona's perception of her husband, and the way he perceives himself. Whatever sentimental attachment she feels for her husband's love-token, Desdemona is still able to perceive its value in a material sense: '[b]elieve me, I had rather have lost my purse | Full of crusadoes' (3.4.25-6). Othello's language, however, shrouds the object in exotic mystery. His reverent description links it to birth, death and sacrifice. Its very production is an act of birth, in fact, since sacred worms 'bred' the silk from which it was woven.

When the handkerchief next appears on stage, it is in Cassio's possession. In requesting Bianca to have the 'work', or embroidery, copied (3.4.189-90), Cassio shows that he recognises the potential value of the object's unusual design. The fact that he is unaware of its origin – 'I found it in my chamber', he tells Bianca (3.4.188) – implies a lack of past intimacy between Cassio and Desdemona, for surely he must otherwise have noticed a token so treasured by his lover: an object she keeps 'evermore about her' (3.3.299). Cassio treats the object as perfunctorily as he does his mistress, provoking Bianca to exclaim: 'I must be circumstanced' (3.4.202), which Honigmann glosses as 'subject to or governed by circumstance'; 'surrounded with conditions'; or 'I must be treated as insignificant' (Note 202). Through Cassio, therefore, both handkerchief and mistress are thus projected as objects of male interest purely in an aesthetic or material sense: accessories that may be easily used, copied, or replaced.

In the following scene, Iago successfully forges a direct link in Othello's mind between the handkerchief and Desdemona's virtue. Othello, tortured by the images Iago evokes in his mind of Desdemona 'naked with her friend in bed | An hour or more' (4.1.3-4), responds eagerly to Iago's subtle reminder of the mislaid gift:

*Iago*            But if I give my wife a handkerchief –

*Othello*        What then?

*Iago*            Why, then, 'tis hers, my lord, and being hers  
She may, I think, bestow't on any man. (4.1.10-12)

Iago's easy-going response is calculated to alarm more than appease the anguished Othello. The subtle inference in Iago's comments links the handkerchief simultaneously to female honour and flirtation, as Othello instantly recognises:

*Othello*        She is protectress of her honour, too:  
May she give that?

*Iago*            Her honour is an essence that's not seen,  
They have it oft that have it not. (4.1.14-18)

Honour and object remain separate items in Othello's mind at this point; he uses one as an analogy for the other. Iago's reply, however, highlights the impossibility of proving female chastity, implying the male's lack of control in such a situation. Female honour becomes a possession to be lost, and its loss concealed: '[t]hey have it oft that have it not'. Othello's perception of the love token is thus subtly fused with his wife's precious gift of honour: they become interchangeable in his mind. His anxiety to see and monitor the 'essence' of her honour becomes a determination to control the object, to confirm its absence as the loss of his wife's fidelity, and its presence in another's possession as material proof of her freely given sexual favours. Iago keeps the object in the forefront of

Othello's mind, recalling it if the Moor seems disposed to talk of anything else: '[b]ut for the handkerchief –' (4.1.18). Othello's reply reveals his ultimate reluctance to confront what he now perceives to be undeniable evidence of Desdemona's adultery. At the same time, his words illustrate, with a vivid sense of physicality, the way Iago is slowly poisoning his mind:

By heaven, I would most gladly have forgot it!  
Thou said'st – O, it comes o'er my memory  
As doth the raven o'er the infectious house  
Boding to all – he had my handkerchief. (4.1.19-20)

The mixture of tenses used here is illuminating. The speech moves from the past perfect conditional tense: 'would most gladly have forgot' – stressing the longing that Othello feels in this moment to change the past, were it possible – immediately into past imperfect: '[t]hou said'st' (20), showing a painful acceptance of Iago's hearsay as truth, and a recognition that past events cannot be altered. The speech then surges into the present, conveying the immediacy of his suffering: 'O, it comes o'er my memory' (20). Othello talks the audience or reader through the mounting feelings of dread and foreboding that darken his mind, as the raven overshadows 'the infectious house' (21) of his imagination. The speech then moves abruptly back into the past, acknowledging Iago's hearsay once again as a proven past event – one that Othello feels he has himself witnessed: 'he had my handkerchief' (22).

Now accustomed to Iago's frustrating tendency to withhold desired information, Othello is goaded to suggest his own answers to the questions that invade his mind. The sense of personal discovery that accompanies these ideas lends them a strong sense of truth. Othello's worst fears are confirmed by and in his own imagination:

*Iago* Faith, that he did – I know not what. He did –  
*Othello* What? what?  
*Iago* Lie.  
*Othello* With her?  
*Iago* With her, on her, what you will.  
*Othello* Lie with her? lie on her? We say lie on her when they  
belie her! Lie with her, zounds, that's fulsome!  
– Handkerchief! confessions! handkerchief! (4.1.32-7)

The resultant image in Othello's mind is so powerful that it renders clarity of speech and thought impossible. His obsessive repetition of words are an expression of his mental anguish, and, as Palfrey notes, an indication of 'the simple inadequacy of language and, concomitantly, a swelling immensity of suffering and need.'<sup>42</sup> The demand for material proof now outweighs any other consideration.

The handkerchief makes its final appearance on stage in Bianca's possession. To her, it is merely 'some minx's token' (4.1.152); for Othello, it represents the evidence he seeks to prove Desdemona's guilt. Even though he witnesses a handkerchief in Cassio's possession, Othello is still too far away to be sure it is his own gift to Desdemona: '[b]y heaven, that should be my handkerchief!' (4.1.156). He later accepts Iago's hearsay as evidence, however: '[b]y heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand!' (5.2.62) and Iago slips into the role of illustrator of the scene that Othello imagines he perceives:

*Iago* And did you see the handkerchief?  
*Othello* Was that mine?  
*Iago* Yours, by this hand: and to see how he prizes  
the foolish woman your wife! She gave it him,  
and he hath given it his whore. (4.1.170-4)

At this point, the consummate success of Iago's plot to sway Othello's reason is made overwhelmingly evident. Othello, ensnared by a web fashioned entirely from words, ironically denies the power of language to physically overset him: '[n]ature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus' (4.1.39-41). This speech significantly demonstrates that Othello now puts action before words, unable to accept that his body can be so palpably affected without the provocation of real events. It is this belief that helps him to accept the handkerchief as material evidence without question, for he is denying the very power of the language that has enmeshed him, in favour of what he sees as the material proof of his physical reaction. His distracted speech illustrates his chaotic state of mind: 'To confess and be hanged for his labour! First to be hanged, and then to confess: I tremble at it' (4.1.38-9). Words tumble one upon another, physicalizing the uncontrolled jumble of thoughts and images invading Othello's mind and sensitising his body. In such a highly vulnerable state, the mind's ability to make associations quickens, as Merleau-Ponty explains: '[k]nowledge thus appears as a system of substitutions in which one impression announces others without ever justifying the announcement, in which words lead one to expect sensations as evening lends one to expect night.'<sup>43</sup> The handkerchief, in its absent form prompting the fervent desire for proof, in its material form, becomes it.

The object does not appear again on stage, for it has finally served its purpose, but the play's audience is forcefully reminded of it a number of times in the final scenes. Desdemona's request that Emilia should lay her wedding sheets on the bed, on the final night of her life, binds the concepts of chastity and sacrifice with Othello's description

of the magical handkerchief. Her own bodily sacrifice becomes poignantly linked with the virgins whose blood was used in its manufacture, through the mention of wedding sheets that suggest the vital life-blood shed by Desdemona in the physical giving of her love to her husband.

After Desdemona's murder, the handkerchief finally appears to lose its magical properties in Othello's eyes. His description of it prosaically returns the object to its role as love-token:

It was a handkerchief, an antique token  
My father gave my mother. (5.2.214-15)

There is notably no mention of supernatural powers connected with the handkerchief. In its final role, it becomes a way of uncovering the truth, as its story is explained by Cassio:

I found it in my chamber,  
And he himself confessed but even now  
That there he dropped it for a special purpose  
Which wrought to his desire. (5.2.318-321)

The discovery of the handkerchief's real story precipitates the collapse of Othello's world. Unable to maintain his self-image as a righteous and avenging husband, he attempts briefly to re-define himself as '[a]n honourable murderer' (5.2.291). He depicts his own death for his onstage and offstage audiences, his words describing a dual image of heroic soldier and reviled 'turbanned Turk', one destroying the other (5.2.351-4). Even in his last moments, he is unable to resist crafting his own narrative ending in the way he dramatically takes his life. There is no romance, however, in the final, brutal onstage picture that, as Lodovico says, 'poisons sight' (5.2.362).

For an object that attracts such critical attention in a Shakespeare play, the handkerchief's appearances on stage are surprisingly brief. As Rutter observes from

looking at a photographic still of the handkerchief in performance, it seems 'not so much as an object as an activity, not "is", but "does". What it is, what it *means*, is expressed in the story it's telling, the actorly activity it's put to.'<sup>44</sup> She notes that in photographic records of the performances, actors playing Iago tend to strike very similar poses when they take the handkerchief from Emilia. They 'spread the handkerchief to voyeuristic display'.<sup>45</sup> She finds that 'a sequence of look-alikes' make the object float through the air by blowing or throwing it, and questions whether the handkerchief, in the hands of the actor, is 'acquiring (female) behaviour - and a reputation that goes with it'.<sup>46</sup> She notes that in Parker's 2007 film,<sup>47</sup> Kenneth Branagh, as Iago, makes the object 'blossom gorgeously in space' while Iago, 'out of frame, has pushed his wife face-down, straddled her, and is sodomising her.'<sup>48</sup> The action, together with Branagh's smug expression as he holds the handkerchief and turns to speak directly into the camera over his shoulder, conveys the sense of relish with which his Iago sets about destroying Othello and Desdemona. It also signals his utter contempt for females in general, and articulates Emilia's bitter attitude towards men: 'They are all but stomachs, and we all but food' (3.4.105).

In Wilson Milam's staged production at The Globe,<sup>49</sup> Tim McInnerny as Iago departed from the popular tradition of setting the handkerchief afloat, so that the audience can see it is as an inconsequential trifle, 'light as air' (3.3.325). Instead, he kissed the handkerchief and tucked it into his shirt, over his heart, an action that stressed his recognition of it as a powerful weapon of revenge against the Moor. Iago's suspicion that Othello has slept with Emilia: 'twixt my sheets | He's done my office' (1.3.386), informed McInnerny's whole approach to his performance, giving us an Iago who was



filled with bitter anger, and the desire for revenge. In kissing the strawberry-spotted handkerchief, Iago pointedly stressed his rejection of Emilia. The handkerchief's new position, next to Iago's heart, expressed its now central role within his web of deceit. It also suggested an intimate closeness with an object that is, for Desdemona, a form of substitute for her husband: one she keeps '[t]o kiss and talk to' (3.3.300). In Parker's film, the billowing handkerchief initially becomes a mask for Branagh's sexual assault on his wife, shutting out the camera from the scene taking place on the bed. As the filmy scrap of material dances in the air before the camera, it becomes an emblem for Desdemona's and Emilia's vulnerability, and the fragile virginal hymen that proclaims female chastity. The image rehearses the role that the handkerchief comes to play in Othello's perception, a tangible form of evidence of his wife's stolen honour. It becomes a recognisable substitute for that fragile essence that cannot be easily proved, once the hymen has been breached in the marriage bed: '[h]er honour is an essence that's not seen, | They have it very oft that have it not' (4.1.16-17). McKinnerny's action also suggested the movement of that precious essence from male body to male body, as he tucked the handkerchief into his shirt, next to his skin.

In Milam's production, Bianca also chose to spread the handkerchief out and hold it up in full view of the audience, as evidence of Cassio's infidelity. Her feisty berating of Cassio: '[t]here, give it your hobby-horse; wheresoever you had it, I'll take out no work on't!' (4.1.153-4) lifted the scene momentarily into the realm of comedy. The audience's obvious enjoyment of the familiar story of husband or lover caught out in an illicit affair provided some light relief from the play's tension, but it also highlighted the seriously vengeful attitudes taken by Othello and Iago towards their

wives. Bianca's disgust at the handkerchief, '[t]his is some minx's token' (4.1.152) cast the object as a pivotal stage property in a situation comedy, in stark contrast to Othello's perception of it as a tangible reason to murder his wife. In this production, a number of handkerchiefs or napkins seemed to make an appearance onstage, besides that famous, strawberry-spotted one that precipitates Desdemona's downfall. Ludovico handed Desdemona his own handkerchief to dry her tears, after Othello struck her (4.1.239). Shortly afterwards, when Emilia entered in 4.2, she set down a stool, on which a white cleaning cloth, resembling a napkin, casually lay. Its understated appearance was a subtle reminder to the audience of the very basic roles played by napkins under normal circumstances, and highlighted how Desdemona's handkerchief's journey from character to character had changed our original perception of it.

Parker's film parades a cast of understudies for the absent handkerchief before the viewer's gaze, in the form of lace veils, net curtains and lights. When Desdemona and Cassio land on Cyprus, and a procession carries Desdemona through the town, we see her extending an arm through the window of her sedan chair to Cassio, who is accompanying her on horseback. Only her arm appears in shot, but her lace veil is noticeably tangled in her fingers, and as Cassio entwines his fingers around her own, the veil is caught between them. The moment is subtly recalled later in the film, when Iago arranges for his General to overhear his conversation with Cassio. Othello entwines his fingers in the chains attached to the dungeon wall, where the scene is set, and writhes in misery as he awaits Iago's answer to his desperate question: '[d]id he confess it?' (4.1.65). This action visually illustrates how enmeshed Othello has become within Iago's tissue of lies: the silken bonds of the handkerchief become loops of iron, within which

Othello willingly entangles himself. When Desdemona alights from the carriage, obviously distressed from the rigours of her journey, Cassio is seen to comfort her in the background of the shot, while Iago nonchalantly but significantly peels a fruit with a knife in the foreground. As Desdemona draws close to Cassio, to speak to him, her veil forms a filmy partition between their faces. Iago's paring back of the fruit's skin from the flesh contrasts suggestively with the close contact of the two faces, whose flesh is separated only by the thin veil of material. The image therefore shows Desdemona and Cassio in the background, separated by a delicate membrane, while Iago's actions infer a delicious unveiling, orchestrated by him, and carried out with relish.

Lights feature heavily in the film's visual encapsulation of Shakespeare's text. On the night of the wedding celebrations in Cyprus, Parker's film shows Desdemona and Othello taking part in a ritualistic dance, in which a pole of flame is held by Desdemona, and grasped in turn by each man who dances with her. The passing of both woman and phallic object from man to man, and initially from Othello directly to Cassio, is oddly unsettling: a prefiguring of Othello's later perception of his wife as 'that cunning whore of Venice' (4.2.91). It is a challenge to the viewer's perception, as it displays Desdemona's behaviour in a way that could easily be misunderstood. The shaping of the viewer's perception is therefore not left wholly to Iago in the film: instances like this show Desdemona in an uncertain light to begin with, as though to encourage us to question what we see, and consider whether such moments would lead us, like Othello, to doubt her fidelity. The flame topping the pole can therefore be understood in one of two ways: as representative of the heat of passion, equally fired by each man Desdemona encounters, or of Desdemona's vital life-light, ultimately and

unjustly extinguished by the Moor. The film demonstrates, in a visual sense, the ease with which the viewer's perception may be subtly influenced.

In Parker's film, both handkerchief and veil are vividly recalled by the appearance of nets around Desdemona's bed, when Othello approaches it for the last time. The nets surround and hide her from his view, and through their shroud-like tresses loom the lights of many candles. We look through the nets, with the camera, seeing the row of flickering lights through the white haze, as though we are within with Desdemona, waiting for Othello to discover us, too. The moment is an evocative reminder of the hymen that is breached on the woman's loss of virginity, linking the nets with Desdemona's veil in the procession through Cyprus, the strawberry-spotted handkerchief, and Desdemona's request to Emilia later in the play, to lay her wedding sheets upon her bed. It gives visual form to the web of words that brings about Othello's and Desdemona's downfall: 'the net | That shall enmesh them all' (2.3.356-7). The camera's exploration of the long line of candles, their lights softened by the white nets, lends the bedroom scene a cathedral-like atmosphere. Othello's approach is in the form of an exotic, religious ritual. Cloaked and hooded, in a biblical-style garment that is essentially white, he moves down the row of lights by the bed, and extinguishes them with his fingers, prefiguring the act of murder, and once again recalling the gripping of his wife's writhing fingers on their wedding sheets. The last candle dies as he breathes upon it, weeping as he does so. The action is an exhalation, rather than a blowing-out of the flame. The whole process anticipates Desdemona's murder in a deeply physical sense: Othello's fingers rehearse the forceful extinguishing of Desdemona's life and his breathing out into the flame anticipates her final breath. The net curtains, a material

reminder of the strawberry-spotted handkerchief, visibly underscore the important role the object plays in her brief life with Othello, and in her death.

In both the stage and film productions, there is a moment during the intimate scenes between Othello and Desdemona that signals to the audience or viewer an uncomfortable intensity in Othello's passion: a perspective that challenges Desdemona's romantic view of their love. In Milam's production, Othello pursued Desdemona around the stage as she playfully sued for Cassio's forgiveness in 3.3, his mood becoming quickly more and more aroused at her innocently teasing behaviour. His suddenly fiercely intense and arrested gaze seemed to devour her as he exclaimed: 'I will deny thee nothing' (3.3.76). This rapid change of mood contrasted effectively with Desdemona's lighter, more even temper. Parker's film suggests a slightly darker side to the couple's relationship, in a lovemaking scene that is never realised in Shakespeare's text. As Desdemona and her husband undress in the bedchamber, she initially smiles and appears relaxed and welcoming. When Othello approaches her, however, his expression intent, Desdemona seems momentarily afraid and backs away from Othello and from the camera, her expression serious and slightly fearful. She then recovers and welcomes her husband, and as they embrace on the bed, the camera pans down onto the white sheets to show blood-red rose petals scattered there, as though presaging the virgin blood to be shed during the lovemaking. As the lovemaking begins, the camera travels from the entwined bodies to Desdemona's hand as it grips the white sheet, some of the red petals caught between her fingers and the material. Othello's fingers cover hers, appearing to crush the sheet and the petals between them, the action stilling her writhing fingers, and silencing her sudden groan, foreshadowing her final moments on the same bed.

Desdemona's moment of fear in the bedchamber is also subtly recalled later in the armoury, when Iago reminds Othello: '[a]nd when she seemed to shake, and fear your looks, | She loved them most' (3.3.210-11). Othello then walks directly towards the camera, with Iago in the background of the shot, so that we can see Othello's slow, meaningful smile of pleasure that hints at that memory of intimacy with his wife: '[a]nd so she did'(211). His reply is spoken reflectively, allowing time for the audience to take in his thoughtful expression, so that he and the viewer can imaginatively replay that earlier moment of fearful anticipation in Desdemona's face, in the bridal chamber. The staging and delivery of this line may therefore suggest a relationship in which Desdemona responds positively to being physically overpowered by her husband.

Parker's Othello is one who is used to subjugating women. When questioning Emilia (4.2.1-19), he circles her with a white and gold decorative stick, which he uses to push her head down as she kneels before him. Deborah Cartmell writes, '[t]his is an Othello who is violent and overtly sexual in orientation; the film, in its emphasis on Othello's body, alarmingly, reinforces a racial stereotype'.<sup>50</sup> Cartmell notes that the film was made 'hot on the heels of the O.J. Simpson trial', and feels that it 'discreetly but consistently calls attention to race.'<sup>51</sup> There is, however, no mention of Iago's sodomising his wife. Cartmel rather focusses on what she sees as the film's racist portrayal, rather than the mistreatment of females by their husbands, which is expressly voiced through Emilia.

In Milam's production, properties and staging were minimal. McInnerny's performance as Iago was driven by simmering rage and resentment, as he growled his discontent and roared in apparently righteous disappointment at Othello's threats: '[i]f

thou dost slander her and torture me | Never pray more, abandon all remorse' (3.3.371-2). A total contrast to the soft-spoken portrayal by Kenneth Branagh in Parker's film, McInnerny's anger made his performance to Othello seem utterly sincere: so much so that it became difficult for the audience, at times, to disbelieve him, even though he made them fully aware of his wiles through asides and soliloquys. His bursts of bodily energy in vocal delivery infused Shakespeare's visceral words with a vital relish as he filled Othello's ears and assaulted his mind with images of Cassio and Desdemona: '[t]hey met so near with their lips that their breaths embraced together' (2.1.257-8) – a moment visually realised in Parker's film, when the couple whisper together on their arrival in Cyprus. In Milam's production, Othello and Roderigo appeared physically repulsed by Iago's words: nauseated by the poisonous images brought to life in their mind and senses. At Iago's invitation: '[w]ould you, the supervisor, grossly gape on? | Behold her topped?' (3.3.398-9), Othello recoiled, as though to bodily repel the image invading his mind. McInnerny, as Iago, used his character's underlying anger to infuse his lines with a relentless vocal and emotional power, so that Othello cowered at times under his verbal attack, the vivid imagery physically overwhelming him. This Iago made his imaginary confessions seem like real truths, unwillingly torn from his body. In answer to Othello's demand: '[b]y heaven, I'll know thy thoughts!' his reply seemed to rend the air: 'You cannot, if my heart were in your hand, | Nor shall not whilst 'tis in my custody' (3.3.164-6). McInnerny vitalised Shakespeare's carefully crafted lines by grounding his voice deep in his body, and filling the words with energy, making sound seem a tangible force. David Benedict, in his review of the play, feels that the vocal battles between Othello and Iago were excessive, commenting that 'both leads sound

hoarse and out of control at times'.<sup>52</sup> Conversely, Peter J Smith criticises Walker for his 'vocally under-powered performance', feeling that the strength of McInnery's performance 'served to point up rather than downplay the shortcomings of his opposite number.'<sup>53</sup> These comments either suggest that there was a marked difference in the performances these two critics attended, or that they were possibly misreading the intentions behind the use of the voice in this play. Vocal attacks that sound in danger of veering out of control suggest the emotion that drives them: Othello's desperate attempt to vocally and physically reject Iago's verbal attack and Iago's underlying rage at the thought of Othello having bedded his wife. If there were times when Walker sounded quieter in comparison with McInnery's Iago, these moments reflected Othello's gradual subjugation to Iago's control.

Walker used his body to express his vulnerability to Iago's verbal attack. Immediately prior to Iago's tale of Cassio's dream, Othello paced towards the upstage door, making it clear from his attitude that he was no longer prepared to believe Iago's accusations. McInnery, keeping movements small, lowered his voice, and appeared tired and defeated as he agreed to divulge more 'evidence' to his General. Othello, his back to the audience, and his fist raised, as though to strike the upstage door, gradually bowed under the weight of Iago's words, feebly miming an assault on the door, but unable to complete the action. These movements were powerful physical transmitters to the play's audience, who could anticipate them in their own imaginative perceptions, and sense Othello's bodily energy draining away as Iago gained in strength, seeming to feed on the Moor's weakening state. The action therefore expressed the power and



control of language over body and mind, as Iago's verbal assault arrested and disabled Othello's physical attack on the door.

Parker's film is full of visual stimuli. As Tatspaugh writes, he 'films Venice, warts and all, and the fortress that is its military outpost in Cyprus, providing realistic detail for both locations.'<sup>54</sup> It is slow-moving, expressing the play's sense of woven secrecy through the camera's exploration of dark corners, with Iago materialising from the dark into the half-light. The smooth, fluid style of its filming is appropriate to its location, and allows time for the unwinding of the story. Mood is enhanced by Charlie Mole's ominous music that sets the emotional scene for tragedy. The film articulates Iago's infiltration of Othello's mind through its medium in a very physical sense: the camera explores the sides of heads and faces, showing Iago speaking over one or other of Othello's shoulders, speaking close to his ear, or hovering in the background as Othello turns his suffering face towards the camera. Othello is often in the centre of the shot, with Iago in the background, or appearing from behind doors or posts. Othello's agonized exclamation: '[n]oses, ears, and lips. Is't possible?' (4.1.42) is visually illustrated through a shot containing Othello's profile in the left side of the shot, with Iago's face in soft focus beside it. The camera therefore intimately explores the features that Honigman describes as 'surrogate genital images' (Note 4.1.42). Othello's thoughts are given material form as he imagines Cassio and Desdemona together, and Brabantio's warning: '[l]ook to her, Moor, if thou has eyes to see: | She has deceived her father, and may thee' (1.3.293-4). Disturbingly, Desdemona's laughing face in this shot is similar to her appearance in the dance, earlier in the film, as she passes from her husband to Cassio. This directorial choice puts the viewer more in Othello's position at this point,

offering a seed of doubt about her feelings for Cassio, and her innocence. The film thus once again teases the viewer's perception, challenging us to doubt Desdemona, even if momentarily.

Within the film's atmosphere of realism, Othello does not emerge as a romantic who constructs and believes in his own storybook world: a concept fully realised in Walker's performance at The Globe. Laurence Fishburne's Othello is unquestionably exotic, with his hooded cloaks, beaded jewellery and tattoos plainly visible around his head and neck. Flashbacks illustrating Othello's account of how his stories wooed Desdemona, however, fail to communicate the gentler side of him in this respect. His surly and brooding aspect is not successfully lightened at this point, and gives him a sinister feel, although in the murder scene his weeping effectively portrays his deep love for Desdemona. Walker's slightly more vulnerable Othello combined the exotic traveller with the noble Venetian, communicating his desperate inner pain through voice and body language. His line: '[b]ut yet the pity of it, Iago – O, Iago, the pity of it, Iago!' (4.1.192-3) was drawn from deep within his body, a childlike cry – full of regret for the action he felt he had to take – that resonated within the theatre space. In Milam's production, the physical impact of the language was of paramount importance in stimulating audience perception and emotionally connecting actor with audience. In Parker's film, the visceral effect of language is achieved in other ways. Branagh's 'I hate the Moor' (1.3.385) is softly and deliberately spoken into the camera, through gritted teeth that barely allow the words to escape. This intimate conversation into the camera draws the viewer into the dark world of Iago's plotting, his tightened jaw and lips conveying his deeply repressed and dangerous hatred.

In the space of the Globe, McInnerny's and Walker's very vocal and physical characterisation managed to convey the strongly visceral impact of Shakespeare's language: to create a sense of intimacy between the two characters, and between Iago and the audience, through shared auditory and bodily experience. As Mark Rylance observes, '[i]t is the introduction of the physical into the theatre, dropping it down into a physical, visceral level',<sup>55</sup> that establishes audience contact in this theatre space. The camera's eye in Parker's film provides a different form of intimate relationship with the viewer: a visual and sensual journey enhanced by setting, lighting, music and properties, including a supporting cast of stand-ins for the famous handkerchief that keep the object in some form before the viewer's gaze, even during its notable absences.

Making its first appearance as a simple napkin, the handkerchief's appropriation as love-token and bandage (Desdemona), object for aesthetic pleasure (Cassio), a gift to elicit a spouse's gratitude and attention (Emilia), a 'minx's token' (Bianca), political tool and weapon (Iago), proposed evidence of adultery, and weapon with which to control female behaviour (Othello), place it at the centre of the play's concerns with obsession and perception. Its physical journey through text, stage play and film, from hand to hand, character to character, reflects Desdemona's own fragility as a powerless female vulnerable to male machinations. As this chapter has shown, *Othello* is obsessed with the creating and crafting of material. The text itself evokes the act of material production, as the handkerchief becomes semantically woven into the play, showing, in its propulsion from character to character, how object and subject may become innocent victims, rendered vulnerable to and by the power of words. The handkerchief gradually accretes layers of meaning from the language that is associated with it, and from the way

characters utilise it. Through linguistic metaphor, it takes on new life in the imaginative perception that in turn influences the way the material object is perceived: on the page, or in stage or film productions, where directors' and actors' manipulation of it reflect its vital role, as the lively thread that binds *Othello* together.

#### END NOTES

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36. Smith, p. 165.
37. Smith, p. 165.
38. Merleau-Ponty, p. 274.
39. Merleau-Ponty, p. 217.
40. Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book*, p. 38.
41. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 245.
42. Palfrey, *Doing Shakespeare*, p. 121.
43. Merleau-Ponty, p. 17.
44. Rutter, p. 191.
45. Rutter, p. 193.
46. Rutter, p. 196.
47. *Othello*, dir. Oliver Parker (USA, Castle Rock Entertainment, 2007).
48. Rutter, p. 190.
49. *Othello*, dir. Wilson Milam (UK, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre Production, 2007), on DVD.
50. Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 77.
51. Cartmell, p. 76.

52. David Benedict, 'Othello' (review, 25 May 2007), *Variety*, CDVII, No. 3 (June, 2007), 34, (p. 34).
53. Peter J. Smith, 'Shakespeare at the Globe Theatre, London, Summer 2007: Othello, May 4 – August 19, 2007', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 26, No. 1 (Spring 2008), 186-8, (p. 187).
54. Patricia Tatspaugh, 'The Tragedies of Love on Film' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 135 – 59, (p. 148).
55. Mark Rylance, 'Research, Materials, Craft: Principles of Performance at Shakespeare's Globe' in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, eds. Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 103 – 14, (p. 111).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Feast or Surfeit? Digesting the Human and Textual Body in *Titus Andronicus*

Shakespeare forces us to see, detail by descriptive detail, the spectacle that we are already beholding<sup>1</sup>

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature (*Hamlet*, 3.2.16-18)<sup>2</sup>

Chapter Three shows how Shakespeare effectively shapes our perception as readers and audience members, and how he demonstrates that process through the characters in *Othello*. It tracks the changing role of Desdemona's handkerchief: an object subtly imbued with subjective qualities, and looks at how language can evoke vivid images in the mind and senses. Chapter Four investigates the way that Shakespeare merges subject and object boundaries in *Titus Andronicus* in a different sense. It explores how he uses language to warp our perception of the onstage body, infusing human subjects with objective qualities through potent metaphor. In *Titus*, human limbs thus become forms of mobilised stage properties, as language distorts and disturbs what we see with what we hear. At times, this combination of verbal and visual stimuli is supremely effective, but at others, language seems to work directly against the play's suggested visual presentation. The discussion below considers the text as an



active force that creates tension and unease through its dramatic structure as a way of communicating with its audience. In addition, it illuminates the play's tendency to contrast powerfully visceral language with less effective modes of traditional rhetoric.

In *Titus Andronicus*, there is a sense in which Shakespeare not only displays the play's very muscular approach to action: he uses dramatic action to challenge the effectiveness of traditional rhetoric. Farah Karim-Cooper feels that 'what *Titus* does holistically is reject the classical past as a model for Shakespeare's contemporary world',<sup>3</sup> and her comments are couched in highly physical terms: 'violence in the play is also violence upon the play.'<sup>4</sup> She notes that the basic language of violence, placed next to Latinate phrases, 'exposes a fundamental tension in the proceedings'.<sup>5</sup> Classical rhetoric is not mutilated in itself, but is juxtaposed with stunning visual evidence of mutilation, causing a sense of tension and discord that sometimes bubbles over into dark comedy. Shakespeare uses the structure of *Titus* to illustrate the absurdity of attempting to convey a truly effective sense of horror and tragedy through classical rhetoric. He therefore uses verbal and visual discords to shock, to create discomfort and to destabilise audience mood and expectancy. The play thus repeatedly calls its audience's attention to the separation of, or gap between what is seen and what is heard, denying the audience the unified perceptual experience normally gained when language and action work in powerful partnership. The following discussion explores how audience perception of violence and mutilation in the play may be greatly enhanced through conflict between words and action, where 'concord is invaded by discord'.<sup>6</sup> It also considers instances where language and action do work together in *Titus*, in a complex assault upon the

imagination and senses, and looks at how language alone can shape perception without the need for visual confirmation.

Because of the stress placed on the juxtaposition of visual and verbal stimuli in this chapter, and its concern with the onstage body-as-object, textual close-reading will centre very much on the play's impact on potential audiences. Where actual performances are discussed, this is always clearly indicated. In order to explore the way Shakespeare's text influences directorial choices of selected scenes, textual close-readings are interspersed with analyses of those same scenes on film, or in live (recorded) performances. This approach is different, in the main, to the other case studies, where an unbroken, in-depth perceptual journey through the text is made before performance experience is reflected upon. For this chapter, however, I consider the integrated form of discussion to be more helpful. Close-reading focusses on the following examples: the play's opening scene; Marcus's discovery of the mutilated Lavinia in 2.3, the dismembering of Titus's hand in 3.1, and the appearance of the severed hand and heads (3.1.234).<sup>7</sup>

In the play's opening scene, Shakespeare shows how the use of powerful metaphor can effectively convey the horror of a religious sacrifice that precipitates the rest of the play's tragic action. Titus ceremoniously hands over his prisoners, along with his sword, to Saturninus, as '[p]resents well worthy of Rome's imperious lord' (1.1.254). The prisoners are therefore immediately identified as objects and possessions. One symbolic coffin is carried on stage at 1.1.72, though losses of other sons are mentioned:

five times he hath returned

Bleeding to Rome, bearing his valiant sons  
In coffins from the field. (1.1.33-5)

Titus's description of the sons' tomb as a '[s]weet cell of virtue and nobility' (1.1.96) is effectively juxtaposed with Lucius's order to barbarically dispose of Tamora's eldest son:

Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,  
That we may hew his limbs and on a pile  
*Ad manes fratrum* sacrifice his flesh  
Before this earthly prison of their bones. (1.1.99-102)

The coffin stands as a visual emblem of the finality of death, separating two sets of living sons: the Romans, who are honoured and respected in life and death, and the Goths, one of whose bodies is bestially dismembered in religious sacrifice. When Tamora pleads for her son's life, she offers Titus a crucial opportunity to be merciful, reminding him that '[s]weet mercy is nobility's true badge' (1.1.122). Titus's failure to empathise with her at this point precipitates the play's tragedy of revenge.

The play's description of the Roman tomb, couched in noble and moving terms, provides a sharp contrast to the barbarous description of Alarbus's sacrifice: '[a]nd with our swords upon a pile of wood | Let's hew his limbs till they be clean consumed' (1.1.131-2). This speech directly links religion with bloody barbarity, and virtue and nobility with mercilessness. In Titus's view, the Roman sons are merely exercising their religious rites: '[r]eligiously they ask a sacrifice' (1.1.127). Bate notes that Tamora's response: 'O cruel, irreligious piety!' (1.1.133) is 'a telling oxymoron' (Note 133), for how can piety be irreligious? Yet Alarbus's body is to be 'clean consumed', suggesting consumption not only by flame, but by hacking the flesh into an almost liquid state: a murder so violent that it seems almost beyond imagination. Whereas the Roman sons are

allowed a dignified, ceremonial burial, Alarbus is physically and violently eradicated from existence.

Tamora urges Titus to recognise her feelings, and those of her sons, as no different from his own: '[a]nd if thy sons were ever dear to thee, | O, think my son to be as dear to me' (1.1.110-11). Titus, however, fails to see any other point of view than his own, steeped as it is in Roman tradition. The onstage coffin remains a stark visual reminder that a dignified death is reserved purely for Romans, while the play's language suggests that for others, mutilation and barbarity is acceptable, even necessary as a formality. Titus's failure to treat the Goths humanely leads to a trail of inhuman violence: the rape and mutilation of his daughter; the execution of his sons; the loss of his own hand; his gory beheading of Tamora's remaining sons, Chiron and Demetrius; Aaron's perfunctory murder of the nurse; Titus's extermination of Lavinia, and the grisly deaths of Aaron and Tamora.

Although Alarbus's mutilation is carried out offstage, reported speech vividly depicts his death:

Alarbus' limbs are lopped  
And entrails feed the sacrificing fire,  
Whose smoke like incense doth perfume the sky. (1.1.146-8)

Expressed in such terms, Alarbus's death forms part of the language of religious piety that opened the scene. His barbaric execution is therefore subsumed into Roman religious rites, as part of the sensory experience of the Roman funeral. As the Roman coffin is laid in that sweet tomb, Titus's words, '[i]n peace and honour rest you here, my sons' (1.1.159) are delivered to an audience who still have the metaphorical 'perfume' from Alarbus's funeral pile in their nostrils. Furthermore, those same words are

immediately taken up by Lavinia and spoken to her father: '[i]n peace and honour, live Lord Titus long' (1.1.160). Speech and sentiment are redirected to Alarbus's executioner, even as the barbarity precipitated by Titus's decision shortly afterwards claims Lavinia as its first victim.

Richard Marienstras points out that words and action seem at odds in such scenes: '[s]ome critics consider that the violence is somewhat distanced by the preciousness of the language.'<sup>8</sup> He sees the text as 'propped up' by 'visible signifiers' which have a 'greater force and longer-lasting impact than the words themselves'.<sup>9</sup> Once again, then, as Marienstras highlights, language seems at odds with onstage action. There is an insistence on the concept of 'sweetness' in relation to death, but in the macabre sense that it describes both the Andronici sons' onstage tomb, and the smoking entrails of the sacrificed Alarbus. The concept of heroic death – expressed in the heightened terms of tragic rhetoric – is directly linked with barbaric, ritualistic slaughter: the poetic sweetness of death cannot fully mask the concept of the stench of burning flesh.

In Julie Taymor's 2006 film,<sup>10</sup> starring Anthony Hopkins as Titus, the Romans' lack of empathy is expressed through striking visual metaphor that effectively communicates the force of their uncompromising natures. The film's opening scenes include row upon row of marching soldiers in masonry-grey costumes, with faces sculpted in dust and grime that resembles half-set cement. Their appearance calls to mind the silent ranks of the Chinese Terracotta army, eerily infused with human life as they close in upon the camera from every side. Each stone-like soldier's slow, deliberate footstep involves a huge, heavy swing of the body, a movement accompanied by a

thudding crash that recalls the dull sound of weighty sacks of cement or rubble as they hit the floor. Even if the surround-sound enjoyed by the viewer is not exceptionally loud, there is a sense in which its quality, together with the visual stimulus of the movement, evokes an anticipation of its reverberation in the body. Merleau-Ponty explains that it is possible to sense weight purely through visual stimuli: '[o]ne sees the weight of a block of cast iron which sinks in the sand',<sup>11</sup> and Ihde notes that distance can also be sensed through sound: '[t]he depth of the well reveals its auditory distance to me as I call into its mouth'.<sup>12</sup> When faced with a visual or aural stimulus, in fact, the senses work in unison to create an 'as if' experience of the real phenomenon, anticipated in the body as well as the mind, as Merleau-Ponty explains: 'when I understand a thing [...] I come to it bringing my sensory fields and my perceptual field with me.'<sup>13</sup> In this example from the film's opening, sound and vision work together to convey the mighty force of an army fused with the qualities of stone. The opening scene is therefore more than a visual metaphor, in the intense way it appeals to its viewers' senses. The scene stimulates our imaginative perception in the same way that rich metaphor in Shakespeare's text appeals directly to our sentient and tactile memories. The soldiers' appearance and the sound of their marching serves to evoke memories of tactile experiences involving the feel and texture of stone and rough concrete. Their movements, stiff and deliberate, may recall the experience of moving a heavy block, sack or stone along, little by little: having to swing it from side to side, in fact: to inch it along. If metaphor in the text 'strives [...] to unite language and action',<sup>14</sup> as Tricomi claims, then Taymor's film takes metaphor to another visual and auditory level in order to express issues and themes explored in the text. The stone-like soldiers, bearing

Titus's dead sons back to Rome, seem fashioned from the very stones Titus appeals to in 3.1.45: through the camera lens, we perceive them as men '[m]ore hard than stones'.

After the initial welcoming ceremony, the soldiers are seen, grouped in various sculpted poses, in the steamy room of a Roman bath. It is almost impossible to tell that they are, indeed, flesh and blood. This startling tableau echoes Bate's view that characters in the play 'so often seem to become emblems, to be frozen into postures that are the very picture of supplication, grief or violent revenge' (*Titus Andronicus*, p. 14). In this case, the visual emblem presented is one of hard, merciless resolve. The film thus shows the soldiers as products of the violence of war, encased in its rock-hard grime that is washed away in chunks as hot water pours from conduits high above them. As the grey crust of dust and dirt peels away, sunlight from the open pipes reveals the soft flesh beneath. In Titus's case, however, this washing still does not soften his heart to Tamora's pleas for her son's life.

Deborah Cartmel writes that 'it is in the tradition of *Titus Andronicus* in which Shakespeare demonstrates an interest in visualising metaphor – especially those which are implicitly violent.'<sup>15</sup> In Taymor's film, the 'visible signifiers' that Marienstras sees as supporting the text (see Note 8) are multiplied or magnified to grotesque proportions, giving the film a nightmare feel in which objects and body parts either loom, in giant form in the background, invading the space of the shot, or hurtle towards us, threatening to burst into the world beyond the camera. When Saturninus decides to take Tamora as his wife in 1.1, and Titus kneels before him (1.1.431), a huge, stone hand with curled fingers is shown in the foreground of the shot, as though in anticipation of the severed hand of the stone-hearted Titus. In the burial scene, a number of soldiers carefully carry

in a wooden palette that bears (rather than the anticipated dead body) a long row of dusty army boots. The boots are more than symbols, or stand-ins for the dead sons, however. They become macabre urns into which Titus ceremoniously pours handfuls of sandy earth: an action that fuses the concepts of cremated remains and Roman soil. Later, at the end of 1.1, one of these boots is seen in giant form behind Titus, as he stands in the left of the shot, facing Tamora. The image presages the death of more Andronici sons in a vividly disturbing way: the spatial distortion of the object visually conveys a sense of warped moral values. The viewer is confronted with a strange imbalance that defies normal expectations of the size of footwear, and evokes a nightmarish quality of non-reality. The film therefore sets out to affect its viewer through the creation of mood, in a similar way that the text engenders a feeling of disruption and unease through its structure. The swelling of the boot that also represents an urn suggests the outrageous magnitude of the tragedies to come: a series of events that seems needlessly out of proportion, just as the tragic rhetoric in Shakespeare's text so often appears to be oddly excessive in the face of the play's insistence on overwhelming visual presentation.

The giant hand is seen on a shelf behind Tamora, on the right of the shot featuring the giant boot. As Tamora and Titus stand, locked in each other's gaze, a curtain of flame seeps up from the bottom of the screen, through which Alarbus's limbs appear one by one, as they hurl themselves through the flames towards the camera. The limbs, like Alarbus's burning torso, appear at one moment to be fashioned from porcelain or stone, and at another to be portions of real, dismembered flesh. As the torso is revealed, however, a crack is heard and seen over the position of the heart, where



Titus's blade had previously marked Alarbus for sacrificial death. The burning trunk melts into flesh, with Alarbus's lower jaw and lips just visible in the flames. The tightly compressed mouth and upward thrust of his jaw suggest an agonized cry that will never be heard, but is uncomfortably sensed through its physical repression.

Lucy Bailey's 2006 production at Shakespeare's Globe theatre<sup>16</sup> also set out to shape its audience's perception of the Romans' sense of power – and their commitment to violence – through a physical assault on the senses. The theatre was transformed into a 'dark temple of death'.<sup>17</sup> Dense, black material shrouded the space, and only a small, circular hole was left open to the sky. The heavy material drained the stage of all colour, lending it a palpably thick, muffled feel: as though no chink of light or hope would ever be allowed to penetrate. Smoke, sound and scent were used to evoke a heavy, oppressive atmosphere. The air was filled with incense, and the sporadic sound of horns and the hissing of maracas penetrated the crowd noise prior to the start of the performance, becoming part of a raucous, rather threatening cacophony of noise. The Roman triumph, displaying Titus's Goth prisoners to the crowd, erupted from the yard with an enormous heckling of sound: baying voices, beating and clacking of drums and instruments. What Claire Van Kampen describes as a 'varied textural palette of instrumentation',<sup>18</sup> with its war horns (based on the Celtic design of the Carnyx),<sup>19</sup> immediately evoked a sense of estrangement from the present, or indeed from sounds normally associated with original practices productions at the Globe. The insistent, heavy drum beat that reverberated in the body, seemed to physically hammer home the Romans' overwhelming might. Ihde points out that 'surroundability is an essential feature of the field-shape of sound.'<sup>20</sup> We stand within a field of sound: it permeates our bodies. In this production, Bailey created

a polyphony of sounds that was inescapable, and became an essential part of this production's vision. The play was filled throughout with enormous voices, projecting above the beating of drums, and howling out characters' rage and despair, as though in an effort to penetrate that dense darkness that enclosed them. Visually, the theatre space became a deadening place, an apt setting for Tamora's anguished pleas to save Alarbus (1.1.107-23) and for Titus's unavailing appeals to the heartless tribunes for his sons' lives (3.1.23-6). Aurally, the characters' voices rose above background noise and easily reached their audiences, but the space somehow worked to effectively contain the characters' cries and pleas for mercy and humanity within the shrouded theatre, as though the volarium itself was a barrier between Titus and the unseen gods to whom he aimed his arrows and his prayers. There were times when actors seemed to divest their bodies of sound in an effort to make their emotion physically felt, grounding their words in the bodies of the audience, who became receptacles of that sound. Tamora's grief at the slaughter of her son, Alarbus, was immensely vocal, physical and overwhelming: in its scope and energy it communicated the vital essence of the vastness of grief that Titus later attempted to encapsulate in his words: 'I am the sea' (3.1.226).

As the Romans and Goths moved through the auditorium in the opening scene, black rectangles of paper fluttered down around them, like large segments of ash. The regularity of each paper segment was also suggestive of the leaves of a book, as though words and stories themselves were being presented as part of the play's destruction, in its mutilation of texts as well as bodies. The two dark grey, leaden coffins, laid on stage, enhanced the atmosphere of sooty darkness, barely alleviated by the browns and greys of the characters' costumes. The watching audience became a crowd of citizens that

lined the streets, while Titus prowled the stage restlessly as he addressed them. This was a predatory Titus, barely concealing the savagery that underlies military power and success. The focus of grief was very much on Tamora in this scene, whose pleading for her son's life rent the air, during which a few rectangles of coloured and white paper fluttered down over the stage, as though in sympathy with her plea for mercy. As the Goths left the stage with the Romans, there was another 'paper/letter drop', as it is described in the rehearsal notes from April 29.<sup>21</sup> On this occasion, the light colours were, for a modern audience, reminiscent of confetti, particularly in the light of Tamora's betrothal to Saturninus. The fluttering paper also had the effect, however, of ominously recalling the black 'ash drop' (as it is noted in the production props list), reminding the audience of the human sacrifice, taking place beyond its view.

These directorial choices effectively reflect the conflict in Shakespeare's text between what is perceived by the Roman characters in the play as civilized, and the reality behind the illusion, that is made clear to the audience. The text goes on to develop this sense of discord between words and action, repeatedly setting heightened rhetoric against a backdrop of shocking visual horror. Marcus's poetic commentary on the bleeding, raped Lavinia, for example, clearly illustrates what Tricomi terms 'the gulf between metaphoric descriptions of events and the irrefutable realities they purport to communicate': Tricomi feels that such tactics serve to contrast 'the vacuous rhetoric of rape and the palpable reality of Lavinia's ravishment.'<sup>22</sup> Bate, however, observes that

Marcus needs a long speech because in it he has to learn slowly and painfully to confront suffering. He has to make himself *look* steadily at the mutilated woman, just as we, the offstage audience, have to look at her. (*Titus Andronicus*, pp. 62-3)

For Bate, then, the speech is a confrontation of horror, an emotional journey of acceptance – for Marcus and the play's audience. His comment serves to illuminate how language, that seems excessive on the page, may be pressed into action to produce an atmosphere or mood in the theatre. Here, language seems designed to over-work, to deliberately evoke a physical sense of striving for the impossible.

Evelyn Gajowski regards Marcus's and Titus's responses to the spectacle of the raped Lavinia as a 'rhetorical bombast' that underscores 'Lavinia's voicelessness.'<sup>23</sup> For Gajowski, as well as for Goldberg, Lavinia – although rendered more an object than a subject through her mutilation – has also become a form of text. Marcus and Titus 'read the text of her body and speak, attempting to interpret what has happened to her'.<sup>24</sup> Goldberg notes that 'Titus [...] commands that she be seen, made visible as a text'.<sup>25</sup> Subject and object boundaries, and relationships between character and form, are not simply blurred in *Titus*: they are decidedly warped. It seems, however, that despite this, and the tension created by a surfeit of description in the face of overwhelming visual evidence, there is a sense in which this particular scene also constantly confirms the importance of the text, but in ways that challenge our normal understanding of its relationship to action. Lavinia, formerly a subject, mutates, through her injuries, into a form of object, her textual voice silenced. That voice is replaced by a reading of her body as a form of visual text, and by Marcus's commentary, as he utilises classical texts in an attempt to explain the spectacle she has become. This adopted voice – or classical text – is shown to be utterly inadequate as a vehicle to effectively convey tragic emotion. In the face of poetic language that cannot convey such horror, Lavinia's body becomes a form of discord to Marcus's melodious rhetoric. The mutilation of Lavinia as

text is therefore used to demonstrate the failure of classical texts to communicate with the audience in sufficient depth or immediacy.

Marcus's insistent confirmation of his niece's all too obvious mutilation draws the scene dangerously into the realm of dark comedy:

Fair Philomela, why she but lost her tongue,  
And in a tedious sampler sewed her mind;  
But, lovely niece, that mean is cut from thee. (2.3.38-40)

This strange speech, which seems designed to add insult to injury, echoes the earlier taunts of Chiron and Demetrius, after the rape:

So, now go tell, and if thy tongue can speak. (2.3.1)

And if thy stumps will let thee, play the scribe. (2.3.4)

See how with signs and tokens she can scrawl. (2.3.5)

Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands. (2.3.6)

Their words list all the activities the now disabled Lavinia cannot perform for herself; as her attackers cruelly point out, she is unable even to devise the means to put an end to her own existence, should she wish to. Marcus's laments unwittingly achieve the same result: they draw attention to Lavinia's injuries and inadequacies, to her changed life. Chiron and Demetrius's taunts, however, draw attention to her physical disabilities in a much more direct and vivid manner. Whereas Marcus's speech locates action inexorably in the past, as a form of memory, Chiron's and Demetrius's words urge future action. As they list all the functions Lavinia cannot perform, the lines invite the audience to rehearse those activities in the mind, and sense them in the body. Lavinia's mutilated body and her attackers' taunts therefore form a powerful combination of visual and verbal stimuli. The evidence of her disability helps to shape the uncomfortable image of

Lavinia clumsily trying to perform normal tasks. In direct contrast, Marcus's classical allusions seem utterly insensitive and excessive. However, they effectively illuminate the inadequacy of Ovid's text to illustrate the real horrors of Lavinia's mutilation.

The gap that opens up, here, between excessive rhetoric and overwhelming spectacle, highlights the absurdity of matching such visually dominating evidence of physical distress with long, flowing poetic periods. Yet on close inspection, Marcus's speech does contain moments of more complex subtlety than is at first apparent. As Bate notes, there is a strong echo of the forestry terms used to describe Alarbus' death.

'Alarbus' limbs are lopped' (1.1.146) is recalled by:

Speak, gentle niece, what stern ungentle hands  
Hath lopped and hewed and made thy body bare  
Of her two branches, those sweet ornaments  
Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in. (2.3.16-19)

This strong connection with the execution of Tamora's son is a reminder that Lavinia's rape and mutilation is not an isolated tragedy in the play: it is in fact a form of revenge for an unnecessary, equally violent killing.

The image evoked by Marcus's description of the mutilated Lavinia is a startling one. The lopping and hewing of Lavinia's 'two branches' seems to convey more than the severing of hands: it evokes the partial severing of forearms, even though the stage direction reads 'her hands cut off' at the beginning of 2.3. The metaphor transforms Lavinia's body into a bare trunk, and although its branches have been cut away, the fact that they are mentioned conjures the image of severed branches in the mind, where it lingers irresistibly. In the imaginative perception, Lavinia's body becomes stiff and unwieldy, her arms – or stumps – projecting awkwardly at an angle. Recently lopped

trees appear ugly and deformed until their new branches and leaves re-grow. Lopping seems an abrupt and cruel practice, but it is one that is, ironically, usually done to stimulate new growth. The choice of 'lopped' and 'hewed' aptly conveys a sense of the physical attack itself, of its bestiality, as well as the resultant injuries. Elaine Scarry suggests that flowers and trees or vegetation are used by some writers to assist vivid mental picturing of motion: 'if [...] we can picture the changing surface of a tree [as it grows], it is because its nature makes it pliant, susceptible to our own mental revisions'.<sup>26</sup> The image of Lavinia as a mutilated tree works starkly against the concept of growth, but it is nevertheless powerfully visceral. The tree seems to grow in the mind's eye, only to be savagely arrested.

Marcus's description of the 'crimson river of warm blood, | Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind' (2.3.22-3) that '[d]oth rise and fall between thy rosed lips' (24) conjures a startling vision in the mind of both reader and audience member, and is designed to enhance audience perception in performance, particularly in a large theatre such as the Globe. In such cases, not all spectators will be close enough to see the performer's lips, and Shakespeare's description therefore brings the scene into the mind in a strongly physical sense, fusing imaginative and visual perception. Marcus's words convey colour, temperature and motility: blood rises, falls and bubbles, suggesting a laboured breathing and rapid heart-rate. The text therefore vividly augments audience perception of the character, through an evocation of Lavinia's bodily presence that makes the warmth and flow of her life blood almost tangible. The image accentuates Lavinia's silent state, the foaming of fluid at the mouth subtly implying abnormality or malfunction. Through Marcus, Shakespeare verbally paints the fine detail of his actor's

appearance, inducing the anticipation of smell, touch, temperature and colour in the imaginative perception, and thus enriching the audience's experience of the vision onstage. Lavinia's mouth and two arms are 'three issuing spouts', projecting blood '[a]s from a conduit' (2.3.30). This is a macabre image of Lavinia as a set of interlocking objects: veins carrying blood become pipes, and this enhances audience perception of her awkward 'stumps', now seen more as machine parts than human limbs. Conversely, the image of veins swelled to the size of pipes conjures an imaginative close-up of Lavinia's body, which appears bizarrely magnified in the mind's eye. Although much of Marcus's poetic commentary seems superfluous and at odds with the powerful spectacle that is Lavinia, in this example, language and object work together in superb partnership to shape and mould perception, and such moments are intensely effective, rendering the heightened rhetoric that concludes Marcus's speech weak by comparison: '[c]ome, let us go and make thy father blind, | For such a sight will blind a father's eye (2.3.52-3).

In performance, such rich imagery that seems to warp the classical writings on which it is based can work to significantly heighten audience experience of the scene, if sensitively handled. However, over-literal visual representation can be dangerous, as Shakespeare shows in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, through the Mechanicals' comic effort to translate concepts or images – such as moonshine – into material objects. In Bailey's production, Marcus's speech was quietly and sensitively delivered, as a fumbling attempt to confront and understand his niece's mutilation: '[i]f I do dream, would all my wealth would wake me' (2.3.13). Here, while Marcus began by delivering his speech partially to the audience as he stood below the down left pillar, Lavinia remained, bloody and statuesque, upstage centre. Her presence, the melancholy and



unsettling sound of a flute playing under Marcus's words, and his rather soft voice – in total contrast to the raucous cries and screams that characterised much of this production – combined to create a horrific, twisted presentation of poetry and sculpture. For a modern audience, used to regular screenings of violence on television and film, there was something grotesquely fascinating in Lavinia's motionless presence that drew and held the gaze. Marcus became the audience's tactile and emotional guide, as he moved upstage to Lavinia, using a combination of speech and touch to explore her damaged body. His gentle patter, robbed of all heroic and epic feel, fell gently into the air like verbal confetti: of transient, decorative value only. His careful tracing of her severed limbs with his fingers took the audience on a perceptual journey of the mind and senses: one which drew Lavinia's body from the distant stage and into close focus in the imaginative perception. The scene, thus staged, created a moment of tragedy that was deeply effective in its poignant simplicity.

Titus's reaction to the appearance of his ravished daughter was characteristically self-centred, exploding into a need to express his own, overwhelming grief. Although he initially lifted Lavinia in his arms, he soon deposited her on the stage, in order to give full vent to loud declarations of misery. Lavinia's body, convulsively twitching and lurching, visually dominated the scene downstage centre: a stunningly abhorrent vision against Titus's linguistic backcloth of ineffectual verbal outpourings. The production thus articulated a sense of horror that words alone could not hope to encapsulate. Titus's subsequent attempt to physically comfort Lavinia, by cradling her in his arms, resulted only in an acutely uncomfortable struggle: Lavinia's uncontrolled movements seeming to heave against his words, as well as his physical presence. Heather James recognises

that visual display and language in the text ultimately open up a gap in our perception, rather than work together: 'Marcus has inadvertently produced the play's most bizarre conflict of rhetoric and referent,'<sup>27</sup> she observes. In Bailey's production, however, the gap that James detects between word and spectacle was not overtly apparent. Instead, Marcus's commentary seemed a traumatised response: a verbal decoration that felt as comfortless as the red petals that fell on Lavinia as, framed below the upstage exit, she turned to face her uncle. Marcus's speech therefore served to deepen the tragedy of the scene in a way that defies all normal expectations of poetic language. In becoming immaterial to Lavinia's suffering, it highlighted the impotence of words to ease physical pain, yet even in doing so it became a material part of the overwhelming tragedy of the staged spectacle. Conversely, Bailey effectively showed the conflict between 'rhetoric and referent' that James detects, in Titus's verbal railing, from which he sporadically broke off to attempt to physically comfort his daughter. This strange alternating between self-indulgent outpourings of grief, and physical gesture, created a strong sense of unease, making language seem not only impotent, but disruptive.

Taymor's film takes a similar approach to the scene between Marcus and Lavinia, expressing Lavinia's physical and mental suffering in arresting visual imagery, with Marcus's speech delivered in a gentle, bewildered way that seems almost full of wonder at the scope of the horror he is witnessing. Taymor makes Lavinia part of a wild, marshy wasteland, in a scene that is painterly in its visual interpretation of Marcus's words. The speech itself is, as Pascale Aebischer points out, 'radically shortened',<sup>28</sup> and its visual realisation is heavily influenced by the image of Lavinia's body as a lopped tree. Lavinia becomes part of the mutilation of nature: planted in a landscape of dead

trees, whose unwieldy, twig-covered branches project haphazardly into the air, their dark outlines grotesquely beautiful against the skyline. Lavinia's own trunk rises up from a blackened tree stump, her arms held awkwardly out from her sides, their own stumps full of lifeless twigs that have been poked into the bloody cavities left by her dismembered hands. The twigs appear strangely like witches' fingers, recalling the bisoms or broomsticks associated with fairy-tale witchcraft. Her white petticoat, shivering like a silken flag around her body, provides a shocking contrast to her dark, tangled hair and the clumps of blackened trees and bushes that surround her. Its colour, normally associated with purity, is a painfully ironic reminder of the offstage rape that has been left to our imaginations. Aebischer notes that the picture she presents, complete with white skirt billowing out in the wind, was modelled on a famous image of Marilyn Munroe.<sup>29</sup> Her body has thus become both the lopped tree of Marcus's speech, and the 'body of a dismal yew' of Tamora's (2.2.107): a deformed specimen that reflects the 'barren detested vale' of her rape, while her clothing suggests the merged identities of classical goddess and female sexual icon.

Her face frozen in an expression beyond horror, Lavinia moves her limbs and trunk like a marionette participating in a macabre form of dance ritual, as though in an involuntary response to the sexual ritual she has been forced to undergo. Her stilted movements reflect the dismemberment that has taken place in her mind. Her mind and body no longer operate as a synchronised whole: their spatial and kinaesthetic relationship, like Lavinia's limbs, has also been severed. Her limbs therefore seem to move of their own volition, or as though controlled by an outside force. Merleau-Ponty observes that body and mind need to operate as a fusion: 'the actual existence of my

body is indispensable to that of my "consciousness".<sup>30</sup> As viewers, our lived experience of our own bodies' flow of contact with the world we inhabit makes Lavinia's movements seem strange and disturbing. Our expectations of normal behaviour are disrupted in a deeply intuitive way, disabling our inherent kinaesthetic understanding of another's spatial presence. Unlike the students in the Chapter One exercise, who involuntarily mimed their colleagues' actions in grasping the keys, we are unable to fully anticipate Lavinia's movements in our own bodies: the visceral thread between character and audience is no longer sensed in the same way. Her movements are too random and disordered to enable accurate perceptual tracing within the viewer's body, but they do, however, convey a strong sense of discomfort. Taymor's visual translation of Shakespeare's text therefore reaches beyond pictorial representation, evoking a feeling of estrangement that vividly conveys Lavinia's confusion and desperation. As Shakespeare's text creates deeply disturbing images in the mind that infuse the senses, Taymor presents visual pictures that engender feelings of shock and estrangement. In Taymor's interpretation of this scene, Marcus's commentary in fact helps us to understand what we are seeing and why, and heightens our experience of it. The textual cutting makes it easier to achieve this balanced feel between words and visual, foregrounding the medium's natural preference for action. In effect, Taymor produces a stunning example of Shakespeare's words enhanced through visual interpretation: language and words working together to optimum effect. There is no danger of over-representation, here, as with the Mechanicals' visual and practical interpretation of set and properties in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Instead, Taymor offers us a visual

exploration of the text that finds startling ways of evincing a strongly visceral and emotional response from its viewer.

The 'bubbling fountain' of blood from Lavinia's lips is not evident until Marcus urges her to '[s]peak, gentle niece' (2.3.16), when her effort to do so causes her to lean forward and open her mouth wide. As she struggles to communicate, crimson ropes of thick blood fall from her mouth, as though she is anticipating Titus's words in 3.1.232, and vomiting her woes with the blood. The action is deeply disturbing, as her bodily spasm rudely disrupts the strange, aesthetically stirring image she presents up until this point. As Aebischer observes, Lavinia is 'both exquisitely beautiful and horribly defiled.'<sup>31</sup> The physical action jolts the viewer back to the abhorrent reality of her physical suffering. In common with Bailey's production, Taymor's film succeeds in expressing the text's warping of its classical source through visual presentation, with images of horrific mutilation that contain a twisted poetic beauty at their heart.

In the above examples, both stage and film productions illustrate, in strongly visual terms, the play's concern with heightened language as potential excess, expressing its underlying drive to communicate a real sense of tragedy through action, visual presentation, and the effective use of poetic imagery that evinces a strongly visceral response from audiences and viewers. In Bailey's production, as discussed above, much of Marcus's commentary on Lavinia's mutilation became a decorative patter, and a reaction to his deep sense of shock, but his tactile exploration of her injuries brought her body into vivid close-focus in the audience's intuitive imagination. Taymor's film juxtaposes Lavinia's wordless, bloody retching with Titus's language of

vomiting that links bodily action to the physical magnitude of the sea, so that we recall the nauseating spectacle within his powerful verbal excretion.

Through Titus, Shakespeare clearly illustrates, in his text, that tears and poetic declamations are ineffectual when it comes to arousing pity. The merciless tribunes and senators are as deaf to Titus's pleas as the earth to which he appeals:

In winter with warm tears I'll melt the snow  
And keep eternal springtime on thy face,  
So thou refuse to drink my dear sons' blood. (3.1.20-3)

And let me say, that never wept before,  
My tears are now prevailing orators. (3.1.25)

And tribunes with their tongues doom men to death. (3.1.47)

His speeches may be more metaphorically charged than Tamora's in 1.1., when she begs Titus to spare her son's life, but they are listened to with the same indifference by the tribunes. Reuven Tsur makes an interesting point in his chapter on 'Deixis and Abstractions', on the way words serve as labels for emotions that 'communicate only the compact concept' of the emotion.<sup>32</sup> Tsur points out that the destabilisation of normal sentence structure found in effective poetry, on the other hand, diffuses perceptions and emotions. The different word construction in metaphors that place an object, event or state of affairs 'at the disposal of one's *perception*', he notes, allows us to 'connect the utterance to extralinguistic reality'. Such constructions help to 'loosen the tight relationship between objects and their attributes, or percepts that convey them'.<sup>33</sup> Titus's lines in the above examples are not strictly labels for emotions, but they function in a similar way as declamations of emotion that speak of, but do not effectively convey the sense of tragedy that they infer. Elsewhere in the play, however, Shakespeare illustrates

how poetic language can produce a far stronger impact on the senses and emotions.

When Marcus likens Lavinia's kiss to the touch of a snake, for example, the words appeal directly to our imaginative and intuitive perception of both the snake's qualities, and its action in trying to drink frozen water:

Alas, poor heart, that kiss is comfortless  
As frozen water to a starved snake. (3.1.251-2)

Tsur explores the idea that destabilization through poetic structure may be highly effective because of the separate areas of the brain involved in intuitive and logical thinking. He points out that the right side of the brain controls our intuitive, emotional and spatial awareness, whereas the left side 'is predominantly involved with analytic, logical thinking'.<sup>34</sup> The use of rich language and unusual word orders might therefore, he feels, act to estrange the logical process of interpretation, and appeal to the emotional and spatial processing in the right hemisphere of the brain.

Tsur's approach offers one interesting way of exploring the very direct impact of language in certain cases, through the detailed analysis of sentence construction. It could therefore prove useful in second-stage phenomenological investigation, as a way of considering a single aspect of possible cause and effect. My study, however, is primarily interested in the intense impact of the whole example in subjective terms, considering our bodily as well as emotional responses – particularly in the light of performance possibilities. In phenomenological terms, Shakespeare's startling metaphor fuses the onstage picture with the image of a snake running its closed mouth over the ice, in an abortive attempt to find water to sip. The snake's closed mouth is a stark reminder of Lavinia's mute state, and the imagined action of the snake and visual stimulus of the

onstage girl help to vividly convey a desolate lack of physical and emotional comfort. The image of the snake's mouth sipping fruitlessly at the ice evokes the anticipation of the chill, unrelenting flesh beneath Lavinia's lips. The suggestion of temperature, touch and movement therefore brings the description alive within the senses, rendering it more powerfully vivid than 'tongues' that 'doom men to death' (3.1.47), which tells, or labels emotion, rather than conjuring images and stimulating sensory perception through association and memory. The kiss is as 'comfortless' for Lavinia as for her brothers, who are unable to feel the touch of their sister's lips, or sense the emotion underlying her action. The snake's silent impotence vividly reinforces Lavinia's disability in a way that Titus's earlier outpourings of grief cannot. In this short speech and suggested action, language and onstage visual presentation are designed to function together in superb partnership, appealing directly to the senses in a way that can potentially enrich an audience's perceptual experience.

Shakespeare's words can enhance the visceral impact of onstage action for his audience. Visual stimuli in themselves may also elicit a strongly tactile response within us, however. For example, as the actress playing Lavinia brushes the severed heads with her lips, the effect achieved in the language may be imaginatively sensed in the bodies of those watching and listening. As Smith explains, 'experiments in neuroscience have demonstrated that the same neurons fire when a particular action is being perceived as when that action is being performed by oneself – only they fire in the reverse direction.'<sup>35</sup> He suggests that this explanation may account in some form for the way our empathy works, and our ability to experience what he calls 'trans-body relations in theater'<sup>36</sup> so intensely. He describes what happens when a subject is 'induced to locate



tactile sensations in a projected image of his body': a state he calls '[p]roprioceptive drift'.<sup>37</sup> In one experiment, subjects wore 'virtual reality goggles that projected, several feet in front of them, images of their own backs as observed by cameras several feet behind them.'<sup>38</sup> When the subjects were stroked with a wand, but they observed the virtual images being stroked at the same time, he notes that 'almost all the subjects attributed the sensation of being touched to the virtual figure in front of them, rather than their actual bodies.'<sup>39</sup> He concludes that visual cues make it 'startlingly easy' to 'include another body'<sup>40</sup> in our conscious appreciation of touch, and explains how recent studies have revealed that a particular area of the cerebral cortex is responsible for receiving and processing 'tactile sensations from various parts of the body'. As a result, 'if a limb is removed, the tissue devoted to sensation in that limb in some cases redirects itself to body parts that are adjacent in the brain even if they are quite remote on the body itself.'<sup>41</sup> Thus stroking a patient's face could activate a feeling of sensation in the phantom limb, since face and hands occupy a similar central area in the brain. He notes that these mechanisms that allow us to project our own apprehension of sensations onto a virtual or surrogate model, and vice versa, are called 'mirror neurons'.<sup>42</sup> Although Smith's reasoning here is couched in neuro-scientific terms, he highlights the same interest and concern with our ability to experience tactile sensations through visual stimuli that is expressed by Merleau-Ponty. Smith also points out that Shakespeare uses verbal cues to stimulate the phenomenon of '[p]roprioceptive drift'<sup>43</sup> or to evoke an apprehension of tactile experience for his audience. Lavinia's kissing of the dismembered heads is an action in itself that triggers this response, yet Shakespeare's

potent description, as the above analysis shows, can offer an even more intense appreciation of her action, if it is sensitively delivered in performance.

Shakespeare subtly reminds us of this powerful metaphor shortly after its mention, in 3.2, when Titus fails to help his daughter to drink:

Here is no drink! Hark, Marcus, what she says:  
I can interpret all her martyred signs –  
She says she drinks no other drink but tears. (3.2.35-7)

Here, Lavinia, like the snake, is literally starved of physical comfort, unable even to express her own needs – denied water by her father's emotional thirst for poetic declamation. Outpourings of words replace life-giving sips of water. Moments like this express the true tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*, and offer great potential for effectively communicating Shakespeare's visceral language to an audience. In Bailey's production, however, the snake metaphor lost some of its potential impact. The speech in which it figures became merely an expression of Titus's bitter rage and frustration, and as such there was no change in pace or intonation in the lines, and no time for the audience to absorb the impact of the words. In Taymor's film, Lavinia kissed Titus instead of her brothers' heads. The heads were placed inside glass jars in a display cabinet carried by a bizarre, three-wheeled military van that acted as the backdrop to a disturbing, comic sideshow. In this example, the feeling of estrangement was achieved visually through the strange scene (discussed in more detail below), and through the incongruous circus music that set up audience expectations (and here the audience included the onstage one of Titus and his family) for fun and entertainment. The impact of Shakespeare's rich metaphor seemed somewhat lost amid this plethora of other stimuli.

The above discussion contrasts the declamations of woe that Titus makes to the tribunes – words that tend to label emotions rather than communicate them – with a metaphor that shows language's stunning potential to evoke vivid images and elicit tactile and sentient responses from a watching and listening audience. The following analysis looks at some effective instances within Titus's verbal outpourings, and asks why these particular points in his speeches seem to have a more immediate, visceral quality. Titus's sufferings are initially expressed in terms of immensity: the massive forces of the sea, and the earth itself, seem unable to convey his despair. The images he employs are desperate attempts to communicate a sense of tragedy beyond measure, but when his words fail to precipitate action, they become – like Titus's emotions – a nauseating surfeit that can only be violently and involuntarily expelled: '[f]or why my bowels cannot hide her woes, | But like a drunkard must I vomit them' (3.1.231-2). This grounding of metaphor in the body appeals instantly to our ability to anticipate movement in the imaginative perception. Peter Crisp, in his chapter 'Conceptual Metaphor and Its Expressions', notes that the linking of emotions to elements is a way of understanding them: '[a]lthough emotions are central to our experience, their nature is often very difficult to grasp. Such physical phenomena as winds and floods, by contrast, are far easier for us to think about'.<sup>44</sup> Our response to Titus's words in this case, however, are more intuitively grounded than in pure thought, as Crisp implies. The magnification of perceived bodily heaving, through the link between sea and vomiting, evokes a powerful sense of involuntary movement that seems to imaginatively drive the contents of the whole body upwards: a huge, muscular spilling-out of undigested surplus. Titus speaks of the vomiting of woes, yet the vivid movement we are asked to

feel and sense seems to catch up his words, a surfeit of emotional labels, in the upward surge. It is the action suggested by these words that conveys the rage, disgust and pain that Titus is experiencing, through appeals to our memories of our own emotional and bodily experiences. In this effective metaphor, the sea becomes both a perceptual magnifying glass, and an energetic force that drives our intuitive processing of the image.

As the above discussion implies, there seems to be an underlying dialogue in *Titus Andronicus* that juxtaposes demonstrations of conflict between action and words, with the powerful effects that can be achieved through the marriage of potent language and visual stimuli suggested in the text. There are also moments in *Titus* when Shakespeare pointedly illustrates the ability of language to obstruct rather than aid visual display, and such tactics cause the mood of the play to flip from tragedy to comedy – despite the obviously tragic events unfolding onstage. Conversely, he shows, in masterly fashion, how the comic mood may be neatly and instantly switched to one that is movingly tragic. The scene that clearly demonstrates this skill is 3.1, when Titus offers to sacrifice his hand to save his sons' lives. It is a useful scene for a phenomenological close-reading, since it once again illustrates a disturbing merger of subject and object boundaries, in its intense focus on severed limbs that ultimately become macabre forms of portable stage property.

Hattaway points out that the word 'hand' 'occurs forty-six times in the play'.<sup>45</sup> The references begin with Titus's pun on the word, in another seemingly cruel and insensitive reminder to Lavinia of her disability: '[s]peak, Lavinia, what accursed hand | Hath made thee handless in thy father's sight?' (3.1.67-8). Michael Hattaway

feels that over-use of the word results in a devaluing of onstage action, 'because the words used to describe it have been raped of their metaphorical significance.'<sup>46</sup> Once again, in *Titus*, the onstage action can be rendered pointless by the insistent over-use of language. Shakespeare stresses, through Titus, the inadequacy of the word 'hands' in the face of overwhelming physical evidence: '[a]s if we should forget we had no hands | If Marcus did not name the word of hands' (3.2.32-3). The obvious absence of Titus's and Lavinia's hands makes the continual mention of them as absurd as an attempt to communicate real tragedy through the re-telling of a classical tale, as Titus shows:

Ah, wherefore dost thou urge the name of hands  
To bid Aeneas tell the tale twice o'er  
How Troy was burnt and he made miserable?  
O handle not the theme, to talk of hands,  
Lest we remember still that we have none. (3.2.26-30)

Katharine Rowe suggests that the hand is 'the instrument of reason and its material counterpart.'<sup>47</sup> In sacrificing his hand to the emperor, and using Aaron as an accomplice, Titus could be said to have severed all links to common sense at this point. More importantly, the grand gesture which accompanies the sacrifice is utterly ridiculed, particularly since the hand is returned almost immediately, with the heads of Titus's two sons. Shakespeare takes care to show the dismembered hand in a comic light. It becomes, in fact, a symbol of the inversion of heroic values: a useless waste product, manipulated in a puppet-like fashion by Lavinia, as she carries it off in her mouth – visually and wordlessly confirming her own disability. Her action smacks of the carnivalesque, moving the play from tragedy firmly into the realm of horror. *Titus* shows, in fact, that tragedy – in the form of needless violence, precipitated by a lack of understanding and empathy – is pure horror at its heart when stripped of the romantic

heroism that otherwise numbs its full effect. Titus's hand and his sons' heads are seen as superfluous products: the scene thereby mercilessly ironises sacrifice, reflecting the pitiless and unnecessary violence meted out to Tamora's son, Alarbus, in the opening scene.

Rowe points out that hands, as 'severed objects', become 'assimilated into the world of manual tools' in the play.<sup>48</sup> Yet Titus's hand cannot be utilised positively in any way whatsoever. Its visual impact is shockingly humorous, but in this way it becomes part of the play's evidence of tragic heroism as surfeit. Rather than encouraging an empathetic response from his audience in this instance, Shakespeare confronts it with absurdly pointless violence. Even before Titus's hand is hacked off onstage, it becomes the subject of a bizarre contest between father, son and uncle, each of them eager to sacrifice a limb to save Quintus and Martius. As they discuss whose hand should be dismembered, they speak in heightened, poetic terms:

Lucius            Stay, father, for that noble hand of thine  
                      That hath thrown down so many enemies  
                      Shall not be sent. My hand will serve the turn.  
                      My youth can better spare my blood than you,  
                      And therefore mine shall save my brothers' lives.

Marcus            Which of your hands hath not defended Rome  
                      And reared aloft the bloody battleaxe,  
                      Writing destruction on the enemy's casque?  
                      O, none of both but are of high desert.  
                      My hand hath been but idle: let it serve  
                      To ransom my two nephews from their death,  
                      Then I have kept it to a worthy end. (3.1.163-74)

Aaron cuts across these noble declamations with grim irony, pointing out in a practical vein that time spent in discussion puts lives at risk:

Nay, come, agree whose hand shall go along,

For fear they die before their pardon come. (3.1.175-6)

The line no doubt expresses the thoughts of many of those in the audience – not because they anxiously await Quintus's and Martius's reprieve, since they are already aware of Aaron's villainous pact with Tamora – but because of the time wasted in speech in the face of the action that is all too obviously required. Aaron's rhyming couplet also sardonically parodies the neat summary that characterises the sonnet, adding a jeering note to the lines that seems directed both at the heroic Romans and at the poetic form itself. His choice of words imbues the hand with an apparent mind of its own: the chosen limb will 'go along', rather than be ceremoniously borne away; the phrase serves to ironise the heroic verbal gestures that Marcus and Lucius are intent on making. The suggestion of the independently moving severed limb heightens the mood of comic horror, and presages the puppet-like role of Titus's severed hand shortly afterwards, as Lavinia carries it off in her mouth. The scene quite deliberately moves into comic gear, with Aaron in the macabre role of witty compere. It remains in verse, but the lines are split cleverly between Marcus and Lucius, to form an absurd wrangle over whose hand shall be sacrificed:

Marcus            My hand shall go.

Lucius                            By heaven it shall not go. (3.1.177)

Titus gallantly intervenes, and the argument continues through a series of carefully balanced, poetic pleas:

Titus            Sirs, strive no more. Such withered herbs as these  
                         Are meet for plucking up – and therefore mine.

Lucius            Sweet father, if I shall be thought thy son,  
                         Let me redeem my brothers both from death.

Marcus           And for our father's sake and mother's care,  
                      Now let me show a brother's love to thee. (178-183)

Titus now appears to give up his intention to sacrifice his hand, but in a prosaic way that has a comic effect, and sets the tone and rhythm for the argument to continue in grimly humorous style. The lines are split once more between Lucius and Marcus, the jerky, abrupt rhythm giving them a petulant feel, as though the scene were depicting two children squabbling over a toy:

Titus            Agree between you: I will spare my hand.

Lucius          Then I'll go fetch an axe.

Marcus          But I will use the axe. (184-6)

When Lucius and Marcus have gone to seek out this item, Titus enlists Aaron's help to 'deceive them both' (187), and finally the sacrifice is made. Once again, Aaron's response is somewhat in the nature of a punch-line, with its inevitably humorous appeal to an audience already aware of his character:

                  If that be called deceit, I will be honest  
                  And never whilst I live deceive men so. (189-90)

Titus's hand is severed from his body, but despite the tragic nature of the event, the mood is undeniably, darkly comic. It is juxtaposed with more poetic lamentations from Titus that even Marcus deploras:

                  O brother, speak with possibility,  
                  And do not break into these deep extremes. (3.1.215-6)

Titus is, however, unable to contain his outpourings of grief:

                  Is not my sorrows deep, having no bottom?  
                  Then be my passions bottomless with them. (217-8)



His impassioned speech lasts for another twenty-four lines, at the end of which, with striking abruptness, visual onstage action flips the mood helplessly back into comedy. The stage direction reads: '*Enter a Messenger with two heads and a hand*' (3.1.234). The instant onstage picture is designed to shock; at the same it shows Titus's unnecessary sacrifice in an absurd light. It also reveals, through the ease with which Aaron has duped his enemy, how Titus shapes his own violent fate in the play. His willingness to believe that the needless hacking off of his own hand might redeem his sons' lives is in fact only possible through the Romans' deeply engrained, barbaric attitude towards their adversaries – aptly illustrated by their treatment of Alarbus. The scene's dark humour therefore arises from the overwhelming irony of that situation, the visual eruption of the body props temporarily replacing the pain of tragedy with the sting of black comedy. This one short moment of onstage visual humour, therefore, is a consummate comic antidote to the tragic rhetoric that introduces it. The objects' entrance conveys the futility of Titus's sacrifice far more effectively than any words could achieve at this point. Indeed, it serves to ruthlessly underscore the utter pointlessness of the heroic banter that frames their appearance.

An audience's awareness that the heads and hands are ultimately only stage properties, does not in any way diminish from the comic shock value of the action: in fact, it rather enhances it. As this chapter has revealed, the relationship between objects and human limbs in *Titus* is complex: both body and object are seen as interchangeable on stage. Here, the heads and hand properties now represent human body parts; conversely, they are also human body parts reduced to the status of objects within the world of the play. The abrupt appearance of the properties onstage conjures the image of

the dismembered bodies they have left behind: the sight of a head without a body immediately recalls the image of a body without its head. The unnatural act of mutilation is therefore communicated through unnatural humour in this moment: the frisson of comedy that shivers through the scene enhancing rather than diminishing the horror and brutality the play depicts.

Bailey's production fully exploited the scene's potential for humour. Marcus, Titus and Lucius squabbled comically over the right to place their hands on a wooden chopping block. They pushed each other's hands physically off the block, like children fighting over a toy, while Aaron, downstage right and in full view of the audience, smirked at the success of his ruse. The whole scene became farcical, evoking great gusts of laughter from the audience at the characters' ever more fervent and frantic attempts to heroically sacrifice their hands. When the characters all finally pulled their hands away, the choreographed action, performed in unison, was greeted by more laughter from the audience that continued during the hacking off of Titus's hand. Titus's momentary agony was effectively conveyed through his howl of pain and violent bodily lurch, with the effect enhanced through the sinister, rattling sound of maracas that had now become, for the audience, a recognisable cue for mutilation and violence. The responsive groans of horror from the auditorium on this occasion confirmed a widespread feeling of abhorrence at the deed, as though many audience members were anticipating the pain evinced by the blows. An undercurrent of humour still ran through the scene, however: a mood which was carried through to the later banquet scene, and infused the horrific onstage carnage and consumption with an energy that felt strangely voracious in its drive. In this way, Bailey effectively channelled the tension and energy produced by the

conflict between verbal and visual in the text into a muscular drive that seemed to engulf as well as propel the action.

In Taymor's film, the hand-chopping scene's potential for humour is delayed until the actual moment of mutilation. The men's wrangling over who is to have the honour of sacrificing his hand is played down in the haste with which the characters rush home to find a suitable axe or knife. The fast-moving pace of the action swallows up any opportunity for the viewer to appreciate the humour running through the lines, as it leaves no pockets of time for them to be adequately absorbed. Moreover, in the rush to find the axe, the camera uses long or mid shots to track the running figures and there are therefore no facial close-ups of the characters as they respond and react to each other's lines: an essential element of successful comic delivery. As Titus and Aaron erupt into the kitchen, however, and Aaron is seen first testing and rejecting a knife, then nonchalantly tossing an axe up into the air to test its weight, the mood becomes quickly and darkly farcical. There is a shot of the axe upheld by Aaron, before the camera cuts to Titus's hand, stretched out on a wooden chopping board, and already appearing bizarrely visually dismembered by the camera's close-up. The camera then cuts to Titus looking apprehensively up at Aaron, then zooms in on Aaron for a head-and-shoulders close-up, where it pauses for a moment for us to take in Aaron's almost gleeful grin and suggestion of a raised eyebrow, before the axe comes down. The comic potential in Shakespeare's text is therefore visually interpreted in this film through the alternating camera shots from victim to villain, the gleeful expression on Aaron's face as he looks into the camera, the frantic pace of the events leading up to the mutilation, and the moments of paused action that effectively capture snapshots of characters' actions and

reactions, so vital to farce. Visceral contact with the audience is established by the judicious use of sound effects to enhance movement. The axe's contact with Titus's flesh is heard, rather than seen. The swish of the axe and sickly crunch of severed bone, together with Titus's howl of pain, and a close-up of him cradling his hand, is enough to evoke a vivid anticipation of the mutilation for the viewer. The sweeping movement of the axe triggers a responsive anticipation of the movement in our own bodies, while the sound effect confirms physical contact with vivid clarity.

In Bailey's production, sound also brought action strongly to life in the audience's intuitive perception, when Titus appeared to snap Lavinia's neck during the banquet scene (5.3.46). The sound effect, caused by 'a brittle bottle or beaker [ . . . ] scrunched up at the exact moment'<sup>49</sup> was palpable. Bailey had the dismembered heads delivered to the stage in muslin bags, but although there was no gory revelation of the bloody contents, Lavinia's action in bending to kiss the bags showed that, despite her grotesque outer appearance, and her clumsy and uncoordinated movements, her sisterly love remained intact. Her slow and measured action in getting to her knees to grasp her father's dismembered hand in her mouth maximised the visceral impact of this scene for the audience. As she fumbled for the flesh with her lips and teeth, she gave those watching time to anticipate its cold, bloody feel against her warm mouth, and to trace her movements within their own perceptual bodies. The uncomfortable feelings experienced by the audience were evident. Front of House reports for the play confirm its physical impact. On 20 May 2006, for example, the Show Report read: 'Foh and our fireman commented that on a night like this, we have an unprecedented amount of fainters.'<sup>50</sup>The remaining reports showed similar occurrences. Numbers of audience

members who fainted during performances were reported to have 'increased dramatically after Lavinia's scene'.<sup>51</sup> As Smith observes, '[i]n the theater of cruelty, analogical disturbances are set off by touch'.<sup>52</sup> The examples of Lavinia kissing the severed heads and picking up her father's hand in her mouth aptly illustrate the vivid impact of action supported by words in *Titus Andronicus*.

Taymor's film succeeds in destabilising audience expectations of the same scene through comic action, in which the heads and hand are delivered by a waddling little brown, three-wheeler car: a truncated version of a military vehicle, adapted to act as a travelling show. Frenetic circus music encourages young Lucius and his family to anticipate some form of entertainment, and the behaviour of the two messengers – the burly, leather-clad soldier who abducts young Lucius in the opening scene, and a red-headed girl – reinforces this idea. As chairs are set, and the side of the van rolled down, however, the scene turns to one of horror as the music stops abruptly, and the brothers' heads are revealed, squashed into large specimen jars, their features grotesquely pressed against the glass. In this interpretation of the scene, the expectation of comedy is abruptly overturned by horror, making Titus's laughter seem part of the scene's mood of estrangement. As Judith Buchanan observes, '[t]his is horror dressed up as a performative confection'.<sup>53</sup> Lavinia's action in grasping her father's dismembered hand with her mouth is done purposefully and without humour, as part of the 'clan's collaborative gathering-up of its own and re-grouping'.<sup>54</sup> It is only given a few seconds of camera time. Like Bailey's production, Taymor's film manages to avoid the sense of ridicule that can be evoked by Lavinia's exit with the hand. Bailey's scene was, however, far more viscerally affective. Arnold Preussner, in his review of the play in

*Shakespeare Bulletin*, comments: 'Bailey's production [...] worked strenuously to emphasize [...] the many points in the script where humor and violence combine to produce the grotesque effects associated with "black humor" and theatre of the absurd.'<sup>55</sup>

In Bailey's production, and Taymor's film, there was no sense of the struggle to reconcile language with action that is often expressed by literary critics. What did become overwhelmingly evident was the fiercely energetic and physical drive this play requires and evokes in performance. The tension that critics so evidently sense in the text therefore seems to have been translated into a powerfully active force in production. Both stage production and film succeeded in creating an exciting visual, aural, sensual and tactile theatrical experience. In Bailey's production, the staging physically interpreted the fearful forest, where 'never shines the sun' and 'nothing breeds' (96) save the pleasure that characters show in lust and brutality. It did so not through pictorial representation, but through creation of atmosphere: a literal process of dimming, restriction and constriction: a muffling through which actors' voices nevertheless howled their fear and emotions. Actors' bodies became the instruments for stunning sound effects. Taymor's film depicts violence as a nauseating feast and surfeit that reflects our own time and that of ancient Rome, linking our anaesthetized attitude towards the violence that we witness through the media of TV and film with the stone-like soldiers and porcelain limbs that act as metaphors for the attitudes of the warlike Romans and Goths. The magnified and multiplied images of objects and limbs are uncomfortably destabilising, invading the space of the screen, looming ominously in the background or oppressively in the foreground, or threatening to hurtle out of shot and

into the viewer's own world. Their spatial distortion reflects the warped values of the play's protagonists. The film presents, in highly visual terms, the excess of violence that literary critics detect in *Titus*. It expresses a sense of horror that is beyond the representation of icons or emblems, echoing the way in which the text shows much of its heightened poetry to be incapable of communicating the true horror of tragedy. In the film, emblems and icons are themselves therefore made visually excessive.

This chapter suggests that *Titus*, as an early play, seems to be paving the way for Shakespeare's later tragedies. Its projected struggle between the superpowers of language and action illustrates an experimental stage in the young playwright's career: a quest and determination to find a new and unique style in which to communicate tragedy to his audiences. In this chapter's opening quotation, Tricomi points out the deliberate surfeit of language in *Titus*, and in the quotation from *Hamlet* that follows, Shakespeare illustrates the dramatic goal he is seeking in his work. The conflict between language and action in *Titus* openly and deliberately portrays the early part of that journey.

The above discussion explores how Shakespeare sets out to enhance our experience of *Titus Andronicus*, on the page and in performance, through the visceral appeal of aural and visual stimuli, and within the conflict of language and action that characterises the play. It considers the way Shakespeare blurs subject and object boundaries through the treatment of dismembered limbs as objects, and looks at the way Lavinia's body, described in terms of a series of mechanical parts and a tree with hewn branches, is also presented as a form of classical text, itself mutilated by the violent assault on tragic rhetoric by the play's action. Whereas in *Othello*, Desdemona creates a story-book world in which she misreads her husband's character – an action that brings

about her own destruction – in *Titus*, Lavinia's mutilated bodily text is read as a result of her dismemberment, as characters strive to come to terms with actions that seem cruel beyond reality. As the essence of Desdemona's body is located in an object that becomes a form of text, whose story is then disfigured by words, so Lavinia's body becomes an object of both verbal and physical assault. In both plays, the concept of storytelling plays a powerful role. Lavinia's rape and mutilation is finally given voice through Ovid's metamorphosis, whereas the handkerchief ultimately expresses Desdemona's sacrifice. In *Othello*, the handkerchief becomes the dismembered essence of Desdemona's chastity. In *Titus*, bodies themselves are treated as objects, savagely dismembered as the play's juxtaposition of horrific action with heightened rhetoric seems to mutilate the classical texts that it takes as its body of reference. The severed limbs in *Titus* reappear in *Henry V*, through an image of dismembered soldiers, killed on the battlefield that is in turn juxtaposed with scenes projecting the healthily wholesome king's body as representative of the nation's unity. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare builds on the linguistic and dramatic achievements that illuminate *Titus*. He explores the complex ability of language to enrich and deepen his audience's perceptual experience of theatre, with and without the use of onstage objects.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### Henry V: Perceiving History

In *Othello*, as Chapter Three shows, Shakespeare demonstrates how our perception of people and objects can be shaped, even transfigured, through language. The last chapter discusses the uneasy partnership of word and object in *Titus Andronicus*, considering instances where stunning visual presentation can make poetic language seem superfluous. Chapter Five explores how, in *Henry V*, language fashions objects of the mind, evokes atmosphere and infers action in vivid appeals to the intuitive imagination. *Henry V* displays a vital, collaborative drive, a desire to harness its audience's imaginative and intuitive powers in a creative partnership. It is indicative of Shakespeare's developing understanding of our intuitive perception, that a play which deliberately employs a Chorus to 'foreground the *artificiality* of the dramatic event'<sup>1</sup> can simultaneously demonstrate the potency of poetry over properties and set. As Lina Perkins-Wilder writes, '[f]or every skull or handkerchief that brings the "past" of the play into its staged present, there are objects whose deeply felt physicality is entirely a matter of language, not a material fact.'<sup>2</sup> As this chapter focuses primarily on objects created in the imaginative perception, the term 'audience' refers in the main to potential audiences, as imagined from the reader's perspective. Where actual audiences are referred to, this will be clearly indicated. In order to pursue a perceptual journey through

the text, comments on actual performances will follow textual close-reading in this chapter.

*Henry V* spins an atmospheric web of inclusivity through its Chorus and principal character that is subtly breached from within through the speeches of minor characters. These subversive voices help to dismantle the play's outer wrapper of patriotic heroism and reveal the horrific reality of war. Subjects take on the essential qualities of objects in our imaginative perception, through a complex use of sound, rhythm, syntax and imagery. This chapter therefore looks closely at examples from the Chorus's and Henry's speeches, the role of minor characters in creating vivid imagery that actively opposes the patriotic heroism both king and Chorus seem to espouse, and the subtle link, forged by language, between one vital stage property and the palpable horrors of war.

James Calderwood notes that *Henry V* 'earns its keep in action',<sup>3</sup> but as Robert Ornstein also points out, much of its action is inferred:

[t]hose who think of [*Henry V*] as a play of physical action, do so not because its scenes are made up of excursions and alarms, but because the Chorus creates such memorable word pictures of epic activity and movement.<sup>4</sup>

The Chorus's speeches are rich with active imagery:

Now all the youth of England are on fire,  
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies. (*Henry V*, 2.0.1-2)

O do but think  
You stand upon the rivage and behold  
A city on th'inconstant billows dancing. (3.0.13-18)

In the above examples, the Chorus conjures scenic mind-pictures with a strongly visceral appeal. '[t]he youth of England are on fire': burning with the heat of ambition,

of anticipated action and patriotic pride. Youth is, like fire, associated with hasty thoughts, temper and action. A characteristic of male youth is the longing to prove its worth in terms of manhood, and thus young hot blood is associated in this speech with war and male prowess. As Rebecca Ann Bach observes, *Henry V* is a story of 'testicular masculinity'.<sup>5</sup> As fire can quickly burn out of control, causing total destruction, so may youth react in the heat of the moment. Fire represents both physical vitality and brilliant imagination: the Chorus calls for 'a muse of fire' in his opening line, and refers to 'the quick forge and working-house of thought' in 5.0.23. 'Now all the youth of England are on fire' contains a simple but effective metaphor, evoking a myriad of associations to stimulate our perception of excitement, heat, ambition and impatience in England's young men, and to subtly link the ravages of war with the flame of ambition and desire. The following line is more subtle. 'Dalliance' is an old-fashioned word for flirtation. Bach notes: 'the *OED* finds the word denoting "wanton toying" with women as early as 1400.'<sup>6</sup> Here, the robes themselves embody the teasing role their owners may have played out whilst wearing them, and yet the image of the robes lying emptied of bodies, in the wardrobe, anticipates the emptying of England of her male youth. 'Silken' robes imply the pleasures of dancing and socialising, and denote class – for only higher-ranking individuals would have worn silk in Shakespeare's lifetime. Yet the adjective serves not so much to indicate the exodus of a certain class, as to suggest the wanton abandon with which the decision to embrace war is taken: the flimsy understanding that motivates it, and gathers England's youth to its banner. War is embraced as lightly as the silken robes are worn and discarded. Flirtation is now with fame and fortune, and dancing – a courtly pastime, governed by its own set of social rules – is exchanged for

the game of war, with its own, hideously unmannerly regulations (vividly illustrated in Henry's speech at Harfleur). Like fire, war can easily become impossible to control; its rules may be broken in the heat of the moment, as with the slaughtering of the luggage boys.

In this one, small example, Shakespeare manages to engender an uplifting sense of anticipation, a lightness of heart – through the concept of leaping flame and the silken robes' association with flirtation and dancing. Buoyancy is an apt term for the atmosphere this scene engenders, for expectation 'sits' in the air, filling the mind and body with its sense of presence. Sitting is often equated with waiting, somewhere between resting and action. Such presuppositions are used by Shakespeare to trigger associations within our minds and bodies. Merleau-Ponty points out that '[c]ommunication pre-supposes (even while outstripping and enriching it in the case of new and authentic expression) a certain linguistic setting through which a meaning resides in the words'.<sup>7</sup> The feeling evoked by the word 'sits' in Shakespeare's metaphor is intuitively apprehended in the body, for as Merleau-Ponty observes, experience 'always comes into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body'.<sup>8</sup> Shakespeare appeals to his readers' and audience members' instinctive bodily and suppositional grasp of what it means to be seated, so that this physical awareness is fused with their understanding of the words 'expectation' and 'air'. The metaphor thus uses but outstrips presuppositions of all three words, so that what is experienced is a complex mixture of thought and sense. Peter B Erickson interprets 'expectation' as a personification, because of its apparent posture: it 'can be personified because it holds no real surprises'.<sup>9</sup> Creating surprise, however, is

not the aim of this scene. A feeling of shared anticipation is rather the goal.

'Expectation' has a sense of mass and presence: its position – 'in' the air, implies that its intoxicating effect may be inhaled. The speech conveys a strong sense of immediacy.

The scene enfolds rather than unfolds: the present tense is stressed by the repeated use of 'now': '[n]ow all the youth of England are on fire' (2.0.1); '[n]ow thrive the armourers' (3), 'now sits expectation in the air' (8). England's youth is filled with the desire for glory and recognition: 'honour's thought' (3). Expectation 'hides a sword from hilts unto the point | With crowns imperial, crowns and coronets, | Promised to Harry and his followers' (9-11). The lighter tone of excitement and aspiration obscures the more practical, underlying ambition for material gain by king and followers.

'[H]onour's thought' is linked directly with the king, in that it '[r]eigns solely in the breast of every man' (4): it is the ruling power within him. The king's wishes are thus subtly implanted in his people's hearts. While an intoxicating aura of anticipation overtly drives this scene, at the same time its subtle subtext conveys a sense of emptiness through the image of unoccupied robes, and thereby suggests an ironic comparison between social entertainment and the sport of war.

In the second quotation, the ships themselves are dancing on the waves: '[a] city on th'inconstant billows dancing' (3.0.15). Again, the image conjures a sensation of lightness, for the ships are on, rather than in, the waves. The metaphor subtly 'direct[s] attention *away from* the objects and concepts *to* their felt qualities': a linguistic device that Reuven Tsur calls 'an ABSTRACT of the CONCRETE metaphor'.<sup>10</sup> The use of the sound 'O' at the beginning of this speech helps to evoke a feeling of longing and admiration; it is a sound often used to express heartfelt emotion, and allows the actor



playing Chorus the opportunity to convey these feelings in the simplest and most direct of ways. The adjuration 'do but think' is an insistent call to the mind's eye: a demand for the Chorus's partner, the audience, to look inwards, to activate the full force of the imagination. On a more subtle level, the words render the speech a poetic musicality that inspires a shared sense of experience between audience and Chorus. In this speech, the audience is imaginatively positioned behind the fleet. If the ships are 'dancing', and there are sufficient to form what resembles a city, then to view them in this way requires a significant sense of distance. The ships' movements also imply the gentle action of the waves themselves, but as they are 'inconstant', the image is of many ships bobbing up and down on the tips of them, as sunlight appears to dance on the water – sporadically, rather than regularly. The longing adjuration for the audience to 'think' is now echoed in '[f]ollow, follow!' (3.0.17), with the long sound of 'o' repeated in the second syllable: the invitation directing the audience's gaze beyond the theatre stage, evoking the movement of the eyes themselves as they track the departing sails. The audience, having seen off the impressive fleet from the bank, is now able, with the Chorus's help, to add effortlessness of travel to lightness of heart, and instantly to accompany the scene to Harfleur. Guided by the Chorus, it is free to create and recreate scenic images and atmospheres through which it perceives the action onstage. This particular type of audience participation is vital to *Henry V*, and forms part of the play's unique style. It allows for a sense of universal purpose, and yet an individual freedom to respond to Shakespeare's language through creative imagination.

As Chapter One shows, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare recognises and comments upon the danger of not allowing an audience the opportunity to respond

imaginatively. In *Henry V*, therefore, Shakespeare appeals to his audience to assist in the ultimate creation of theatre: a collaborative 'muse of fire' (0.1) that can outstrip any attempt at physical representation of this epic tale. The risk of being laughed off the stage by a paltry presentation of swords and men is still obviously present, but he defuses the threat by lamenting these shortcomings through the Chorus, and thereby prepares his audience for the reality of visual representation:

And so our scene must to the battle fly,  
Where O for pity, we shall much disgrace,  
With four or five most vile and ragged foils,  
Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous,  
The name of Agincourt. (4.0.48-52)

The audience *is* in some way 'cajoled', as G P Jones writes,<sup>11</sup> but the mannerly approach the Chorus uses encourages a willing collaboration, within a spacious imaginative landscape, unlimited by material boundaries. As Meek comments, '[b]y saying what it cannot do, Shakespeare's art brilliantly complicates our responses to it.'<sup>12</sup> The humble excuse the Chorus advances his audience is not, in basic concept, unlike the Mechanicals' attempts to explain the appearance of a lion onstage, or physically represent the moon, but what is lacking in their performance is effective poetry. The Mechanicals attempt instead a direct translation of word into action. There is no linguistic imagery or carefully crafted sound and syntax to pre-empt or accompany the scenes, to lift them from the limitations of the stage into the imagination, as in the Chorus's speeches in *Henry V*.

From the opening words of the Prologue, the Chorus expresses a longing to be able to present theatre as living history: '[a] kingdom for a stage, princes to act, | And monarchs to behold the swelling scene' (0.3-4). At the same time, the language implies

an inversion of theatre and reality: the kingdom is a stage for monarchs, as Shakespeare demonstrates constantly through Henry's performative style of kingship and his awareness of the 'idol ceremony' (4.1.228). The play therefore opens by voicing a dream, and yet simultaneously revealing a reality. The opening speech is, moreover, a form of confidence, which immediately places the audience in the privileged role of confidante. Yet even as the wistful statement conveys the impossibility of the dream it expresses, language begins to do the work of diverting audience attention from the limits of the physical world, into the creation of a new perceived reality. The scene is already 'swelling' (0.4) before the imagination. 'Swelling' implies a sense of slow but noticeable growth: of filling with matter as yet unseen, and to proportions as yet unknown. The idea of theatre mutating into kingdom is therefore subtly introduced, along with a sense of expectation. 'Behold' is a deliberately poetic choice, as Gary Taylor notes (Note 0.4), conveying an appreciation of posture: a deliberate stance adopted to stand and gaze. As the audience members are to be the beholders of the scene, it not only prepares them to direct their gaze – reminding them that they are witnessing a story unfolding – it subtly confers on them a sense of privilege. The Chorus creates a vivid image of Harry in the intuitive imagination:

Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,  
Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,  
Leashed in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire  
Crouch for employment. (0.5-8)

Shakespeare does not expect his audience to launch immediately into the suspension of disbelief. 'Should' reminds us that he cannot present a real-life King Harry, but this admission only affirms rather than weakens the image of Harry this Chorus presents.

Taylor glosses 'like himself' as 'presented in a manner worthy of his greatness' (Note 0.5), and the image as 'a traditional personification of war' (Note 0. 6-8). Here, therefore, Shakespeare creates a static vision, an imaginatively perceived painting of a god-like king whose fearful power is conveyed more by the restraint of the destructive forces at his feet, than by their action. The image is full of suppressed movement. Famine, sword and fire, personified as hounds, are barely held in check, crouching as though at the start of the hunt. The suffering they are capable of inflicting, if released, is regarded merely as 'employment', which they apparently cannot wait to negotiate. There is no sense of humanity in this picture, only power. The scene has begun to swell, and to the general sensation of growth and filling is added an undercurrent of danger: of what might happen should this swelling burst and history become reality. At this point, the Chorus allows us to look back at what it sees as the real Harry, while simultaneously encouraging an expectation of the performance to come. In one way, the words act like a movie-trailer, an exciting glimpse of the thrills and spills in store. Shakespeare sets up an action hero of the mind, and through this image conveys an arresting impression of Harry's warlike character. From the static picture he paints in the imagination, he evokes a sense of awe-inspiring greatness, which is fostered by the Chorus's next words:

But pardon, gentles all,  
The flat, unraisèd spirits that hath dared  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object. (0.8-11)

The mock humble appeal prepares the audience for the limitations of the forthcoming enactment, but in describing its unworthiness, Shakespeare merely heightens the impact of the Chorus's earlier image of Harry, and strengthens the link

between imaginative perception and visual acceptance. The speech combines past experience with future expectation. Anthony S Brennan feels that, '[i]n attempting to inspire us to reach out for a glorious reality the speech of the Chorus begs us to forget the stage in language that forcibly reminds us of it.'<sup>13</sup> But the reminder is timely. By negative inference, the quality of the story to be unfolded is perceived to be the greater: its content is placed beyond the limitations of staging and actors. Jonathan Goldberg aptly writes, '[t]he Chorus [...] represents the mind itself as a stage. Moreover, the Chorus represents the mind and stage as a body; the "flat unraisèd spirits" that work in a "little place" will swell elsewhere.'<sup>14</sup> The play's language works to fuse the performance on stage with that simultaneously taking place in the ample space of the intuitive imagination, drawing on both its audience's reaction to immediate visual stimuli and on experiences stored in the memory, and utilising the powerful and instantaneous link the human memory has with the physical senses. An audience's response to the play's aural stimulation becomes the lens through which it focusses the 'flat, unraisèd spirits'. Far from being 'elsewhere' – which suggests a separation of some kind – the actors, as viewed by the audience, are transfigured by and become part of the overall perceptual experience: at its best, a 'muse of fire' in the mind and senses, made molten through Shakespeare's language.

The Chorus unifies class disparity in a mannerly fashion. The audience members are 'gentles all'; in real life they may be divided by social class ruling, but here one and all are valued for their imaginative contribution. As Harry promises that every man in his 'band of brothers', 'be he ne'er so vile, | This day shall gentle his condition' (4.3.60-3), so the Chorus unites its audience under one banner, in this first speech. An

atmosphere of unity is vital to the success of this play. As Sidney Homan observes, the members of the audience are 'collaborators of the playwright working with a dramatic form striving to be as inclusive as the larger reality that is its subject.'<sup>15</sup> Now the Chorus openly draws the audience into an increasingly active imaginative partnership:

Can this cock-pit hold  
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt? (0.11-14)

By simply posing the first question, the Chorus has already brought the fields of France within the mind, and therefore the theatre is in some way filled with them. As Garner Jr observes, 'language extends and articulates space'<sup>16</sup> in such instances. For the play's audience, this is a space both individually sensed and pictured, and yet part of a collective experience. As Merleau-Ponty explains, a landscape is imagined 'in my uniquely individual being', or as part of 'the experience I share with others.'<sup>17</sup> Shakespeare's use of 'cram' induces the image of the theatre itself, jammed to bursting with wall-to-wall armoured heads. The audience is not asked to produce any spatially accurate image of Agincourt, but a relative one, easily achieved through language: a tightly packed army, row upon row, in a restricted but familiar space. In order to convey the size and scale of an army, extremely difficult to imagine with any accuracy, Shakespeare infers the impossibility of its containment. The result is a sense of immensity – rather than a detailed image – that serves in performance to enhance the audience's visual perception of the scene to come. The real battle is always present in some way in the imagination, while the skirmishes the audience does see on stage are individual snapshot scenes of small group encounters, where speech drives the action.

Shakespeare suggests 'vasty fields', but helps us to picture space crammed: in performance, a space immediately surrounding his audience, and therefore easy for it to relate to. Again, the effect is to evoke an apprehension of the scene, rather than create accurately spatial images. At the same time, he is gradually bringing the idea of battle and the atmosphere of war into the theatre space, by conversely indicating the absurdity of attempting to represent such an event. The mood and sense of the battle scene never actually witnessed onstage are engendered even before the play begins.

The Chorus's constant reminders to members of his audience that they are witnessing a performance, also serve to distance them, by preventing total suspension of disbelief. At the same time, the Chorus's potent language irresistibly evokes an intuitive, imaginative response from them. This is multiplication and division, unification and diversity at one and the same time, deftly demonstrating the complexity of human perceptual abilities, and Shakespeare's own skill in deploying them. A preoccupation with multiplication and division is revealed early in the play. In the Prologue, the Chorus offers his audience an apology, before he begins to marshal and direct the minds before him:

O pardon: since a crookèd figure may  
Attest in little place a million,  
And let us, ciphers to this great account,  
On your imaginary forces work. (0.15-18)

With the stroke of a pen, the addition of a zero, the Chorus claims, huge multiplications can take place, in the same instantaneous way that a single poetic line can set the mind teeming with images. This concept is also subtly suggestive of the power of one cipher – or individual – to change the balance of power, as part of a unit. The sense of swelling

and expansion reiterated in this apparently humble appeal to the audience for its support, prepares the way for the powerful image of two contending kingdoms seen within the boundaries of the theatre. In confining this imposing image inside the theatre walls, Shakespeare places it within a space the audience can relate to, while the suggestion of cramming the two kingdoms in so small an area simply bolsters the impression of barely contained power:

Suppose within the girdle of these walls  
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,  
Whose high uprearèd and abutting fronts  
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder. (0.19-22)

A 'girdle' simultaneously conveys the idea of both city and theatre walls, and a garment often used to hold in a swelling stomach: therefore the metaphorical cities are also in a sense living bodies, with heads rearing up against each other in threateningly close proximity. Taylor glosses 'fronts' as 'frontiers', or 'foreheads', or 'the foremost part of the body' (Note 0.21).

The sense of growing, threatening power, carefully engendered by the Chorus, is now fused with the image of gathering English forces, paraded in the mind. Shakespeare creates, as Perkins-Wilder writes, 'an aural landscape conveyed through the visual and physical language of the theatre':<sup>18</sup>

Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;  
Into a thousand parts divide one man  
And make imaginary puissance.  
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them,  
Printing their proud hoofs i'th' receiving earth. (0.23-27)



Taylor glosses line 24: 'this would be better expressed by multiplication than division', but it 'becomes itself a source of theatrical delight, lending an unexpected and felt reality to Henry's evocation of "[w]e few, we happy few" (4.3.60)' (Introduction, p. 59). The suggestion of simultaneous multiplication and division subtly underlines the unifying and distancing tactics the play practices on its audience. There may also be an additional reason for this particular linguistic construction. In suggesting a division of each man, rather than instant multiplication, Shakespeare slows down the perceptual process in our minds: there is a sense of tackling the division man by man, of requiring greater concentration and work to produce the image. The same result appears to be achieved as it would be by multiplication, but the worth of each man to be divided up into so many parts is intangibly increased. The implied suggestion is that of division without diminution of potency, which does indeed reinforce Henry's vision of his 'band of brothers'. It reiterates the potential power of the one man or 'cipher': an insight that might be said to be prophetic, in the light of the civil war that followed Shakespeare's lifetime. 'Puissance' is glossed by Taylor as both 'powers' and 'army' (Note 0.25), and so here the audience is also made aware of its own imaginative power. The Chorus goes on to stress the idea of the potency of imaginative perception: '[f]or 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings' (28). The ceremonial robes and rituals, openly acknowledged by Harry as vital aids to the power of kingship, are to be provided by individual minds, suggesting that the power of kings is ultimately subject to the power of the subject, if only that people-power can be recognized, and galvanized.

Scarry's theory that images themselves are moved before our imaginative gaze, as tissue-like substances that can be stretched, folded or tilted, might apply in a similar

way here, to the concept of division. In an example from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, she explains that the statement "we stretched towards home" produces an image in the reader's mind whereby we see the characters' bodies 'pulled, elongated in the direction of their destination.'<sup>19</sup> I would contend, however, that our experience of such an image is more than a matter of seeing in the mind's eye. We anticipate the movement of the characters' limbs in our bodies, as well as picture the action in the mind's eye, and it is this mimed or rehearsed movement in the perceptual body that lends the image its vivid intensity. In Shakespeare's metaphor of an army multiplied by division, it is also significant that the audience is urged to carry out the action. In directing his audience to actively shape the image, Shakespeare makes it part of each individual's own creation and personal, intuitive experience.

The Chorus is employed to transport its audience to and from Harfleur, but this is a journey that allows for multiple perspectives, drawing its audience into a unique form of participation. Through language, Shakespeare evokes imaginative experiences that draw on his audience's visual, aural and tactile memories. Scarry explains this phenomenon as an act of 'perceptual mimesis': if we are asked to imagine 'the sweep of the wind across the moors, we perform a mimesis of actually hearing the wind.'<sup>20</sup> The scene described below is full of such sound and activity:

Upon the hempen tackle ship-boys climbing;  
Hear the shrill whistle, which doth order give  
To sounds confused. (3.0.8-10)

Although the whistle is said to restore order, the use of 'confused' immediately suggests a cacophony of sound that precedes and surrounds its use. The audience is urged to

behold the threaden sails,

Born with th'invisible and creeping wind,  
Draw the huge bottoms through the furrowed sea,  
Breasting the lofty surge. (3.0.10-13)

Taylor notes that 'threaden' was 'in ordinary usage at the time' (10). Like 'hempen', it gives the material a texture, as though its grain is visible in the light, lending the sails a tangible quality. The 'creeping wind' does not suggest sluggishness of speed, but that the wind itself has a crouching posture: it is hiding behind the sails. The fact that the ships are drawn along, rather than pushed by the wind, subtly conveys the impression of the vessels' substantial size and weight, and their overall magnificence. The metaphor reinforces the aura of imposing might that the play carefully constructs around Harry. While the audience visualizes the ships being drawn along, it is also encouraged to intuitively sense the force needed to haul them through the resisting 'lofty surge'. Here, the Chorus directs his audience to imagine itself in front of the fleet. The effect of this new vision is much more immediate and intimate: the audience becomes imaginatively involved in encouraging the ships towards their goal, which involvement helps to engender a feeling of inclusiveness and anticipation.

As the imaginary fleet sails towards Harfleur, audience perspective is quickly re-directed to the rear of the ships. The Chorus urges its audience to '[g]rapple your minds to sternage of this navy' (18). The sudden change in perspective effortlessly conveys the fleet's gathering speed, for the audience must now work to keep up with it. The imagination is itself expressed in arrestingly physical terms: it is to be launched at and hooked onto the back of a moving vessel. The effort of using the mind as though it were a limb, to reach out and catch hold of a ship, lends a vivid sense of physicality to the imaginative workload.

The Chorus's words create a mood of feverish activity through a stream of active verbs, urging the audience to participate imaginatively. Thinking becomes busy and energetic:

do but think (3.0.13)

Follow, follow! (17)

Grapple your minds (18)

leave your England (19)

Work, work, your thoughts (25)

Suppose (28)

And eke out our performance with your mind. (35)

Tsur regards the use of imperatives such as 'follow!' and 'work!' as a 'vigorous deictic device' that is used to place the perceiving consciousness right in the midst of the situation'.<sup>21</sup> His comment stresses the positioning of the mind in a strongly physical sense. Tsur directs the sense of energy implied in the imperative into its description, 'vigorous', in an attempt to encapsulate the intuitive feel of this verbal force, which, in phenomenological terms, is sensed very much in the body as well as the mind. Erickson sees the repeated imperatives in this speech as an expression of desperation, however. He observes that '[w]e are placed in a false position because the Chorus' agony over the theater's inability to reproduce the actual event [...] is superfluous.'<sup>22</sup> Yet the speech is part of the Chorus's drive to inspire his audience's intuitive experience of the journey, and the anticipation of battle. Shakespeare has no need to draw attention to the hard work involved in imagining: he has already effectively illustrated the instantaneous ease with which images may be conjured. The aim of this speech is rather to engender an

atmosphere of unalleviated labour, a palpable sense of urgency, in which to set the battle scene at Harfleur. Shakespeare thus appeals to his audience's memory: to the experience of hard work and its physical impact, simply by making the act of imagining in itself seem full of effort. He cannot hope to stage the battle convincingly in practical terms, but he does communicate an apprehension of the massive physical commitment and uncompromising violence of war. The sense of urgency inspired by the Chorus's imperatives therefore helps to set the scene in terms of mood.

Even before arrival at Harfleur, his scene is atmospherically set, and it needs to be, for the battle is already well underway when the audience next encounters Henry. Now the Chorus's language evokes an image of the ominous 'fatal mouths' of guns aimed at the city walls, together with the gaping jaws of hunting dogs or wild beasts. It thus prepares the way for the ferocity of those human animals that Henry imaginatively creates in his famous 'breach' speech:

Then imitate the action of the tiger.  
Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood. (3.1.6-7)

Like the Chorus's speeches, the action is all in the present tense, evoking a sense of vital immediacy. The language seems driven by the sheer physical power the soldiers will need to maintain their bloody attack. War is 'wild and wasteful' like the ocean (14), often devoid of conscience, a concept later reiterated by Henry at the gates of Harfleur:

What is it then to me if impious war  
Arrayed in flames like to the prince of fiends  
Do with his smirched complexion all fell feats  
Enlinked to waste and desolation? (3.3.95-8)

Gone is the bright spirit of joyful expectancy and enterprise of the Chorus's early speeches. Henry adopts the same rhetorical style, but his words here abound with

images of heat, blood, wild and uncontrolled violence and destruction. What follows, in Henry's 'breach' speech, is not a battle on stage, but a vivid and haunting description of the transformation necessary for men to become mercenaries. Henry takes his men, and audience, step by step through the process, teaching them how to conjure the necessary rage to become 'the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart' (3.3.91). The speech allows an audience to view the soldiers onstage through the lens of its vivid imaginative perception, creating a heightened theatrical experience that could not be achieved in action without such skilled linguistic aid that fuses imaginative and visual perception. In Henry's words, these 'noblest English' (3.1.17) are transformed into examples of ungovernable 'licentious wickedness' (3.3.102), '[w]ith conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass | Your fresh fair virgins and your flow'ring infants' (93-4). He may or may not be responsible for his men's immortal souls, but here Henry is decidedly their coach and mentor, actively encouraging their mutation into a form of 'other': '[b]e copy now to men of grosser blood, | And teach them how to war' (3.1.24).

Without actually staging a full-scale battle scene, Shakespeare engenders the intimate sense of raw excitement, dread and sheer physical exertion of war, through this intimate close-up of Henry shaping the self-perception of his men. The conclusion of this speech is a magnificent fusion of muscular physicality and epic style in the language Henry uses to inflame his soldiers with an image of their own brave mettle. Eagerness for battle becomes a passport to temporary higher social status: '[f]or there is none of you so mean and base | That hath not noble lustre in your eyes' (3.1.29-30). It is a carefully crafted piece, again rich in active verbs, surging along with barely time to pause from one listed activity to another. Henry moulds his soldiers into the army he

wants and needs, extolling his men's anticipated virtues and marshalling visions of glory into present service. Before the audience's gaze, the soldiers become what Henry himself wishes to perceive: as 'greyhounds in the slips' (3.1.31). At the end of the siege, his vision of the threatened carnage awaiting Harfleur, should its governor fail to capitulate, is a powerful antithesis of the Chorus's early inspirational speeches that anticipated 'crowns and coronets for Harry and his followers':

Your fathers taken by the silver beards,  
And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;  
Your naked infants spitted upon pikes. (3.3.116-18)

The troops capable of perpetrating such mutilation are a long way from the 'choice-drawn cavaliers' of the Chorus's words in 3.0.24. Henry's 'noblest English' are now transfigured in the mind to monstrous beings, so powerful that Henry himself seems doubtful of his ability to control them: a reminder of the Chorus's warlike image of Henry in the Prologue. The army's success at Agincourt attests both to its bravery and its savagery, which – as Henry shows through his Harfleur speech – are equally necessary characteristics of war. His words before the battle of Agincourt display the full power of rhetoric to create and shape belief, to precipitate action fuelled by emotion. The threatened final assault on Harfleur is never realised in the play, but of course, through Henry's words, it has actually already taken place in the minds of the audience, and in a play where almost all action relies on intuition, it has an uncomfortably real impact.

Interestingly, as the battle of Agincourt approaches, Henry – adopting the Chorus's epic style of speech – takes over as historiographer. The play thus fuses story teller with heroic character, and the concept of history in the making, with the making of

legend. Henry's rhetoric is calculated both to inspire his men and to be remembered '[f]rom this day to the ending of the world' (4.3.58), a line powerfully echoing the ending of St Matthew's Gospel: 'And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'<sup>23</sup> Henry's qualification, '[b]ut we in it shall be remembered, | We few, we happy few, we band of brothers' (4.3.59-60) implies historiographic immortality for the king and his men, through a subtle link with that most famous of books, the Bible. In this way, Shakespeare shows how the reconstruction of history may be moulded to popular perceptions of past fame and renown, using the latter attributes to confer legendary status on current or future events. Henry also emphasises that Agincourt fame will be spread by word of mouth. Royal and noble names are to become 'household words', 'familiar' in the mouths of ordinary men (4.3.52), and passed from father to son and from neighbour to neighbour at future celebrations. Thus Harry reaches all hearts, of both noble and common, learned and unlearned men, with promises of future brotherhood with the king for every man, 'be he ne'er so vile' (4.3.62), who is willing and prepared to be 'marked to die (4.3.20)'. Noble blood is to ennoble the common soldier, through a common purpose. Like the Chorus, Harry appeals to masculine pride:

And gentlemen in England now abed  
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,  
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's Day. (4.3.64-7)

The sharing of spilled blood is to be the price for this brotherhood, and in return Henry gives his men an advance verbal transfusion of spirit and courage. As Calderwood writes, 'in his pre-battle speeches, we have the Word as adrenalin.'<sup>24</sup> The listening soldiers are projected into the future in their imaginations, already remembering the day



of the battle as an heroic achievement of the past – and more importantly, being remembered beyond their own lifetimes. They are being written, in their own perceptions, into Henry's version of history. As Perkins-Wilder notes, the stage becomes the 'scene of to-be-remembered battles',<sup>25</sup> but in this instance, they will be shaped and remembered through Hal's gaze. She observes, 'Hal's mnemonic succeeds, in one sense, because it takes shape before our eyes.'<sup>26</sup> Shakespeare demonstrates, through Hal's speech, how the process of history may be created and shaped in the popular perception, and indeed, in the minds of the audience. His step by step unfolding of future events brings them vividly into the present moment in the theatre, even though at the same time we perceive them as the historical past.

The play subtly juxtaposes this view with Pistol's behaviour in the next scene: an antithesis of every honourable sentiment voiced by the king. Where Henry valiantly declares his preference for death over ransom, Pistol shows a lust for nothing but 'brave crowns' (4.4.34) when he captures a French soldier. When the soldier offers Pistol two hundred crowns for ransom, Pistol's response is characteristic:

Tell him, my fury shall abate, and I  
The crowns will take. (4.4.43-4)

This clumsy poetic parody neatly ironises Henry's grand rhetoric, in Rude Mechanical style. Pistol's attitude to mercy is also darkly humorous: 'As I suck blood, I will some mercy show' (4.4.58). The scene reveals the harsh practical reality of war that attracts and harbours such social leaches as Pistol. As Brennan shrewdly notes, the Chorus blithely ignores the intervening scenes with minor characters, whose behaviour parodies the values he canvasses. In this way, the Chorus's 'poetic vision is played off against the

reality of the everyday world.'<sup>27</sup> As Erickson also observes, '[i]n general, critics who maintain the purist epic view of *Henry V* fail because they cannot adequately account for the proliferation of minor characters.'<sup>28</sup> The lack of what Brennan calls the 'lyric exuberance'<sup>29</sup> conveyed by the Chorus in these scenes, and the very fact that the Chorus refuses to comment upon them, sets them up in sharp contrast with the atmosphere of unity that is carefully fostered by both king and Chorus. Williams's challenge to the king prior to the battle of Agincourt serves in particular to question the play's outer wrapping of patriotism. As Patterson writes, Williams is the 'un(common) critic [...] whose intelligence prohibits a simple submission of his will to the idea of popular leadership, merely because it is in the national interest.'<sup>30</sup>

Catherine Belsey notes that Williams's voice is one 'presented without irony.' He is unique in the play, she feels, being a common man whose marginality is not, like 'other contrasting figures in the second tetralogy', indicated by a 'precarious command of English.'<sup>31</sup> Shakespeare uses Williams to intelligently represent the voice of the common soldier: one who dares to question the agenda of those empowering the game of war. His words suggest the helplessness of the rank and file in the face of authority, and even – through his challenge to Henry's motives – the pointlessness of the invasion of France. In Williams's speech, Henry's vision of his soldiers' heroic future, before the battle, is underscored by the lingering image of the common soldier as a macabre collection of dismembered limbs. The body is divided and the mind seemingly multiplied in a strange dismantling of unity that confronts both king and audience with the physical consequences of war. The limbs may belong to the 'base, common, and popular' (4.1.39) soldier, but the effect of his dismembering is far-reaching: each limb is

given an individual afterlife of emotional and physical suffering in its single state.

Suffering is therefore seen to multiply as the body divides.

Whereas in *Titus*, mutilated limbs and bodies are paraded before an audience's view as well as described, in a feast, or sometimes a surfeit, of aural and visual stimuli, in *Henry V*, powerful images of dismemberment are conjured in the mind and senses of reader and audience. On one occasion, the mind itself is separated from its body, when Canterbury urges the king to allow soldiers' minds to join their bodies, already 'pavilioned in the fields of France' (1.2.129). This strange concept of disembodied and time-travelling hearts and minds also encapsulates the play's presentation of action as an intuitively perceived force. Ewan Fernie observes, '[p]resence actually never becomes knowledge, however close we come. Instead it is experienced as the powerful imminence of sense – ineffably beyond thought, which it nonetheless irresistibly solicits.'<sup>32</sup> The play, in fact, sports with the concept and feel of action, particularly in its second scene, when Henry's words articulate war as a tennis match with France. The ammunition to be used in this game is the common soldier: the sons and husbands who, as well as their French counterparts, will be mocked from their mothers and wives in the cause of war.

In Henry's glorious Saint Crispin's Day speech, ordinary soldiers are invited to join the king's 'band of brothers' (4.3.60). However, when the king reads out the list of English dead after the battle, the ordinary men have become '[n]one else of name' (4.8.103). Henry's speech may be remembered and treasured by the few who survived the battle, but the official records will offer no recognition whatsoever of the common soldiers lost on the battlefield. As Diana E Henderson points out, 'common soldiers,

living or dead, were listed as groups from geographical areas rather than as individuals.'<sup>33</sup> Despite Henry's promise that for every man, 'be he ne'er so vile, | This day shall gentle his condition' (4.3.62-3), the common soldier in death is identified only as a number in association with a mass of land owned by the crown: a land where he cannot even ultimately lie buried. In this battle of nation against nation, men become a part of the land they fight for and against. The common soldier's name is subsumed by that of his native birthplace, and these small ciphers of Henry's kingdom, killed in battle, ultimately merge – physically 'enclosed in clay' (4.8.122) – with the land they seek to conquer in the name of king and country. The fact that common soldiers' deaths in battle were not listed by name may be lost in modern performance, but the term still encapsulates – perhaps even more so – those soldiers' lack of significance for many of today's audiences. These erstwhile 'brothers' of the king, seen now as a void, without voice or presence were once part of the England Henry creates as a conquering power: embodying both a spirit of unity and a force of destruction and division. In battle, the common soldier is as ultimately expendable as the weapons he fires: a collection of limbs to be clamped to the king's body of power in order to form the army unit, but perfunctorily shed when no longer needed. Shakespeare introduces the metaphor of the royal body made up of limbs of state in *Henry IV Part Two*, when the young King Henry V addresses his ministers:

Now call we our high court of Parliament,  
And let us choose such limbs of noble counsel  
That the great body of our state may go  
In equal rank with the best-governed nation.  
(*Henry IV, Part Two*, 5.2.133-6)<sup>34</sup>

In *Henry V*, however, the above speech gains a gruesome significance in the light of Williams's challenge to the king on the eve of Agincourt:

But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in a battle shall join together at the latter day, and cry all, 'We died at such a place' – some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afeared there are few die well that die in a battle, for how can they charitably dispose of anything, when blood is their argument? (*Henry V*, 4.1.129-38)

The image of the king as a body with a collection of attachable limbs of power now becomes a macabre reminder that those limbs embody not only the power of government, but of the king's army. In Williams's speech, the soldiers' limbs, hacked off and dehumanised, are given a new life of eternal suffering, and individual voices with which they describe their pain. Common soldiers killed in battle may remain nameless on the list of dead, but here they are given multiple personas. Their afterlife also reflects the suffering of their families, bereft of a breadwinner, and offers a glimpse of the effects of war beyond the battlefield. For the orphaned children and widows, the death of the breadwinner is in all probability merely the start of their deprivation. The family unit, which has lost its own main body, its provider, is now reduced to a collection of dysfunctional limbs, fit for nothing except suffering. Here is a vividly literal interpretation of the Chorus's early speech: '[i]nto a thousand parts divide one man' (0.24), that effectively acts to dismember the grand and heroic image of war the Chorus sets out to create. The speech does not simply question the king's right to send his soldiers into battle: it questions his reasons for doing so. Since the play's first scene between Ely and Canterbury makes it clear that the reason for war is simply a means of

deviating Henry's attention from Church affairs, Williams's challenge would appear to be ironically justified. Moreover, in the play's second scene, when action is an urgent anticipation rather than a physical manifestation, the concept of war as sport is conveyed in an almost tangible sense through and within the text, superbly communicated by the use of a collective stage property.

In Act 1 scene 2, when Henry receives a gift of tennis balls from the Dauphin's ambassador, his speech of thanks begins in a mock-mannerly fashion, as gentle as the curtsy and bow at the commencement of a courtly dance. It soon gathers momentum, however, and by the time it has returned to the subject of the tennis balls, it has become interwoven with the language and rhythm of a real tennis match:

When we have matched our rackets to these balls,  
We will in France, by God's grace, play a set  
Shall strike his father's crown into the hazard. (1.2.261-3)

Gary Taylor glosses 'hazard' as '(a) aperture in the back walls of a tennis court; a ball struck into it became unplayable (b) jeopardy' (Note 1.2.263). Henry is an ill-mannered player, and the French court the ground he will play on:

Tell him he hath made a match with such a wrangler  
That all the courts of France will be disturbed  
With chases. (1.2.264-6)

The box of tennis balls presents an example of a property that is not only introduced physically on stage: it is woven as a concept into the imagery of the language.

Furthermore, as Henry's speech gathers in intensity, it begins to resonate with the sounds and rhythm of a tennis match, with the repeated 'mock, mock' simulating the return of a ball from racket to racket:

And tell the pleasant Prince this mock of his

Hath turned his balls to gunstones, and his soul  
Shall stand sore chargèd for the wasteful vengeance  
That shall fly from them – for many a thousand widows  
Shall this mock mock out of their dear husbands,  
Mock mothers from their sons, mock castles down;  
Ay, some are yet ungotten and unborn  
That shall have cause to curse the Dauphin's scorn. (1.2.281-8)

The language reveals a foreground and background semantic structure, where key words act as an auditory horizon to what Don Ihde calls 'the center of language' that is doing the obvious foreground work of semantic delivery. As Ihde notes, the '[w]ord does not stand alone but is present in a field of deployed meaning in which it is situated.'<sup>35</sup> Part of this field of presence is made up by the aural texture of the words – whether spoken aloud or heard in the imagination. Bachelard writes that 'through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depths these echoes will reverberate and die away.'<sup>36</sup> The 'echoes' in Bachelard's quotation are memories and associations triggered by the image, not necessarily auditory echoes. In Shakespeare's metaphor, however, echoes of imagined sound are used to intensify the effectiveness of the image as it reverberates semantically through the play. We hear the sound and rhythm of ball hitting racket, a ground base that drives the hard-hitting, competitive force of the speech. Here, language acts as its own sound effect or mood-setting musical underscore, triggering associations in the memory that serve to endorse the significance of the speech, which becomes charged, through the subtle chaining of concepts and memories, with social, cultural and political implications. In this masterly speech, a box of tennis balls, sent in jest, becomes the ammunition for the serious game of war, and in turn they are associated with the soldiers sent to fire them. The idea of soldiers as cannon fodder is developed in *Henry IV, Part One*, when Falstaff

describes his own troops as 'good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder. They'll fill a pit as well as better. Tush man, mortal men, mortal men' (*I Henry IV*, 4.2.62-4).<sup>37</sup>

The box of tennis balls, therefore – a collection of individual objects presented as a unit – aptly symbolizes the body of men who, formed into an army, are shaped into both wagers of war and a human arsenal, becoming ultimately, in some cases, a scattering of used up and abandoned objects or dismembered carcasses. In Williams's speech, those mutilated limbs are horrifyingly animated and allowed to think and feel as living men. If Henry feels he can claim God's support for his cause – the sin upon Canterbury's head – then Williams brings before his and our perceptual gaze an inescapable judgement day for the 'blood' that is their 'argument', confronting us with an individual's culpability for the destruction of his fellow human beings (4.1.137-40). Sinfield and Dollimore may contest that such conflicts are present only to show that they must be ultimately suppressed by '[i]deologies which represent society as a spurious unity',<sup>38</sup> yet the following research into the fate of such soldiers as Williams ironically illuminates this haunting scene as a powerful and undeniable antidote to *Henry V*'s presentation of heroism. In *Fat King, Lean Beggar*, William Carroll points out that many paid-off soldiers became inmates of Bridewell hospital/prison, due to poverty, and were made to manufacture tennis balls as part of their work there. Bridewell was originally built by Henry VIII for the visit of Emperor Charles V in 1522, but was converted to a hospital for the poor after a public petition to the Privy Council in 1552, specifically to house and provide work for beggars: those who had (Carroll quotes) 'fallen into misery by lewd and evil service, by wars, by sickness, or other adverse



fortune [...] (TED:2.307)'.<sup>39</sup> The aim of the new hospital was to provide work as well as food and shelter, and it 'clearly did attempt to train the unemployed in useful occupations. A set of orders dated 1582 listed twenty-five distinct "artes" or occupations the inmates could be taught, from the "Spining of wollen yarn" to the "Making of Tennise balles" (*Orders*: B2<sup>v</sup>).'<sup>40</sup> However, Bridewell's role as a hospital soon degenerated into that of a prison, with regular whippings meted out to inmates. Much of the work was 'virtually indistinguishable from punishment.'<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Carroll cites a complaint against Bridewell by John Hawes in 1582, which states that

servimgmen, soldiers and other honest youthes, whose lacks have been the cause of their loitering, have been packte up and punnished alike in Bridewell with rogues, beggers and strompets and pilfering theves.<sup>42</sup>

The evidence Carroll cites, detailing life in Bridewell, paints a grim picture of its inmates' suffering. It is particularly ironic that such suffering should have produced an item used purely for sport among the more fortunate. This historical background provides a fascinating insight into the world Shakespeare inhabited when writing *Henry V*, but of course such detail will largely be lost on modern audiences. However, it does illuminate Shakespeare's deliberate and complex interweaving of objective and subjective qualities within the text, showing how an important stage property is semantically seeped into the text through the sound and rhythm of language, and our familiarity with modern tennis matches still helps to enrich our understanding of this ingenious use of object and language.

This chapter has considered how Shakespeare shapes our perception through one vital stage property, and through the rich, descriptive language of the king and Chorus in *Henry V*. As the discussion illustrates, Shakespeare's employment of the Chorus is

complex. By inviting its audience at the outset to form a partnership with one of its actors, *Henry V* offers the possibility of a greatly heightened theatrical experience that can transcend the limits of practical staging and performance, fulfilling the Chorus's initially expressed desire. By drawing the audience into this relationship, the play is able to practise upon it the power of its own seductive language, even as it simultaneously illustrates rhetoric's potentially dangerous influence. In order to reveal the somewhat empty dream the play weaves of the perfect leader, who selflessly loves his people and is beloved in equal measure, Shakespeare 'produces a built-in optical incongruity'<sup>43</sup> through his minor characters. This in turn reveals the impossibility of the dream, and yet despite this point, the play's glorious 'oral/aural pleasures, with mouth-and ear-filling sensuousness', as Danson writes,<sup>44</sup> still tempt audiences to revel in the sensations and emotions they evoke.

The 1997 production of the play at Shakespeare's Globe, directed by Richard Olivier,<sup>45</sup> chose to divide up the Chorus's role among various cast members, the first speaker being Mark Rylance, who also played Henry. This directorial choice diffused the function of the Chorus into the body of the cast, stressing the importance of storytelling within the play as a whole. For Rylance, the role of storyteller became an increasingly important part of a successful performance at the Globe. When traditional approaches to acting proved problematic in this new space, he explains, he 'had to become a storyteller as well as a part inside the story'.<sup>46</sup> As Christie Carson suggests, in an interview with Rylance, this shift from 'psychological realism' resulted in an approach to theatre as a 'creative process'<sup>47</sup> with the audience. Olivier's *Henry V* was aimed very much at the audience from the outset, so that the Chorus's line: '[c]an this

cockpit hold | The vasty fields of France?' (0.11-12) was greeted by many of the groundlings, at whom it was particularly directed, with cries of assent. Canterbury's description of the invading Scots as 'pilfering borderers', delivered with a mischievous look at the audience, provoked delighted laughter: a 'festive reaction'<sup>48</sup> that Catherine Silverstone notes has become part of the experience of theatre at the Globe. Rylance's dual role as Prologue and king encapsulated the strong sense of deliberate artifice that characterised this production. History was to be told as story, through story, in a process that involved the audience at almost every step of the way. It was obvious that a new history was in fact being made during this first production, through a relationship that was being forged between actors and audience.

The collage of Chorus performances from within the cast evoked a strong feeling of unity between actors and audience as a whole: a feeling greatly enhanced by characters' willingness to encourage audience engagement. The production thus effectively distanced itself, through the medium of humour, from any outer cloaking of heroic patriotism evident in the text. Some gentle jeering greeted the mention of the traitors, Grey, Scrope and Masham, and much laughter met the Chorus's obvious irony as he directed the line: 'there must you sit' (2.0.36) to the standing groundlings. Rylance's Henry chose to speak flippantly rather than threateningly to the French ambassador, pointedly punning on the lines: '[a]nd tell the pleasant Prince this mock of his | Hath turned his balls to gunstones' (1.2.281-2), much to the enjoyment of those watching and listening. He therefore chose not to stress the hard-hitting sounds that suggest the competitive energy of a tennis match. He also treated the gift of tennis balls lightly, juggling them in the air: an action that was effective in the sense that it made the

French ambassador appear rather foolish before the amused crowd. Rylance presented a Henry who was, in fact, relaxed and in control of his emotions in this scene. His arbitrary treatment of the Dauphin's insulting gift inferred a carelessness that effectively underscored the concept of war as a game, implied in the text. Here was a Henry who demonstrated grave decision-making as a sport.

Rylance aimed Henry's famous 'breach' speech in 3.1 directly at the audience, whose ready participation showed how effectively cast and audience had been drawn into an imaginative partnership. A number of the groundlings, familiar with the text – or at least with this line, which is so often taken out of context – joined in with his cry: 'God for Harry, England and St George!' (3.1.34). His threatening speech to the Governor of Harfleur was defused by laughter as, at the end of a long catalogue of the vicious actions to be taken against the citizens, should they refuse to capitulate, Rylance paused, unseen by the Governor above him, to glance significantly and humorously at the audience and wryly add, '[w]hat say you?' (3.3.81-122). His insistence on humour robbed the speech of its seriousness, stressing the idea that Henry's threats to the citizens of Harfleur are indeed a mere subterfuge. Weariness rather than rage often characterised his speech. As Cynthia Marshall notes, 'Rylance used the oratorical threat of violence to win submission, while simultaneously displaying postures of exhaustion to indicate to viewers that Henry was bluffing'. She goes on to explain that '[r]ather than using this split performance to cement viewers' connection with Henry, Rylance advertised the extent to which "Henry" was a matter of poses and rhetorical performance.'<sup>49</sup> Despite the dispersal of the Chorus's role within the cast, such moments

served to foreground the play as a story, stressing the play's sense of unity as a collaboration with actors and audience, rather than an espousal of heroic patriotism.

The sharing of the Chorus's role among a number of cast members, however, did seem to weaken the effect of the play's minor characters as a counter Chorus. In Olivier's production, Mistress Quickly, Bardolph, Nym and Pistol were very much played as comic roles, and although Williams's speech was effective, it did not offer the same intimate intensity as in Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film,<sup>50</sup> where the camera could capture Branagh's voice and expression in intimate close-up (discussed below). In Rylance's own pre-battle soliloquy, however, his more internalised acting style at this point provided an effectively serious contrast to his more flippant, humorous approach elsewhere. As Marshall notes, Rylance 'delivered the speech with his body curled to the stage [...] so that his arched back was toward the majority of viewers. It was a moment of abjection and self-doubt for Henry and one of terrific vocal challenge for Rylance'.<sup>51</sup> In turning his back on the audience with whom he had built such a firm rapport, Rylance signified his isolation, breaking his established audience contact. This deliberate action seemed a physical rejection of his lifeline with the audience, and as such it was intensely effective. His sense of loneliness and anguish was palpable, and this contrast to his earlier flippancy gave us a Henry whose heroism seemed an obvious performance. It underscored Henry's vulnerability in strongly visual terms, stressing the rather self-pitying content of his soliloquy. His portrayal in this scene recalled the lightness of heart with which England's youth abandoned their silken robes to go in search of crowns and coronets, contrasting that earlier foolhardiness with his realisation of the practicalities of war.

In Henry's 'band of brothers' speech, Rylance initially appeared exhausted, as though Henry was unable to regroup his inner forces sufficiently to begin another performance for his men. As Rylance gathered momentum, he used humour to involve the audience once again, deliberately pausing to smile ironically between 'he'll remember' and 'with advantages' (4.3.50): a pause that, even as it evoked laughter, conveyed his sense of weariness. Having decreed that if any of his soldiers should lack stomach for the fight, '[l]et him depart' (36), he ad-libbed humorously to an actor, who happened to move slightly at that moment, 'well, go on then!' causing enormous laughter, and thus reminding the audience once again that they were watching a performance. When four or five actors then appeared to represent the battle, therefore, his deliberate engendering of audience awareness worked in the cast's favour. No-one expected a stirring visual display.

Olivier's production embraced *Henry V* as a story, reaching back to Shakespeare's own history in order to explore contemporary acting styles. Audience perception of the play, however, was shaped through the collaborative recreation of the text with a modern audience. As Marshall writes, '[t]he presentational style of this production did not aim to seduce viewers either with props and scenery or with psychological depth; instead it advertised artifice'. As such, it 'called attention to the seam between actor and character'.<sup>52</sup> There was no attempt to suspend disbelief, to recreate what might seem to an audience an authentic history of Henry V and Agincourt. Rather, the production became a recreation of theatre history.

Branagh's 1989 film makes a useful contrast to Olivier's production, in its more realistic approach to the presentation of history. It has come under some critical fire for

its transformation of the text into a cross between war film and history epic, but its populist appeal remains unquestioned. Both Olivier's production and Branagh's film have demonstrated, in different ways, what Carson terms 'the dramatic pull of the text towards a present audience.'<sup>53</sup> the stage production through its engagement with its audience, and the film through its aura of psychological realism. In spite of its textual cuts, that allow more time for visual representation of the battles, however, the text's intimate appeals to audience perception, through sound, rhythm and rich semantic layering are recognised and most effectively interpreted. The film presents a resonant mix of counter voices to the play's outer cloak of heroism, in its strong cast of minor characters. As Maurice Hindle notes, Branagh uses '**mid shots** and **close-ups**' to 'draw the audience into the inner life of his characters.'<sup>54</sup> Intimate close-ups create moments of quiet reflection that visually communicate the characters' emotional journeys, but also allow time for the viewer to absorb the characters' words. On the eve of Agincourt, for example, Williams's face appears quite ghoulish in the flickering firelight, his eyes glittering with fear and horror at the images he envisions and describes. The intimacy of the close-up shot in the eerie half-light illuminates the dark shadows and hollows of his face, making his eyes more prominent. It captures their almost palpably fearful expression, while the bitter, trembling resentment in Williams's voice brings Shakespeare's words vividly alive. Lighting and make-up accentuate the sickly pallor of his face, and create dark shadows on his features, giving him a ghostly look that presages the faces of dead soldiers after the battle. His appearance thus brings us as viewers closer to the very real sense of horror that is apparent in Williams's speech. The actor playing Bates makes the most of a small role often overlooked, in his matter-of-

fact sniff at his comment, 'I do not desire he should answer for me, and yet I determine to fight lustily for him' (4.1.179-80). These simple words resoundingly encapsulate the total sacrifice of the '[n]one else of name' (4.8.103) in the rank and file of Henry's army. Bates anticipates giving all and expects to lose everything, even – possibly – his immortal soul. It is little wonder that such men are so affected by Henry's 'band of brothers' speech, for in his words they finally find a reason for their existences, and even their deaths. In Bates's short speech, Shakespeare gives this very minor character a voice that is meant to be clearly heard in the simplicity of its expectations. As such, it challenges Henry's unwillingness to accept responsibility for his soldiers' souls, if, as Williams says, 'the cause be not good' (4.1.129). The film's close-up on Bates allows him that voice.

The sense of unity and heroic patriotism suggested in the text is communicated in the film through Branagh's portrayal of Henry, and Derek Jacobi's Chorus: not simply in terms of character, but through vocal delivery. The Chorus's speeches are truncated, but the deep, almost fatherly admiration he displays for Henry as he describes the king's visit to his troops on the night before Agincourt: 'O now, who will behold | The royal captain of this ruined band' (4.0.28-9), and the excitement with which he reports the battle at Harfleur, are intended to infuse the viewer with a sense of Henry's enormous worth and personal magnetism. The Chorus's role as storyteller, although it reminds us of the film's artificiality, is not effective in the same way as the Chorus in the text, or indeed as the role was realised in Olivier's production, where the humour was effectively used to distance the audience from the story. Jacobi's first exit, from a film studio (with its array of theatrical props), through a huge wooden door into the



outside world of the film's action, suggests a movement from artifice to realism. His modern costume might proclaim him as an invader from our own time into the past, and could be seen as incongruous in the play's historical setting, but modern viewers are accustomed to the easy slippage from artifice to apparent reality on screen, and Jacobi's role as war correspondent is a familiar one. Despite such discrepancies in style, the psychological realism underpinning actors' performances in the film creates a temporarily emotionally believable world, within which we absorb the presence of the Chorus, until the theatrical doors are closed on the play in its final moments and we are reminded of the play's original performance medium.

Although Henry's heroism is undercut to some degree by the film's insistence on violent realism, Branagh successfully conveys to his viewers the ease with which a great speaker can seduce his audience into perceiving him in a heroic light. In his famous 'band of brothers' speech (4.3.18-67), Branagh's Henry dispels the sense of dread and despair in his men, through the very sound and intonation of his words. He lifts his voice and imbues it with a cheerful, airy roundness that seems to make the sounds soar around him. Whereas his earlier, threatening speech to the French ambassador is spoken through clenched teeth, inferring suppressed power and energy and stressing the sounds of the repeated word 'mock' in a way that makes them echo the tennis match it infers, in his heroic St. Crispin's Day speech, Branagh shapes his mouth to frame the big, open sounds suggested by the words. Shakespeare provides his actor with a speech comprising words of almost entirely one syllable. As a result they are easy to understand, and their wide vowel sounds are designed to travel, creating a bright, uplifting effect. Branagh makes superb use of these devices, sending the vowel sounds

in such words as 'marked', 'die', 'share', 'honour', 'made', 'raise', and 'name' streaming into the air like aural banners. 'We few, we happy few' (4.3.60) is said in a softer, more intimate tone, and here Branagh smiles caressingly at the faces upturned towards him. The action is not simply effective in terms of emotional and visual impact. Smiling lifts the soft palette in the mouth and draws the lips upwards, brightening the sound: a device well known in the teaching of singing. The airy sound of the vowels in 'greater share of honour' (22) seems literally to breathe life into the listening and watching men's spirits. Cartmel notes that for her, the film 'does not inspire feelings of nationalism', but does have 'the audience [...] cheering the king alongside his rebel ranks', caught up in the patriotic fervour communicated by the speech. She adds significantly, 'but these emotions grip you unawares.'<sup>55</sup>

Sound also plays a vital role in Branagh's delivery of Henry's famous soliloquy on the eve of Agincourt, where he debates with his soul on the hard condition of kingship (4.1.218-272), drawing out the smooth vowel in 'sleep', for example, as though to rehearse the long, peaceful slumber he yearns for both physically and vocally. This scene powerfully questions the play's heroism through its visual presentation, however. As Henry sits alone by the firelight, his face still half-cloaked, the ominous, unsettling musical motif that is present at the film's opening is heard once again. The camera pulls back for a long shot of fire, smoke and the king's cloaked figure as Henry begins his speech. It then tracks slowly forward across the foggy landscape towards him, over a sea of sleeping bodies that appear like corpses abandoned in the mud. There is something accusatory in the insistent musical motif, and the relentless approach of the camera towards the reaper-like figure hunched motionless, with the slumped forms of his men at

his feet. As the camera finally reaches Henry's now uncloaked face, it pauses at his ear, as though to emphasize Henry's self-absorption or to indicate to the viewer that listening is to be predicated over seeing.

Much has been written about the battle itself, and the long, tracking shot of Henry carrying a dead boy across the field to a waiting cart. Cartmel notes that this image has become an 'emblem of the film', inasmuch as 'it visualises the ambivalence of this production which simultaneously glorifies and condemns Henry's war'.<sup>56</sup> There is little room to focus on the battle in detail at this point, but it is important to note the film's concentration on close-up shots that bring individual suffering closer to the viewer. As Cartmel observes, 'it would seem that the close-ups are used by Branagh to question rather than approve the king's actions.'<sup>57</sup> Although crowd and battle scenes fill the screen with bodies, the camera also seems intensely interested in faces, capturing vivid moments of expression that stay on the mental retina long after their visual disintegration. Indeed, the action moves into slow motion at several points during the battle, as the camera closes in to show bloody faces contorted in agony as torsos are impaled on axes and spears, and limbs hacked away. The scene visually realises Williams's horrific image of 'legs and arms and heads chopped off in a battle' (4.1.130-1).

Branagh's film, like Olivier's production, brings a translation of *Henry V* to his audience that makes it accessible to the modern viewer. Unlike Olivier's production, his film reaches back into a history beyond Shakespeare's, in the attempt to present Henry's story in a realistic setting. The film's retention of the story-telling Chorus, however, and its opening shot of the film studio provide an outer wrapper that initially and finally

confirms the artifice of its medium, and its relationship to the theatre at its heart. The film's presentation of Henry as a heroic leader is both affirmed and questioned, but what appears in an undoubted light is this Henry's outstanding ability to rouse his troops to loyal fervour through his performance of Shakespeare's rhetoric.

*Henry V* is a vital play to this study, in terms of the way it allows us to understand how Shakespeare influences our perception through its phenomenological 'metaphysics of action', as Ewan Fernie expresses it.<sup>58</sup> The play shows how we, as audience member or reader, are susceptible to the power of language and its ability to stimulate our sentient and emotional memories, to create mood and atmosphere, and to evoke intuitive responses to linguistic sound and structure that vivify the images we experience in the mind and body. Material objects and objects of the mind are part of a fluid and creative experience that this play weaves in our imaginative perception, in 'a space in which thought becomes physical and in which physical objects become the conduits for thought,'<sup>59</sup> to quote one of Perkins Wilder's terms. *Henry V* plays with our perception, drawing us into its world of heroism and inclusivity, yet it simultaneously disturbs that membrane of mood and atmosphere through references to its own theatricality. It also glimpses into the dark underside of war through its presentation of minor characters. As audience members we make an individual, imaginative journey that is influenced by our own life experiences, but we are also subject to the pleasurable appeal of the Chorus's words as a body of listeners, and Henry's heroic speeches can prove difficult to resist. The sound and rhythm of the words, and the intense imagery they conjure, invite us to shelter beneath the overarching aesthetic of the play's atmosphere of inclusivity, and tempt us to blindly 'follow!' where Chorus and Henry

lead, although at the same time, Williams's view of the battle gives us reason to pause and question. The linguistic appeal of such speeches is effective because of their attack on the intuitive and tactile senses: the play creates the illusion of felt experience. It cannot bring a realistic battle into the theatre, but it can suggest the experience of frantic action, energy, heat, chaotic noise and cramped space to the mind and body.

The next chapter, on *Macbeth*, continues this exploration of illusion, considering how potent language and dramatic structure can prepare the mind to augment visual perception, fusing what we see with what we imagine, sense and feel.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### Language, Object and Illusion in *Macbeth*

Imagination resolves to create its own meaning, out of nothing,  
even if it has to invent an unreal world in which to do so<sup>1</sup>

Everything is [...] truth within consciousness<sup>2</sup>

Whereas *Henry V* aims to transport us beyond the restrictions of the theatrical space, *Macbeth* lures us into the closed, claustrophobic interior of its main protagonist's mind. Shakespeare's language infuses his play with a mood of darkness, doubt and uncertainty, where reality meets illusion, and the normally reliable senses of sound and vision become disturbingly misleading. Through rich imagery, sound, rhythm and syntax, Shakespeare draws his audience into the world of the play, where subject and object boundaries dissolve, and illusion and reality bleed into each other. This chapter scrutinizes the play's evocation of mood and atmosphere, investigating how language in *Macbeth* builds an image of its main character in its audience's perception, before Macbeth physically appears on stage. It then goes on to consider how the weird sisters' prophecy transfigures Macbeth's perception of himself – precipitating the play's tragic events – and discusses how Shakespeare's careful use of language and stage properties (the dagger and the leafy branches representing the moving Birnam Wood) create a

sense of illusion that supplements visual perception. In addition, it examines disparities between verbal and visual presentation, as in the appearance of the weird sisters and Banquo's description of them, and looks at how the play's language is designed to augment audience perception of Banquo's ghost. As in Chapter Five, textual close-reading is followed by a discussion of actual performances of the play, and the 'audience' referred to during textual analysis should be understood as a potential or imagined one.

The play's presentation of Macbeth as a character – or rather, as an image – is steeped in the language of his strange and uncertain world. As Simon Palfrey comments, the language used early in the play 'shows Shakespeare – literally – making up [Macbeth's] world. The words are rushed through with a strange restlessness of becoming'.<sup>3</sup> Macbeth's sword is described as 'brandished steel | Which smoked with bloody execution' (1.2.17-18) and 'carved out his passage' (19) through the hacking down of bodies, until, facing his enemy, Macbeth 'unseamed him from the nave to th'chops' (22). The word 'sword' is subtly replaced by 'steel': the object by its material quality, linking image to memory – of the sound of steel upon steel. Furthermore, this is not cold steel, but a metal that smokes with the heat of use and the warmth of blood. Macdonald's 'execution' is something akin to the slicing-up of an animal carcass, ominously prescient of Malcolm's final description of Macbeth as a 'dead butcher' (5.7.99), and a reminder very early in the play that bravery and butchery are in fact indistinguishable in a bloody battle. As a soldier, Macbeth embodies both qualities, and both are exploited by the world he inhabits. The immediate juxtaposition of Duncan's cry: 'O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman' (1.2.24) with the Captain's description of

Macbeth's bloody action in battle is suggestive of this double perspective. When the time suits, Duncan welcomes with relief Macbeth's ability to slaughter his fellow human beings. Here is the seed that Duncan has 'begun to plant' and plans to nurture (1.4.29).

Macbeth's encounter with the weird sisters marks the start of a transformation in his self-perception, but his response to their tantalising vision is also heavily influenced by the way the world sees him. The reports readily given by Ross and Duncan nurture Macbeth's growing sense of power: the king's 'wonders and his praises do contend | Which should be thine, or his' (1.3.92-3). Reports create an image of a Macbeth who is '[n]othing afeared of what thyself didst make | Strange images of death' (1.3.96-7). This speech conveys a multiplicity of concepts. Its juxtaposition with 'thick as hail | Came post with post, and every one did bear | Thy praises' (1.3.97-9) subtly fuses the idea of military combat with mass slaughter. This is no straightforward picture of battle. The language shapes an imagined Macbeth who is not simply exterminating life, but repeatedly creating the moment of death itself. The words seem to generate a sense of slow motion, in order that the mind's eye may perceive the men falling 'thick as hail', and the transformation of living bodies into strange, unworldly forms at the point of death. There is a sense of lingering in the metaphor, of bodies that refuse to conform to the natural laws of life and death and lie at peace. They remain, at the moment of extermination, imprinted on life and on the perception: living, breathing men transfigured 'as pictures' (2.2.53). These macabre images are not part of Macbeth's own perception, however: they are part of a 'mental panorama',<sup>4</sup> to quote Merleau-Ponty's apt term, within which Shakespeare shapes our perception of him. Macbeth is the de-sensitised soldier, doing his job, and is praised for it. Such potentially rich descriptions of

his bravery have a strangely disruptive effect on the imaginative perception, replacing the expected with the unexpected and lacing the perceptual experience with an alien or dream-like quality. This is the mood in which the play's principal character is initially apprehended and appraised by his audience, and it establishes a backdrop against which that audience witnesses the gradual transformation of Macbeth's self-image, as it observes the tragic consequences of his actions.

In *Macbeth*, the role of language is vital to the creation of mood. Unnatural actions call for “unnatural” operations of language that divide and “thicken” narrative’,<sup>5</sup> as Malcolm Evans writes. This is a play in which darkness not only closes in, it strangles light: ‘[b]y th’clock ‘tis day, | And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp’ (2.4.6-7). Darkness also absorbs light: ‘[l]ight thickens’ (3.2.53). The language here appeals not to colour, as we might commonly expect in metaphors concerning darkness, but to the concept of density: lending the image an almost palpable quality. Thin liquids are made into sauces by the act of reduction (prolonged simmering), thereby growing denser by self-absorption. In this metaphor, therefore, light is being absorbed or swallowed, but slowly, almost imperceptibly into its antithesis. The semantic loading of these carefully chosen words is complemented by an intensely effective auditory underscore. In Shakespeare's imagery, here and in countless other examples, meaning and sound work together with the intimacy of an orchestral score, drawing on the imagination, where memory conjures a host of sense-perceptions triggered by language, and stimulated by the rhythm and musicality of the language itself. A close look at the following passage illustrates the intensity of the relationship between sound and meaning:

– ere the bat hath flown

His cloistered flight, ere to black Hecate's summons  
The shard-born beetle with his drowsy hums  
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done  
A deed of dreadful note. (3.2.43-7)

Bats and beetles are both black, as is Hecate; the 'yawning' night evokes the image of a great gaping mouth, or yawning graves. 'Cloistered' conveys a sense of isolation and silence, with its link to the idea of religious retreats, so the bat's flight is a soundless, solitary affair. The repetition of 'ere' lends the speech a sermon-like quality. The onomatopoeic 'drowsy hums' are complemented by the euphonic vowels in 'shard', 'born' and 'beetle', and 'night's yawning peal', which have the effect of elongating the rhythm of the line into what Frank Kermode calls 'a sort of hypnotic firmness'.<sup>6</sup> The alliteration in 'deed' and 'dreadful' and long vowel in 'note (echoing that in 'doleful' and 'toll') simulate the sound of a solitary church bell: a death knell. Dessen and Thomson note that the 'tower *bell* that sounds an *alarm*' also 'announces a death or gives the time'.<sup>7</sup> Yet 'night's yawning peal' is also fused with the idea of the shard-born beetle's natural call. These 'incantatory rhythm[s]',<sup>8</sup> to appropriate Kermode's phrase, form a ground base for the rest of the play, reminiscent of the weird sisters' chant at its opening. There is a suggestion of reprise and repetition of this style of speech in Macbeth's '[c]ome, seeling night' (3.2.49), and in Lady Macbeth's call to the spirits to 'unsex me here' (1.5.40).

Macbeth's 'seeling night' is more than a curtained darkness: it is a violent and cruel blinding, for as Brooke explains, 'seeling' was the sewing up of a hawk's eyelids, 'while training it for hawking' (note 3.2.49). 'Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day' (3.2.50) refers simultaneously to the painful hooding of the tender flesh of the hawk's

eyelids, and the shutting out of innocent daylight. Here, Macbeth acknowledges in himself the inhumane violator. The imagery conjures twilight, as '[l]ight thickens, | And the crow makes wing to th'rooky wood' (3.2.53-4). Vowel sounds reflect the growing density of the atmosphere, with the soft, rounded assonance in 'rooky' and 'wood' (perhaps subtly echoing the call of a night bird, such as the owl). The choice of the adjective 'rooky' fills the wood of the imaginative perception with black wings, while one solitary pair makes its way silently to join them. The lone crow adds to the image of blackness, and again, may evoke the memory of its harsh cry, often heard at twilight when birds begin to roost. The wood, thickly populated with black birds, helps to convey the idea of dense layers of darkness, and of the gathering of scavengers. Brooke notes that 'crow may be another name for a rook [...] or it may mean the solitary carrion crow' (3.2.54). The hypnotic rhythm continues: '[g]ood things of the day begin to droop and drowse, | Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse' (3.2.55-6).

Once again, the alliteration on 'd', the long vowel sound in 'droop' and the rich, rounded diphthong in 'drowse' produce an irresistibly mesmerising effect, aided by the regularity of the rhythm. In the second line, the sibilants in 'whiles', 'night's' and 'agents' help the rhythm to slide easily over the three monosyllables at the beginning, throwing the stress on the longer vowel sounds and the sibilants in 'preys' and 'rouse' (particularly the hard 's' in the latter). The result is a rocking rhythm at the end of the line, giving the speech a nightmarish quality of lullaby that is accentuated by 'euphonious sound devices',<sup>9</sup> and confusing expected perception: 'nothing is | But what is not' (1.3.142-3).

No material objects are called for or indeed needed in these scenes. Language and imagination work together to create and influence perception, not just in the sense of images produced in the mind, but through the stimulation of sense-perceptions such as touch, smell, and sound. Sound plays a vital role in *Macbeth*, aiding and even creating perception. As States aptly writes, the play 'is a field of sound [...] in which meanings parasitically swarm'.<sup>10</sup> The feel and texture of words, both spoken and read, create an intense, bodily experience that is sensuously hypnotic. Smith observes that '[t]he scripted words are something to be brought to the lips, to be tasted, to be taken in through the mouth',<sup>11</sup> implying both their performative potential and their tactile appeal to the imaginative perception of the reader, who anticipates their effect. The reader, in this sense, is both actor and audience, through the power of imagination and its ability to stimulate our intuitive senses. Wright notes that in *Macbeth*, 'meter reinforces feeling that is already suggested by the words' through 'variations in iambic rhythm.'<sup>12</sup> The spondees in 'whiles night's black' and the trochée in 'agents', in the above example, help to evoke mood and atmosphere, enriching the semantic overlay of the words. Wright feels that spondees create 'intensification and emphasis', while medial trochées communicate a sense of 'violence, anger, abruptness, shock'.<sup>13</sup> The deliberate, heavy pulsing in 'whiles night's', and the sudden drop in intensity within 'agents' build a sense of dread that is abruptly arrested.

Macbeth's speech therefore affects the mind and senses on a rich and complex level that appeals to both reader and audience. As States aptly writes, 'in Shakespeare 'the character creates a verbal world that bathes what we see before us in its quality'.<sup>14</sup> Sound plays a vital role in the creation of that quality, enhancing meaning through a

direct appeal to the senses, triggering sentient and tactile memories that can in turn instantaneously ignite a mass of intuitive and conceptual associations. In *Macbeth*, it subtly creates an atmosphere that serves as an evocative sensory backdrop for the play's characters. Shakespeare wrote for the dramaturgical voice, and was fully aware of its potential power. As Ihde notes:

[i]n dramaturgical voice [...] the sounding of voice is amplified. Dramaturgical voice stands between the enchantment of music, which can wordlessly draw us into the sound so deeply that the sound overwhelms us, and the conversation of ordinary speech, which gives way to a trivial transparency that hides its sounded significance.<sup>15</sup>

Shakespeare's language shapes sound for the dramaturgical voice, so that words have both a semantic and an atmospheric, intuitive quality that is felt in the body. As States observes, 'no semantic explanation – such as that sense is passing through sound, or that sound and sense are inextricable – can exhaust the marvel of what is left under: the fact that the body, in possessing the sound, is “gripped” by its vibrations.'<sup>16</sup> Even when we are silently reading Shakespeare's play text, we can appreciate the intended effect of the language through our own 'inner voice': a complex form of auditory perception that responds to the visual stimuli of written words, imaginatively sounding and hearing them: anticipating the physical experience of speech. The vibration of a loud cry or forceful shout, for example, is intuitively apprehended in the body even when it is silently rehearsed and imagined.

In the face of Shakespeare's consummate skill in linguistically shaping his audience's understanding and perception of Macbeth's character, the apparent flaunting of differences between verbal and visual presentation elsewhere in the play seems



puzzling, and invites investigation. One reason for this apparently deliberate conflict, this study suggests, lies in *Macbeth*'s disturbing ability to destabilise audience expectations, to create feelings of uncertainty. When Banquo and Macbeth encounter the weird sisters, for example, Shakespeare deliberately makes his audience aware of the gap between what is seen and what is heard. Our perception of the sisters is still heavily influenced by language, for despite the performers' presence onstage, Banquo's detailed description is surely a defiance of material possibility: '[s]o withered, and so wild in their attire, | That look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth | And yet are on't' (1.3.40-2). Another way of understanding this apparent disparity, then, is as an attempt to fracture perception, destabilising audience expectations and enhancing the feeling of a supernatural presence. Shakespeare illustrates the effect of fractured perception in

*Richard II*:

For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,  
Divides one thing entire to many objects,  
Like perspectives, which rightly gazed upon  
Show nothing but confusion. (2.2.16-19)<sup>17</sup>

In this example, not only is the perception physically distorted by the interference of 'blinding tears', the subject is unable to form a unified impression of what the eye sees. The tear becomes a prism that refracts the visual signal into a myriad of particles, each one a possible transmitter of meaning. The result is confusion: a fracturing of vision leading to a breakdown in understanding. In such a case, the individual signals are unfamiliar – they do not connect with what we recognise or expect to see. The world becomes de-familiarised, the site of a simultaneous attack on reason and senses, both of which normally work together to create a perception we might expect, or be able to interpret. Now they each become temporarily isolated, and until

they are able to restore former connections – or forge new ones based upon some link with the old – normal, unified perception is replaced by a sense of chaos. This quality is what drives *Macbeth*, seeded and fuelled by the weird sisters' theatrical magic, through the power of words. As Stephen Greenblatt notes:

*Macbeth* manifests a deep, intuitive recognition that the theatre and witchcraft are both constructed on the boundary between fantasy and reality, the border or membrane where the imagination and the corporeal world, figure and actuality, psychic disturbance and objective truth meet. The means normally used to secure that border are speech and sight, but it is exactly these that are uncertain.<sup>18</sup>

The apparent disparity between words and vision denies an audience a sense of unified perception, but in fact ultimately allows the imagination freedom to move beyond expected boundaries. That audience is helped to form a new image of the weird sisters through Banquo and Macbeth, who convey the impression that the women's appearance is unworldly, beyond belief. To an audience already in a state of uncertainty, this concept is easy to accept, if not easy to imagine, but in this instance, the denial of a clear image is a necessary part of what Shakespeare wants us to perceive. There are enough explicit features in the description, in fact, to shape that quality of the supernatural, encased as it is in an outer shell of recognisable humanity.

The disappearance of the weird sisters '[a]s breath into the wind' (1.3.82) once again highlights an apparent disparity between language and visual presentation. This seems a challenging effect to achieve onstage; it was possibly originally envisaged that the sisters would exit through the trap door in the playhouse stage. In modern productions, special effects or the judicious use of smoke can help create the illusion of dematerialisation. Returning to the text, however, it is important to consider the

unsettling effect of the gap between action and words. To Banquo and Macbeth, the witches vanish; to an audience they may not be required to do so, since none of their future 'magic' proves to be more than a trick of language. Birnam Wood does indeed appear to move, and Macbeth does meet a man not naturally born of woman, but it is ultimately made clear that these are obvious equivocations. An audience watching *Macbeth* is left uncertain of how much it, too, is meant to see or not see, and this is surely a deliberate part of the play's effect on, or infection of, those drawn into its web of language and illusion

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare uses language and dramatic structure to foster illusion, by transfiguring or supplementing his audience's visual perception. The object that is first conjured in the imagination – the illusory dagger – paves the way for the real stage property's appearance, so that the audience's perception of the real object is fused with the imaginative experience. Macbeth's 'dagger of the mind' (2.1.39) materialises before him in an almost palpable form, but for his audience, it remains an image created from words: albeit an image given immense dramatic force by the intensity of the scene. By this point in the play, an underlying mood of doubt and duplicity is already deeply entrenched. When Macbeth envisions his 'dagger of the mind', it is clear from his description which way the dagger is facing: '[t]he handle toward my hand' (35). He positions it spatially, gazing directly at it, and consequently directing the audience's gaze to that same spot. In *Shakespeare's Speaking Pictures*, John Doebler suggests that an Elizabethan audience may have expected to see a real dagger – a stage property, possibly suspended out of Macbeth's reach: 'it must remain an object that is but seen. It should, therefore, be a stage property, as it probably was in Shakespeare's day.'<sup>19</sup> The

interference of a visual stimulus at this point would surely be an untimely reminder of the real world outside of the play, however, disturbing the carefully nurtured, uneasy atmosphere of slippage from real to unreal, material to illusion in *Macbeth* at this point. It might even provoke untimely humour, as the Mechanicals' clumsy use of objects does among the nobles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Frances Teague points out that 'the relatively commonplace property of a bloody sword or knife is particularly effective because it is *unconvincing*' (my emphasis).<sup>20</sup> In other words, the anticipation of the property's use as a real object is what induces a feeling of horror in the observer, although the object is clearly representational. Any past experience we may have of using a knife is immediately pressed into service by the perceptual toolkit. The memory of how the blade feels to the touch, the apprehension of its capacity to inflict pain or damage: all are summoned instantly to the mind and senses, fused into a moment of imaginative perception. Our experience of how our own body works means that we can intuitively stand momentarily in the attacker's place – or in the victim's. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, the habits that we build up through bodily experience enable us to recover the essence of previous movements or tactile experience, and therefore 'each "visual" structure eventually provides itself with its mobile essence',<sup>21</sup> that can be recalled and perceptually reconstituted. For Merleau-Ponty, 'every habit is both motor and perceptual':<sup>22</sup> what we perceive, we also sense in kinaesthetic terms. When we see an onstage actor grasp a weapon, therefore, or being apparently wounded, we are able to project ourselves into a perceptual experience of that movement or impact. Smith notes that in experiments where subjects observed projected images of their bodies, once they had experienced '[p]roprioceptive drift',

(where subjects being stroked also watched their virtual bodies being stroked, and 'almost all the subjects attributed the sensation of being touched to the virtual figure'), they were 'much more likely to react viscerally in their physical body to an object (in the experiment, a hammer) that seemed to threaten their virtual body'.<sup>23</sup> An audience's response to physically present objects and onstage characters is therefore intensely complex, and becomes more so when language is used to interfere with our perceptual response: to augment or transfigure what we see, as Shakespeare's introduction of the real dagger and suggestion of the illusory one both demonstrate. The stage property daggers used in the play are therefore dramatically effective, whereas the use of a property to represent the 'mind' dagger would merely destroy the concept of illusion that Macbeth's commentary carefully creates.

The illusory dagger appears to Macbeth as he begins to give form to Duncan's murder in his mind. It is vital that Duncan's murder initially remains in the dream world of Macbeth's imagination, thereby romanticising the act: robbing it of any sense of revulsion, in order to make it acceptable to contemplation. When Macbeth takes hold of the real dagger at his side, however, he merges the imaginary world with the physical one, in a tragic moment of choice that materialises his dream and transforms the vision into a real event. When the murder is committed, the very real shock that Macbeth feels, and communicates to his audience, is underscored by the appearance of the stage daggers. The property of the mind materialises, with stunning dramatic effect.

The fact that Macbeth speaks directly to the illusory dagger (rather than describing what he sees and senses to his audience) enhances the feeling of intimacy between audience and character, bringing Macbeth into close focus with his own vision,

and narrowing the audience's gaze into the space that he occupies, as the outside world appears to close down around him. For Macbeth, the border separating illusion and reality momentarily dissolves, as he becomes unable to wholly distinguish between visual perception of a real object, and an image created in his imaginative perception. Overwhelmed by a feverishly active imagination, his perceptual powers are intensely heightened, threatening to swamp the borders of reality that normally enable him to categorise material and image. Desperately attempting to redefine those borders, he questions the reality of what he sees, even as Banquo questions the weird sisters: '[a]rt thou not, fatal vision, sensible | To feeling as to sight?' (2.1.37-8). For Macbeth, there is now an obvious confusion between sense-perception and reality: 'I see thee yet, in form as palpable | As this which now I draw' (2.1.41).

The line is spoken even as his fingers physically close around the dagger at his side. The movement underscores the coexistence of the illusory and material daggers in his world at this moment, illustrating the power of language to create an alternate reality. Macbeth's ambition, awoken by the weird sisters' prophecy and fostered by his wife, now manifests itself in the material form of the dagger. What Shakespeare seems to be exploring in this scene is the shifting of perspective, the closing down of one world, previously accepted as real, and the intense focus on the world within consciousness. Mind and matter fuse momentarily, and normal perception is disrupted as the imaginary object takes on material form, invading the space immediately in front of Macbeth. Merleau-Ponty explains, in fact, that '[w]hat brings about both hallucinations and myths is a shrinkage in the space directly experienced'.<sup>24</sup> He points out that for the patient suffering from hallucinations, objects do not keep their distance from the subject as in

normal perception: they occupy space at will and seemingly by their own choice in a terrifyingly invasive manner. The material dagger at Macbeth's side is still in its place, yet Shakespeare shows how the splintering of normal perception creates the vision of it in close proximity, as Macbeth's world shrinks into a dark space in which he contemplates an act he has hitherto set at a distance. The materialisation and dematerialisation of the object before Macbeth's gaze, the fluctuation of the dagger from vision to reality, disturbingly underlines the permeability of the border between real and imaginary. Merleau-Ponty notes that '[w]hat protects the sane man against delirium or hallucination, is not his critical powers, but the structure of his space: objects remain before him, keeping their distance'.<sup>25</sup> The sane man rejects, in other words, perceptions that he categorises as tricks of sight, dreams or ideas, and thereby keeps in sight of consciousness a vision of his real world, and a bodily apprehension of its spatial dimensions. These dimensions coincide with a general world-view. Banquo's reaction demonstrates this view. Although disturbed by the weird sisters and their prophecies, he does not allow the perspective they offer to change his beliefs or his actions. Such is the uneasy atmosphere of *Macbeth*, however, that even Banquo's words imply uncertainty, offering a double perspective:

merciful powers,  
Restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that nature  
Gives way to in repose. (2.1.8-10)

The play does not clarify whether Banquo is praying to be spared torturing fears of Macbeth's murderous intent, or to be delivered from his own dark, unuttered thoughts.

Macbeth may be ultimately aware that his hallucination is a product of his 'heat-oppressèd brain' (2.1.40), but the experience prepares him to use the real dagger at his

side. He thus begins to transform the sisters' prophecy into a new reality: in seizing the material dagger, he turns the illusion of power into the powerful act. For a short time, illusory and material daggers coexist, before his perception becomes a unified experience once more and the illusion disappears. Macbeth will never see the world in the same way again, however: the action ultimately defines the man. Merleau-Ponty observes: 'I make my reality, and find myself only in the act.'<sup>26</sup> The moment of fracture produces a new perception of life for Macbeth, and weakens his ability to keep the world of dream and illusion at its normal distance from waking reality. The scene underscores the power of words to weave a world of illusion.

Another phenomenal achievement of this scene is the setting of mood and creation of atmosphere through language. The hypnotic rhythms and sounds that pulse through Macbeth's speech and the potent metaphors linked to myth, radiating power and sensuality, help to draw the audience into the inner world of the play – and to form their own image of Macbeth's illusory dagger. Don Ihde illustrates how difficult it is for the imagination to resist the influence of language: '[t]he old challenge, "Try *not* to think of a white bear," is an entity version of a possible field question, "Can you "turn off" your thinking altogether?" I suspect that the answer must be a qualified "No".'<sup>27</sup> This imaginative audience participation, therefore, brought about by listening and watching, forges a subtle link between Macbeth and those sharing in this intimate scene. It is a reminder that Macbeth is responding to a vision we are all capable of imagining. For Macbeth, however, this becomes more than an exercise in the imagination. The seeming physical presence of the dagger gives form to his ambitions, plunging him into a materialising future that he longs to grasp. His hallucination enables him to live his



darkest thoughts, to give form to and face his fears, and to rehearse what he is about to do in his mind and senses. It offers him a quasi-reality in which to prepare himself to commit murder: a state in which he may not only think the unthinkable, but anticipate it as 'experientially possible'.<sup>28</sup>

Duncan's murder is an act that always remains offstage. As members of an audience, we know of it only through report, but as in *Henry V*, mood and atmosphere infer the action that we never see. Mood-setting is achieved through language and the use of sound and stage properties. A servant bearing a torch suggests the approach of night, and gathering darkness. Macbeth gives the order for a bell to be struck when his bed-time drink is ready (2.1.32-3). The sound of a death knell is therefore suggested to the mind even before the actual sound of the bell is heard. Its very absence, in fact, is a presence in the scene, deepening the tension until it is rung. Macbeth's words lure his audience into an imaginative world associated with myth and witchcraft. The sense of heroism suggested by the language of myth mingles with the imagery of dark magic, with a resultant thrill that robs the anticipated murder of revulsion. He personifies murder as a withered figure, stalking the night silently with 'Tarquin's ravishing strides' (2.1.56). The image combines the grotesque with the sensual, the powerful man with the macabre. Tarquin's rape of Lucrece is linked with images of nightmare and dense darkness: 'wicked dreams abuse | The curtained sleep' (2.1.51-2). Imagination draws on memory, not just of vision but of sound and touch, stored in the mind and re-delivered to the senses to enhance perception. The word 'abuse' anticipates Tarquin's rape of Lucrece and Macbeth's murdering of sleep (2.2.35), and subtly implies the violent removal of the bed curtain: the abuse of sleep and of chastity. The mention of bed

curtains also suggests the shutting out of light and deadening of sound. The speech climaxes at this point, and then appears to diminish in power:

thus with his stealthy pace,  
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design  
Moves like a ghost. (2.1.55-7)

The long vowel sounds in 'moves' and 'ghost' help to convey a sense of gliding, as they bring the intense speech smoothly to a halt. Macbeth's next words indicate an abrupt return to present reality:

Thou sure and firm-set earth,  
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear  
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,  
And take the present horror from the time  
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives;  
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives. (2.1.57-62)

The succession of monosyllables and short vowel sounds in 'firm-set earth' endorse the semantic significance of regularity and firmness in the words: with the spondaees in 'set earth', the line itself seems to tread along at a confident pace, making its rhythmic mark in the speech. The rhythm then appears to falter, with the next line broken up by pauses, echoing Macbeth's underlying anxiety. The words evoke an atmosphere heavy with dark expectancy, and the fear that discovery will tear this fragile web of horror that enables him to carry out the unthinkable act and realise his ambition. He then makes his choice to act, and the decision is framed in what seems to be a shortened rhyming couplet that ironically imbues the concept of murder with heroism, while its incomplete form subtly infers unwholesomeness. Warped linguistic form and rich imagery therefore effectively encapsulate this character's lost heroic potential, disfigured by ambition: the grandness of the declamation belied by the grotesqueness of the deed it implies.

The ringing of the bell abruptly breaks the mood: Macbeth's 'I go and it is done' signals the dawning of a new reality (2.1.63), as possibility and actuality become interchangeable in his altered perception. He prepares himself for the act of murder by moving from a hallucination of the future into a dream-like present in which the act has already been imaginatively executed in his mind. He needs only to complete the physical act of murder to realise the dream, and to do this he must, in a sense, separate mind from body: the body must carry out the deed in the present, while the mind remains projected into the future. This separation of perspectives results in a temporal fracture in Macbeth's perception: past, present and future become confused and destabilised. The sound of the bell is an auditory trigger for action, the finality of Macbeth's decision underscored by the rhyming couplet: '[h]ear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell | That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell' (2.1.64-5). In this scene, Macbeth propels himself into a nightmare world through a vision that becomes hallucination. He forms his new reality through contact with the material dagger, and through his subsequent actions. Merleau-Ponty observes that our first apprehension of objects can intuitively shape our immediate knowledge of ourselves. 'It is through my relation to "things" that I know myself', he writes: 'inner perception follows afterwards.'<sup>29</sup>

In *Macbeth*, as in *Titus* and *Henry V*, Shakespeare also explores the body as object, but at a new level of subtlety and intensity. In the scene following Duncan's murder, Macbeth's obsession with his 'hangman's hands' (2.2.26) reflects the fracture in his perception. By making his hands responsible for the murder, in a curious psychological dismembering of limb from mind and body, Macbeth evades direct confrontation with himself as the entire perpetrator of the murder. As Brooke points out,

part of a hangman's job was to 'disembowel and quarter the hanged man' (Note 2.2.26), and therefore steep his hands in blood. Macbeth now views his bloody hands as alien to the rest of his body. He effectively disowns them: '[w]hat hands are here? Ha, they pluck out mine eyes' (2.2.58). The line directs the actor to manipulate his hands as though they are making an attack on his character's vision. This reaction stresses the unbearable sight Macbeth has witnessed: the hands that have committed the murder seek to blind him to the reality of it. It also implies an anarchic quality in limbs that are normally perceived as part of a whole: if the hands are capable of murdering Duncan, they are equally capable of maiming Macbeth. Through Macbeth's words and actions, flesh takes on the role of animated object.

The actor's attitude towards these limbs, and his manipulation of them, endow them with the qualities of stage properties rather than integral parts of a working body-subject. The horrified alienation with which Macbeth regards his own hands illuminates his growing sense of self-degradation. The scene constitutes a disturbing vision of the body infected by its actions: flesh gradually becomes de-humanised by ambition. Shakespeare uses linguistic imagery to infuse audience perception of the bloody hands with the concept of 'the multitudinous seas' (2.2.61) turned red from Duncan's blood, as though the hands are still in some way connected to the dead body, and unable to stop pumping forth its blood. Perkins-Wilder explains that the word 'multitudinous' suggests fertility, and that there is therefore 'a glancing suggestion of impregnation' in the phrase, while "'incarnadine'", according to the OED, means "'make flesh colored'". Therefore, she concludes, 'the ocean seems almost to be taking on the flesh, as well as the blood, of the human form, multiplying Macbeth's deed in a parody of generation.'<sup>30</sup>

Here, then, is a repeat of the link between ocean and body that is found in Titus's vomiting of a sea of his daughter's woes, but in Macbeth's case, the ocean is used to hideously multiply his vision of butchered flesh into a heaving mass that, fused with the attributes of the sea, rises and falls restlessly in his perception. Perkins-Wilder perceives a theme of dismemberment in *Macbeth*, through violence on generation itself. The ripping of Macduff from his mother's womb, she points out, recalls Lady Macbeth's image of the child to whom she had 'given suck', (1.7.54), and would willingly have brutally murdered, in pursuit of her husband's ambition. 'Like the body as a whole, the fertile "womb"', she writes, 'not only the site of generation but the metaphorical place of remembering and invention – becomes a thing to be dismembered.'<sup>31</sup> For Perkins-Wilder, time is also dismembered in *Macbeth*: the future is ripped away from children, from Duncan, and from the Macbeths themselves, and their possible generative line.

The shock of committing an act of murder is reflected by an abrupt change of style in Macbeth's speech:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No – this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red. (2.2.59-62)

Brooke notes the 'astonishing shift of language from the polysyllabic Latinate l.61 to the monosyllabic English l.62' (Note 2.2.61-2). The complex rhythm of 'multitudinous seas incarnadine' gives the line a tumbling quality, as though the language is bursting previous boundaries of rhythm, echoing the breadth and power of waves swelling, breaking and finally, ebbing. The strange, child-like simplicity of the last line seems to illustrate that ebbing, as though the words that had contained such force suddenly lose

power and have nowhere to go. The switch to monosyllables in the last few words signals Macbeth's bewilderment, as though heightened poetic language is unable even to begin to adequately stress the magnitude of the horror he feels. The words draw visual focus to the actor's hands, the strangeness of the language displacing comforting rhythms with an insistent repetition of monosyllables that deny reason, and seem to echo the ominous sound of knocking from without, that signals Macduff's arrival. Here, linguistic structure reinforces the character's emotional reaction, and abruptly slows the action down as it narrows the focus on Macbeth's body, drawing the audience into the play's hypnotic atmosphere. Just as the Porter delays answering the door, the language at this point seems to move the play into a moment of slow-motion. It invades the senses with a fluidity implied by the 'seas incarnadine', bringing the audience inside Macbeth's private world, heightening the experience of this moment of theatre through its complex fusion of what is seen with what is heard.

In the next example – of Banquo's ghost – the full horror of Banquo's mutilated body is conveyed to the mind and senses prior to the character's entrance. The audience learns from the first murderer that Banquo's 'throat is cut' (3.4.15). Macbeth's happiness at this news is short-lived, however. Shakespeare carefully structures his character's speech to communicate the suffocating stress Macbeth feels on learning of Fleance's escape. This is carefully juxtaposed with the freedom and relief that Macbeth feels would have been his, had the boy also been killed:

I had else been perfect –  
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,  
As broad, and general, as the casing air;  
But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in  
To saucy doubts and fears. (3.4.21-5)

The first three lines generate a sense of openness and firmness, with their images of solid rock and timeless marble, and the latter's link to the eternal quality of the monument. The vowel sounds in 'general', 'casing' and 'air' require the actor delivering them to open his mouth increasingly wide, pulling the jaw back and down to release the sound. In stark comparison, clear delivery of the next line requires the mouth to work harder, as the lips are constantly compressed to produce the combinations of n-d and b-d in this consonant-rich phrase. The act of speech therefore physically conveys the semantic workload, the tight-lipped action giving the words a sense of pressurised breathlessness that adds to the mood of imprisonment and suffering described by Macbeth. Simon Palfrey observes that '[w]hat could have been emphatic assertion is transfigured into anguished meta-poetic paralysis'.<sup>32</sup> The tension builds, anticipating Macbeth's impending 'fit' (3.4.20). The first murderer's words now paint an even more detailed mental image of Banquo's fatal injuries: 'safe in a ditch he bides, | With twenty trenchèd gashes on his head' (3.4.26-7). The alliteration on 't' in 'twenty' and 'trenchèd', and the regular rhythm produced by the two-syllable words in the second line reinforce the suggestion of repeated blows.

Brooke glosses 'trenchèd' as 'cut (especially of severe wounds in flesh)' (Note 3.4.27). Yet 'trenchèd' also has as its stem the word 'trench', meaning ditch, where Banquo lies, and is thereby indicative of the depth of his cuts. It also echoes the word 'drench', extending the image to encompass wounds running with blood: ditches or trenches are dug to drain away fluid. The ghost's appearance in the final cauldron scene, when Macbeth describes him as 'blood-battered' (4.1.138), seems to bear this idea out.

Brooke glosses this as 'blood-matted hair' (Note 4.1.138). It is also reinforced by the ghost's shaking of his 'gory locks' (3.4.51). 'Gashes' are not clean cuts, but imply wounds made by indiscriminate slashing. Thus a watching audience has access to a vivid image of Banquo's mutilated body before the actor materialises, and language prepares the mind to supplement any deficiencies in physical appearance. The audience sees Banquo's ghost, in fact, through the filter of the play's description, and thus through an appeal to the imagination: a sight, in fact, '[w]hich might appal the Devil' (3.4.59).

The stage is full of properties at this point: a table, chairs or stools, goblets of wine, and platters of food: signifiers of comfort and hospitality. The ghost's appearance is significantly and ironically linked to this symbolism of friendship and hospitality. As Brooke notes, the first Folio is specific about the ghost's entrance (Note 3.4.37.1-2). His cue comes directly after Lady Macbeth's words, 'the sauce to meat is ceremony' (3.4.36), which bizarrely links food with Banquo's mutilated corpse. Her remarks come just after the first murderer has described Banquo's gashed body, and Brooke points out that "[m]eat" puns with "meeting", and 'ceremony' with "cere", the wax used in laying out the dead' (Note 3.4.33-7). Lady Macbeth's pun on sauce, meat and ceremony links the imaginary vision of Banquo's bleeding corpse with the physical onstage representations of hospitality and social order. Dessen and Thomson also note that 'ceremony' recalled 'a variety of activities including (1) *conjuring*, (2) *religion*',<sup>33</sup> an observation that also links the term to the play's preoccupation with witchcraft. Brooke again notes that the first Folio directs the ghost to enter and 'sit in Macbeth's place' (Note 3.4.37.1-2). Macbeth's stool thus simultaneously suggests his throne, but the



symbolism is further complicated by the connection between the concept of ceremony, with its supernatural and religious resonances, and the arrival onstage of a dead body. This is no corpse laid out to rest, but one mobilised into action, usurping Macbeth's symbolic seat of power in full view of the audience. Lady Macbeth's desperate efforts to maintain the mask of hospitality which conceals murderous intent make Macbeth's earlier words a reality: 'make our faces | Vizards to our hearts, disguising what they are' (3.2.36-7). Dessen and Thomson point out that '*vizards* can also be linked' to the 'supernatural':<sup>34</sup> it is therefore an apt term given the play's preoccupation with witchcraft and the ghostly appearances of Banquo.

Teague remarks the use of banquet scene properties that suggest hospitality – '[t]his banquet initially looks and sounds like an enactment of community'<sup>35</sup> – but like the banquet in the play's opening scene, which becomes 'increasingly sinister', this feast degenerates into a macabre self-consumption of conscience and peace of mind. As the ghost of Banquo appears to Macbeth and to his audience, Macbeth's own mind has become a feeding ground: 'O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife' (3.2.39). The idea of carrion feeding is reprised later in the scene:

If charnel houses and our graves must send  
Those that we bury back, our monuments  
Shall be the maws of kites. (3.4.71-3)

Brooke explains that 'maws' should be understood as the 'stomachs' of birds of prey, and notes: '[k]ites are said to have a habit of disgorging undigested material, but the connection is tenuous' (Note 3.4.72-3). In fact, in the light of the flesh/feeding imagery prevalent in this scene, the choice of kites as stomach-like graves that hideously disgorge undigested bodies would seem to be most apt. The metaphor suggests that

Banquo, his flesh mangled and mutilated, appears partially digested by death: a macabre addition to a celebratory feast ostensibly designed to honour the murdered man.

In this scene, then, language shapes a vivid image of the ghost's appearance, prior to his entrance. Whereas the illusory dagger appears suddenly to Macbeth, and his vision prepares an audience for the appearance of the stage dagger, Banquo's ghost is constructed in the mind well before he is introduced on stage. This process has a double impact. It helps to enhance an audience's perception of the ghost when he does appear, and intensifies the dramatic effect of his entrance. The impact of the ghost's presence on stage is strengthened by the failure of all other characters, except Macbeth, to see him. This apparent fracture in perception between Macbeth (and his audience) and the remaining characters adds to the play's atmosphere of doubt and unease. It is clear from Lady Macbeth's words that no other character on stage shares his vision. She scornfully berates him: '[w]hen all's done | You look but on a stool' (3.4.67-8).

The appearance of the ghost may therefore serve to confirm Macbeth's guilt and give the audience an insight into his future: the manifestation of a spirit confirms that death is no escape from his crime. Conversely, its non-appearance to the audience is liable to intensely influence that audience's perception of Macbeth's mental state. There is a subtle, dramatic link between Banquo's appearance to the audience, and the illusory dagger. The intimate scene in which the audience has watched Macbeth face his illusory dagger now gives depth to and impacts on the later one. If only Macbeth is allowed to see Banquo's ghost, then the audience may perceive Macbeth simply as deranged: a man spouting his own fears in isolation. However, Banquo's appearance to the audience provides an external force and motivation for Macbeth's apparent madness. The other

guests' inability to see Banquo's ghost also intensifies Macbeth's isolation. The audience's ability to share Macbeth's vision, on the other hand, is a reminder that, although it did not share his hallucination, daggers of the mind are not difficult to imagine. With the appearance of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth's audience witnesses his penalty for realising his ambitious vision, as his world becomes a living nightmare.

While Lady Macbeth attempts to bring her husband back to a sense of reality, the audience still shares Macbeth's vision. The play allows a brief respite from the ghost's presence, as he seems to exit on line 3.4.73 (confirmed by Macbeth's speech, one line later: '[if] I stand here, I saw him'). The pause serves, in fact, to prepare the audience for Banquo's next ghastly appearance. Macbeth's speech again helps to shape and mould how the audience perceives Banquo:

The times have been,  
That when the brains were out the man would die,  
And there an end; but now they rise again  
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,  
And push us from our stools. This is more strange  
Than such a murder is. (3.4.79-84)

His words doubly underscore the ferocity of the attack on his former friend. 'Twenty mortal murders' recalls 'twenty trenchèd gashes', with its double alliteration on 'm' stressing the horror of the crime. Each gash has now become a separate murder. The double meaning of 'crown' is a reminder of the multiple injuries to Banquo's head ('the brains were out'), and of his royal lineage, as pointed out by the weird sisters, who had hailed him as the father of kings to come. This idea is visually reinforced onstage when Banquo takes Macbeth's place at the table. There is an undercurrent of black humour in the speech (Macbeth seems to question the impossibility of permanently killing

someone these days), but it only serves to deepen the sense of self-degradation that the scene conveys.

The ghost reappears, ushered in this time by a cheerful toast and a momentary return to social order and hospitality. Macbeth's efforts to establish a sense of normality during the spectre's absence now appear impotently out of joint in its presence. The ghost's short time offstage allows little or no time for any alteration to the actor's physical appearance. However, audience perception is now directed through the intimacy of Macbeth's gaze, and Macbeth's descriptive language appeals not just to visual aspects of the ghost's appearance, but to sensations of cold and of lifelessness:

Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;  
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes  
Which thou dost glare with. (3.4.96-7)

His desperation prompts a return to heroic speech style, in another attempt to recover the image of the previously fearless Macbeth:

What man dare, I dare:  
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,  
The armed rhinoceros, or th'Hyrcean tiger,  
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves  
Shall never tremble. (3.4.100-104)

The '[u]nreal mock'ry' (3.4.108) of Banquo's ghost, with its empty-eyed gaze, marrowless bones and cold blood conveys a feeling of empty presence: an antithesis that once again serves to unnerve and unsettle. As the guests leave, unceremoniously dismissed by Lady Macbeth, and the social order breaks down ('[s]tand not upon the order of your going' – 3.4.120), the language slips back once more into the hypnotic rhythm connected with night, witchcraft and murder, anticipating Macbeth's return to

the weird sisters. He is now not simply infecting the 'multitudinous seas' (2.2.61) with blood, he is wading in them:

I am in blood  
Stepped in so far, that should I wade no more,  
Returning were as tedious as go o'er. (3.4.137-9)

The concept of wading suggests the weight of the blood he is pushing against in his attempt to advance, and 'tedious' the weariness this journey induces, as well as the pointlessness of turning back.

As the play draws to a close, Macbeth clings to the weird sisters' original prophecy. He still believes that he is in no real danger unless he sees Birnam Wood moving towards Dunsinan, and that he cannot be killed unless it is by a man not born of woman. Neither of these suggestions seems possible in reality: they appear purely products of the imagination. Yet as Malcolm's army approaches the castle, bearing boughs hacked down from Birnam Wood, the resultant vision seems to confirm the impossible. This apparent magic is achieved by the use of properties, but in fact, the audience is invited to imagine the illusion long before it sees the army on stage. Macbeth recalls the sisters' prophecy at the start of 5.3: '[t]ill Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinan | I cannot taint with fear' (5.3.2-3).

A servant then confirms the approach of ten thousand soldiers. His terrified exchanges with Macbeth build the tension in the scene. Macbeth's description of the servant's physical state is designed to shape audience perception of the onstage actor: '[w]here got'st thou that goose-look?' (5.3.12). Brooke glosses this as 'white [...] terrified (as in goose flesh)' (Note 5.3.12). The metaphor appeals to the sensation of shivering, or the raising of hairs on the body in response to terror, as well as to paleness.

The boy is described as 'lily-livered', with 'linen cheeks' (5.3.15-16). Even if an audience member is not close enough to see an actor made up to look pale, Macbeth's description supplements what he or she perceives, lending the experience 'perceptual immediacy'.<sup>36</sup> At this end of the scene, Macbeth reiterates the prophecy: 'I will not be afraid of death and bane | Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinan' (5.3.58-9), once again prompting the audience to envisage the moving wood within the mind. Scarry suggests that 'a single image asserted and withdrawn accomplishes much of the work' of movement in the imagination, a device she terms 'additional and subtraction.'<sup>37</sup> The suggestion and withholding of information therefore intensifies what we see in the imagination: an effect used by Iago in *Othello*, as Chapter Three shows. The couplet again suggests a retreat into mock heroism, neatly ironised in the next scene, when Seyward asks '[w]hat wood is this before us?' (5.4.3). The words of the prophecy still in their minds, the listening members of the audience hear Menteith's fatal reply: '[t]he wood of Birnam' (3). The prophecy unfolds before them, as Malcolm orders every soldier to 'hew him down a bough | And bear't before him' (5.4.4-5). The soldiers within the world of the play create illusion by using natural properties, just as the actors playing soldiers achieve the same effect with stage properties. The order and corresponding action is a reminder to an audience of two things: that it is witnessing the actual materialisation of the prophecy, and that the prophecy itself is no more magical than the actors who are making it happen.

The numerous mentions of the prophecy thus far in the play have ensured that the miracle of transformation – the moving wood – has actually already happened in the realm of consciousness. The audience then sees and hears a messenger bring the news of

the moving wood to Macbeth. The messenger reports 'that which I say I saw | But know not how to do it' (5.5.31-2). His reluctance to put into words what he has seen allows for a pause, in which the audience is able to confirm the prophecy in the mind's eye. His own wonder at what he has just witnessed serves to intensify what the audience member imagines. The prophecy is brought to life in the imagination, through his words:

As I did stand my watch upon the hill  
I looked toward Birnam, and anon methought  
The wood began to move. (5.5.33-5)

This speech begins with the quality of a recital, which is subtly suggestive of story-telling. The audience has, by this time, already witnessed Malcolm's soldiers preparing this apparent miracle, and therefore the suggestion of fiction is a reminder that the messenger is describing an illusion. The messenger's speech style contrasts strikingly with Malcolm's prosaic orders to his men:

Let every soldier hew him down a bough  
And bear't before him, thereby we shadow  
The numbers of our host, and make discovery  
Err in report of us. (5.4.4-7)

The rhythm of the verse is broken up with commas, interrupting the flow and making the speech sound closer to prose than verse in style, helping to convey the abruptness of the orders. The first three lines begin with the shorter metrical 'foot' or iambus, whereas the fourth line begins with the naturally longer sound on 'err', throwing the stress onto that first monosyllable. The change in rhythm gives the line a clipped, peremptory quality. This prose-like speech sets the mood for the soldiers' practical actions. The speech is harsher in sound, and lacks the hypnotic rhythm of much of the language that characterises Macbeth and the weird sisters and links them with magic and witchcraft. In

contrast, the messenger's speech opens with a regular rhythm, pauses at 'Birnam' (so that we can anticipate what he is about to disclose), and moves smoothly back into iambic pentameter. The soft, rounded diphthongs in 'wood' and 'move' echo the sounds in Macbeth's 'rooky wood'. The perception of the distant moving wood is formed in the mind's eye at the servant's words.

The boy's reiteration of the tale then moves away from verse, sounding more akin to Malcolm's prosaic style. The slippage from the formal style lends the speech a ring of truth, as though the words are tumbling free of restraint in the Messenger's haste to confirm what he has seen:

Let me endure your wrath, if't be not so –  
Within this three mile may you see it coming.  
I say, a moving grove. (5.5.36-8)

The weak ending of the suffix 'ing' in 'coming' makes 'I say, a moving grove' sound merely a desperate reiteration. Macbeth responds in poetic verse, his style once again mock-heroic, but now reverberating with a weary note of acceptance:

I pull in resolution, and begin  
To doubt th'equivocation of the fiend  
That lies like truth. 'Fear not, till Birnam Wood  
Do come to Dunsinan', and now a wood  
Comes toward Dunsinan. (5.5.42-6)

The first part of this speech contains two strikingly direct statements: 'the fiend | That lies like truth', and 'now a wood | Comes toward Dunsinan'. The first is given great impact by the stop at 'truth', endorsing the finality of Macbeth's acceptance, and closing down the world of magic and illusion. The second smacks of bitter humour: the declamatory style used to reiterate the prophecy is heavily ironised by 'and now a wood | Comes toward Dunsinan', a matter-of-fact pronouncement that dissolves verse into the



style of prose. The contamination of the rhythmic verse in this way highlights Macbeth's realisation of the truth: that the weird sisters' vision was never a real prophecy, but an equivocation. The verse finally returns to heroic style in a strangely poignant echo of the former 'brave Macbeth', as he prepares to accept his oncoming fate.

The play at last visually confirms the falseness of the prophecy, by the appearance of Malcolm's soldiers, bearing leafy branches. For a moment onstage, the percept and the image converge. Then the branches are thrown down and the true visual acknowledged. The obvious stage properties serve as a reminder that the prophecy was indeed an equivocation, for – as this discussion highlights – the real illusion of the moving wood has already taken place in the imagination. At the same time, the use of the properties, as part of the play's illusion, also demonstrates the equivocation of the players themselves, in the world of theatre.

The above discussion has considered how Shakespeare explores the themes of equivocation and illusion in *Macbeth* through the use of language and properties. The weird sisters' vision is certainly realised, but in a totally unexpected way that is devastatingly destructive to Macbeth. From their first appearance, the sisters present opposing possibilities: the same battle can be lost and won (1.1.4). There is a simple answer to this riddle, of course. In every battle, there is always a losing, and a winning side. There is no magic in the weird sisters' predictions, only a way of seeing. At the end of the play, Macbeth's illusions are shattered, as the world of imagination gives way to reality, and the soldier whose vision has made him a king is reduced to a gruesome object – that of his own dismembered head, victoriously brandished by Macduff.

In March 1978, Trevor Nunn's extremely successful RSC stage play, originally performed at Stratford's The Other Place, was filmed for television,<sup>38</sup> directed by Philip Casson. Filming a stage play for television carries with it the danger of translating over-large acting gestures and unnecessarily projected voices to the small screen, which requires a much lower-key performance. We are accustomed to thinking of television as a close cousin to film, in other words, as a primarily visual medium, but as Susan Willis writes, 'film is a far more highly visual medium than is television'.<sup>39</sup> For Willis, television deals primarily with language; its 'mode is that of rhetoric',<sup>40</sup> and it invites intimacy. The comparison of television to theatre, rather than film, is an interesting point. Casson's production began life as intimate theatre, and therefore was well suited to television, and to the play's close psychological exploration of character.

In Casson's production, visual presentation becomes woven into the fabric of the play, as the action is contained in a tightly-controlled area, and the camera explores it in an intimate fashion: over shoulders, from behind earlobes, between bodies and over features, 'feeding an interest that borders on voyeurism',<sup>41</sup> as Michael Mullin writes. Although the close-up shot is also part of the cinema film technique, in cinema, we become viewers of a spacious exterior world that occasionally draws us into intimacy, but as Michèle Willems observes, ultimately 'opens onto a world of total illusion'.<sup>42</sup> In Casson's *Macbeth*, the camera closes in rather than opens up, therefore negating our need for a wide view of scenic landscapes. It approaches from the exterior and bores inexorably into the play's interior. As an audience of viewers, we also enter the swirling cauldron, psychologically and spatially. There is no distraction from the intense focus of the lens as it explores the psychology of character, challenging our concentration, our

commitment to Macbeth's dark world. This intensity demands a great deal from the cast; the lens is close enough to transmit laboured breathing, convulsive swallowing, sickly perspiration dribbling from the nose and lips of Macbeth. The medium is used self-consciously, to seduce a modern audience into accepting a play with the Elizabethan concerns of magic and witchcraft, yet it becomes curiously interwoven with the drama itself.

The opening shot from high above the circle, which Mullin describes as 'an abstract star pattern',<sup>43</sup> (but is actually the actors standing around the circle), also resembles a camera lens. This is a wonderful symbolic fusion of the medium with the physical bodies of the actors: theatre and camera become as one. As the bodies move around the circle, the lens rotates slowly, reminding us of a kaleidoscope, as actors merge with lens. The circling movement continues as a strong theme throughout the play, serving a double purpose. It is a constant reminder of the camera's all-encircling presence, and the inescapable, ritualistic mesmerism of the play: the continuous circle of power and violence, gentleness and weakness; the inexplicable 'tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' (5.5.19-28). The witches' incantation is chanted in the round, as they brew their potion (4.1.10-60). The camera's perspective constantly reminds us that we are part of a circle, as it films from various angles off-centre. We, like the actors, are unable, ultimately, to escape the circle. Characters enter and leave, but always return to meet their fates, often melting into and out of the smoke and darkness.

The actors' individual movements become part of this process of circling, or present a contrast to it. As Lady Macbeth, Judi Dench's prowling to and fro as she reads her husband's letter (1.5.1-28) has a sinuous, serpent-like quality. In contrast, before the

murder of Duncan, Ian McKellan's Macbeth has an upright, confident body language; his movements are brisk and controlled: those of a respected soldier. From the moment he begins to consider murder, however, they subtly change. Filmed from a close up perspective in the right foreground, his head glides round to us as he considers his future. When Macbeth and his wife discuss Duncan's murder, they circle each other, as though Macbeth is trying to escape his lady's seductive, almost predatory movements, yet is unable to resist them: he takes on her physical idiom, as he becomes her partner in murder. When he returns with the bloody daggers, he unconsciously backs into his wife and the circling movement is evident once more as they move to face each other: Macbeth's actions become slow and dream-like. He strokes his bloody forearms and hands in turn with smooth, undulating movements, exploring them in an intense, mesmerised way, as though they have become separated from the rest of his body. We are strikingly aware of the psychological dismemberment illuminated by the text, through this unrelenting focus. From the viewer's perspective, the normal figure and ground relationship of body against background is disturbed, as Macbeth's arms dominate the foreground and the remainder of the body seems to be absorbed into the background.

Faces themselves become misshapen circles in the shadowy half-light. Rather than adding lighting to his production, Casson extracts almost all of it, leaving a potent darkness that adds to the claustrophobic mood of the production and physically realises Macbeth's line: 'light thickens' (3.3.53). Darkness and light themselves become murderer and victim, as darkness threatens to strangle any beams that stray into the scene. When Birnam Wood comes towards Dunsinan (5.6), the battle is invoked

psychologically by a circle of flashing lights, spotlighting each character individually. It appears to seek out Macbeth when he least wants and expects to see it, half-blinding this man who has dwelt in inner darkness for so long.

Sound and music form part of the play's concern with double values: '[h]e's here in double trust' (1.7.12), juxtaposing religious ritual and witchcraft. As Bernice Kliman points out, the witches chant 'over the cauldron a parody of the *Deus Irae*'.<sup>44</sup> Religious organ music, normally associated with harmony, slips uneasily into the discordant tones reminiscent of horror films. The witches use narcotics to induce hallucination in Macbeth, while they daub his body with Christian crosses: a directorial choice that makes the play's theme of witchcraft accessible to modern audiences. The viewer is drawn into a circle of drug abuse and its consequences, in which Macbeth degenerates, losing control over body and mind.

The success of this production lies in its fusing of method and material. The intimate staging of the play translates perfectly to television drama, but Casson also uses the circle itself (and the circling camera) to embody themes in the text. Sound and lighting do not merely enhance the production – they are accomplices in the drama: symbols of the power of darkness and those who struggle against it. Sound effects are used to confuse values, to throw stereotypical interpretation off balance. The play closes in an atmosphere of uncertainty, with no sense of relief or celebration. As the crown is offered to Macduff to hold aloft, and he raises bloody hands, still clutching the daggers, his expression is full of horror. The closing image of crown and bloody daggers is held for a long moment. The play has come full circle; the victim has become the assassin.

Rupert Goold's 2010 BBC film<sup>45</sup> is also based on a successful stage play, and like Casson's production, its action is contained within one location. Goold's labyrinthine setting in the basements of Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire encloses his characters within echoing corridors reminiscent of mid twentieth-century wartime bunkers, and utilitarian kitchens whose white-tiled walls would seem at home in a Victorian hospital, but for the stainless-steel surfaces and refrigerator that indicate a more modern, 20<sup>th</sup> century European setting. The atmosphere is cold and comfortless: a feeling accentuated by paint-peeling walls, hard surfaces and stone floors. Action flashbacks throughout the film suggest an East European location, or as Michael J Collins describes it: 'a modern Russian dictatorship'.<sup>46</sup> This idea is reinforced by the Cossack hats worn at one point by Macbeth and his wife, and the Stalin-like image of Patrick Stewart as Macbeth, projected in the main salon or hall after his rise to power.

The grandeur of this one luxurious room, in which Macbeth discovers the weird sisters, is initially visually erased by the blinding light in which they appear, suggesting that light is being used to conceal rather than reveal: to deliberately confuse our expectations. On the sisters' exit, when the light is less intense, the floor of the room is seen to be of polished wood, the ceiling hung with chandeliers and the room lined with paintings. It has, however, been stripped of all furniture, suggesting that the house has been pressed into use by the army, perhaps inferring the expunging of a social class with whom this previous grandeur was related. There are some external shots showing the stone exterior of the abbey, the courtyard and the woodlands beyond. In the main, however, characters lurk below ground in the endless, entrail-like corridors that are

alternately dark or intensely lit, or gather in the steel-lined kitchens, where food is being prepared or consumed.

These kitchen scenes are heavily reminiscent of the gory theme of cannibalistic feasting in *Titus Andronicus*, in their obvious link between food and murder. The constant juxtaposing of eating and appetite with death is reminiscent of Lady Macbeth's words: 'the sauce to meat is ceremony' (3.4.36). Murders are repeatedly planned amidst the preparation or consumption of food. In a report on the stage play, Jonathan Ivy Kidd remarks that Patrick Stewart, as Macbeth, 'orchestrated the assassination of Banquo while casually making a sandwich, and sealed his fate by breaking bread – and class hierarchy – with the hired murderers.'<sup>47</sup> This action was repeated in Goold's film. As Macbeth warns the murderers to 'leave no rubs nor botches in the work' (3.1.134), he grasps both men by the throat, almost choking the younger man, whose cheeks are uncomfortably full of food. The man's bloated mouth and starting eyes, and the unswallowed food in his cheeks, seem nauseatingly expressive of the unpalatable murder, yet undone.

Duncan arrives in the kitchen amid a frenzy of chopping, hacking and butchering of meat. Lady Macbeth significantly feeds him with a titbit as she assures him of his welcome, and Duncan's speech: '[t]his castle hath a pleasant seat, the air | Nimble and sweetly recommends itself | Unto our gentle senses' (1.6.1-3) is ironically at odds with his setting in a way that recalls the vein of black humour running through *Titus*. A voracious air characterises these moments of feasting that anticipate human butchery, lacing the film with horror, rather than tragedy. As Duncan and Lady Macbeth leave the kitchen, the weird sisters – who enact the roles of hospital nurses, kitchen maids and

serving girls, all in similar costumes – turn to face the camera, knives clutched in their hands, as though anticipating Duncan's imminent death. As Macbeth contemplates the murder: '[i]f it were done when 'tis done' (1.7.1), he opens a bottle of wine, and pours the blood-red fluid into a glass decanter. The slaughter of children is also linked with feasting: Macduff brings his wife and children into the castle kitchen on the morning after Duncan's murder. On the night before Duncan's death, the boy Fleance eats chocolate gateau as he sits, perched on a stainless steel surface in the same kitchen; and prior to the banquet scene, Macbeth samples a blood-red soup that looks like Borscht: a Russian recipe made from beetroot. This Macbeth's relish of food is matched only by his keen appetite for power.

Whereas Casson's production portrays murky darkness, Goold's gives us achingly bright light that thrusts the horrific reality of war and its butchery before our gaze, yet at the same time casts shadows that suggest the presence of unseen horrors lurking in corners and doorways. From the violently clenching, bloody hand that dangles from a hospital trolley in the opening shot, the film strips all heroism from the Captain's battle report. Close-up shots of the officer's body, showing the reality of the wounds inflicted by modern warfare, are starkly laid bare by the unforgiving electric beam. They are juxtaposed with flashbacks of military fighting that recall the carnage of twentieth-century warfare. The Captain's suffering in the comfortless corridor eclipses these apparently televised reports that seem removed in comparison in their dimmed lighting, despite the disturbing images they contain. The weird sisters, nurses who attend the dying Captain and apparently precipitate his fatal cardiac arrest through a lethal injection, are presented in the white lighting of the here-and-now, as they rake in his



body for human organs to use in their black magic. Their invasions of domestic and medical spaces are deeply disturbing, as though there is no escape from the horrors of inhumanity they represent: they are constantly in our midst. Their construction of a modern, full-size voodoo figure from a surgical transfusion stand, blood pack and the Captain's coat brings the black magic from Shakespeare's play sharply into the present realm of modern medicine, as though the weird sisters are, in effect, warped creators of humanity who simultaneously perpetrate acts of gory destruction. They are, in essence, the shadows that lurk within, cast in a beam of light that is demonic, rather than heavenly: man-made, rather than supernatural.

Goold's film creates illusion through the modern medium of lighting. After the sisters' first encounter with Macbeth that takes place in the more luxurious hall, they exit into a lift – as though in practical terms defying the characters in the text who melt '[i]nto the air' (1.3.81). However, in the beam of light projected down upon them, they seem to disappear, although there still lurks an uncertain presence in the shadows. The film thus plays with its viewers' perceptions through lighting, by making us question what we see, or think we see.

In the West-End stage performance I attended, the suggestion of illusion also played an important part. The weird sisters, nurses-come-waitresses, circled the banquet table with hands clasped behind their backs. Without warning, all three turned simultaneously to reveal carving knives clutched in their fists: a stunning moment of unexpected visual presentation that momentarily shocked the audience. The next instant, it seemed, the knives had vanished. The audience was left questioning the evidence of its own gaze. Similarly, the first appearance of Banquo's ghost was thrillingly effective,

in both stage play and film. Michael Collins reports on the stage play that 'Banquo entered from the elevator, covered in blood, with the witches behind him, as if he were a life-sized puppet.'<sup>48</sup> His entrance eerily recalled Lady Macbeth's earlier return with the two bloody daggers, after Duncan's murder: her stilted gait and glassy stare that gave her a 'Stepford-like chilliness', as Kidd notes: a strange divorcing of mind from body, that seemed 'an unsettling prelude to [her] eventual derangement.'<sup>49</sup> Banquo's similar entrance, but this time attended by the weird sisters, inferred their supernatural hold over the dead as well as the living.

It was Banquo's action, rather than his appearance, that arrested every gaze as he walked along the cluttered table top, directly downstage towards the audience. His unexpected and stunning entrance was immediately followed in the play by the interval. The beginning of the second act then reprised the ghost's entrance, but this time the audience, like the onstage guests, witnessed no gory figure representing Banquo: they saw only Macbeth's terrified reaction to an apparent hallucination. The different versions of this important scene unsettled the play's audience by presenting two possible perspectives: pointing out the play's preoccupation with double vision. In the film version, the ghost's entrances echo the stage play. Banquo appears only once to the audience, but twice to Macbeth. His presence in the second instance is signalled, however, through the sound of a heartbeat. This could infer, therefore, that the viewer is meant to sense, rather than see the ghost on the second occasion. On the other hand, the sound could also represent Macbeth's intensifying distress. Again, we are left to choose from these two perspectives.

In Goold's film, there is no attempt to create on-screen illusion in the Birnam Wood scene, although the camera does cut to soldiers in camouflage battle dress moving through the forest. The idea of illusion is conveyed through the performance of the servant – whose hesitation to disclose what he has seen conjures the image in the minds of the audience and viewer. Macbeth's attempt to grasp the illusory dagger is filmed so that it directly involves the audience: Stewart reaches towards the camera, as though the viewer embodies, or is perhaps holding the dagger he sees. This draws the viewer into the story in a startlingly different way from Casson's production, directly confronting us, by placing the temptation the dagger represents within our own midst: a technique that is particularly effective in view of the intimacy of the medium. As Coursen notes, '[w]hile television tends to hide its techniques the better to sell us something, *Shakespeare on television* demands that we pay attention *to* technique.'<sup>50</sup> Both Casson's and Goold's productions therefore succeeded in communicating the play's sense of uncertainty, illusion and double values through the performance of its actors, and through the medium of film, geared to appeal to a television audience.

*Macbeth* ultimately challenges us to question what we see, and to consider how we respond to what we hear. Simultaneously, it consciously illustrates the potential power of Shakespeare's language to create illusion and shape perception. The deployment of that power also involves the destabilisation of normal expectations that fractures perception and results in a sense of de-familiarisation. This can in turn free up the imagination, enabling it to conjure new perceptual possibilities. As Palfrey comments on Iago's speeches in *Othello* – and the same can be said here of *Macbeth* – Shakespeare's language 'invok[es] customary meanings or expectations, splitting them

in two', so that 'unprecedented possibilities sprout and spawn from the fissure.'<sup>51</sup> As the examples in this chapter show, *Macbeth* attacks its audience's senses on every possible front, through vision, sound, emotion, and the anticipation of touch and smell – galvanising the power of the imagination through the stimulus of language. The structure and sound of the language reflect the play's concerns and help to create its dark mood. Speech conveys a sense of uncanny fluidity between the world of material and image, deepening an audience's appreciation of the play through an ever-fertile abundance of imagistic associations. Audience members are not merely spectators: they are implicated in the play's dark atmosphere. They become part of *Macbeth*'s exploration of the psychology of murder and inhumanity through the visual impact of objects and the sounds and structure of language, the multiple meanings it suggests, and the potent imagery it evokes.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *King Lear: Perspective and Illusion*

If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes

(*King Lear*, 4.6.172)<sup>1</sup>

*King Lear* is a play preoccupied with perception and perspective: particularly with the dangers inherent in viewing the world from a single vantage point. It demonstrates – through the inability or unwillingness of Gloucester and Lear to appreciate any other perspective than their own (and their consequent failure to recognise the true motivation of their offspring) – the vital role our perception plays in influencing our judgement. As the play shows, the full experience of perception involves far more than sight. Lear endorses the importance of listening to the blinded Gloucester, when he advises him to ‘[l]ook with thine ears’ (4.6.147). *King Lear* takes Lear and Gloucester on a tragic journey of self-discovery, yet the play’s preoccupation with perception and perspective is illustrated in a much more complex way than through a didactic storyline.

In Act 4, Scene 6, Edgar’s and Gloucester’s metaphorical climb to the top of an imaginary cliff in Dover illustrates the power of language to shape our perception, enabling us – as readers or audience members – to adopt multiple perspectives. This chapter examines in depth that phenomenal scene, and its overall importance in the play.



Secondly, it considers how Shakespeare creates perceptual illusion through language and the use of two vital stage properties: a bloody dagger brought on by a Gentleman in Act 5 (3.220), and the feather that Lear holds to Cordelia's lips, as he desperately wills her to live (5.3.263). Once again, textual close-reading considers the potential impact on an imagined audience, and although detailed discussion of actual performances is largely retained until the last section of the chapter, there are some instances where examples from performances are used to illustrate a particular point in the textual analysis.

*King Lear* presents us with a totally different landscape to the intimate world of *Macbeth*: vast, barren, untamed and unaccommodating. It bursts from its grimly repressed opening at court to a scene of royal rage, and thus onto a wild heath land where king and beggar alike are abandoned and pitifully vulnerable. The play reaches beyond its concern with the tragedy of its powerful protagonists. It utilises these characters to imply the greater tragedy that their unthinking actions precipitate on a helpless world, and to communicate the scale of that misery. Where the mood in *Macbeth* grows suffocating and absorbing as the play moves into the space of Macbeth's mind, the world of *King Lear* is wrenched apart by the rashness of one man's immaturity, and as a consequence characters find themselves adrift in its wilderness, clinging to life. In *Macbeth*, as Chapter Six shows, Shakespeare lures us into his protagonist's obsessive world through hypnotic rhythms, sensuous sound and rich, linguistic layering. He encourages us to become part of the mood of the play, to momentarily share Macbeth's tragic vision, in order to realise our own vulnerability to temptation.

*King Lear's* approach is rather to distance itself from its audience. The opening scene, with its formal courtly tableau, is horrifyingly mirrored in the play's closing moments: the array of dead bodies displaying the consequences of Lear's selfish, single perspective at the start of the play. There is a strong sense of demonstration in the final tableau, in which the play illustrates cause and effect through the comparison of the two scenes. This pictorial approach to the beginning and end of the play underlines the audience's role as spectator: an external position that allows it to view *King Lear* from a broader perspective. The play offers its audience a variety of perspectives, in fact: at times presenting it with several viewpoints simultaneously. Lear's banishment of Kent and Cordelia, at the beginning of the play, discourages us from empathising with him, though he does command our pity as the play progresses. He becomes a pathetic sight, rather than someone with whom we closely identify: that role is filled by Edgar, and to some degree by Kent, both of whom display deeply empathetic character traits. Edgar's several assumed roles in the play emphasise the ability of a good actor to inhabit another character: his portrayal of Poor Tom becomes more of a lived experience than a performance. Edgar's ability to anticipate Lear's suffering suggests a degree of physical, as well as emotional pain: 'O thou side-piercing sight!' (4.6.85). His reaction effectively communicates Lear's distress to the play's audience, and his voice is, appropriately, the one that Shakespeare uses to explore the human capability to perceive and understand multiple viewpoints, even in the same moment.

In the Dover Cliff scene, Shakespeare draws us into a fascinating form of audience participation through a phenomenal tour-de-force of writing, in which Edgar takes his father and the play's audience on a metaphorical climb to the top of a high

cliff. Language alone evokes imaginative illusion, unless the flat stage can be classed as an object – and certainly, Shakespeare uses his stage as both a physical area to be transformed in the imagination, and as a constant reminder that the scene is metatheatrical. We are told that Edgar carries a staff. On the one hand, this is a visual sign to the audience that the imagined cliff is supposed to be steep; on the other, it draws attention to the fact that we are watching a play-within-a-play. Its use must perforce highlight the reality of the flat stage – however Edgar labours to show otherwise. The object itself therefore belies Edgar's story, even as the images Shakespeare creates through Edgar's words weave a totally believable world in the imaginative perception. Language and imagination triumph over material limitations.

For Jonathan Goldberg, 'the effect of the scene, at least in retrospect, is to call representation into question'.<sup>2</sup> He feels that the non-existence of Dover Cliff on stage complicates 'the possibility of the creation of the illusion of place through language.'<sup>3</sup> Although Dover is repeatedly mentioned in the play as a place characters strive to reach, it remains a place suggested to our minds, first by Gloucester, then by Edgar. In Act 4, Scene 1, Gloucester describes it:

There is a cliff whose high and bending head  
Looks fearfully in the confined deep:  
Bring me but to the very brim of it. (4.1.76-8)

The speech makes us aware of Gloucester's despair, and at the same time introduces the image of the cliff in a particularly effective way. It is, in fact, personified: '[t]he cliff becomes a person terrified by the sight of the sea far below' notes Foakes (4.1.77). The enormity of the cliff's height is thus conveyed to the audience: if the cliff itself is terrified of its own distance from the sea, then its size must be awe-inspiring to a human

mind. The image lures the mind to form a vision both of and with the cliff at the same moment. We are also, like the cliff, looking down at the sea, and are able to appreciate the cliff's apparent fear.

The feeling of immediacy engendered by this strange image is fostered by Edgar's commentary, as he begins to build the illusion of the climb upwards. Edgar talks his father, and the audience, carefully through the scene, appealing to our appreciation of the physical aspects of such an experience. His use of the collective term 'we' encompasses both Gloucester and the audience, even as it reminds us that Edgar is acting a part: '[l]ook how we labour' (4.6.2). Although the audience is made fully aware that Edgar is pretending, it is almost impossible to prevent the imagination responding to the perceptual imagery evoked by his speech. An audience therefore reacts on several levels at the same time, imaginatively perceiving the scene from both Gloucester's and Edgar's perspectives, while remaining ultimately aware of the scene's metatheatricity. When Edgar asks, '[h]ark, do you hear the sea?' (4.6.4), we listen for it, too, even if to confirm the fact that we cannot hear it, to remind ourselves that we are temporarily part of Edgar's fabricated world. A few lines later, we also learn the quality of that imaginatively perceived sea: softly lapping, for it 'chafes' the 'idle' pebbles on the beach (4.6.21). Merleau-Ponty describes the visual and imaginative experience of seeing a pebble as follows: 'I can imagine possible fissures in the solid mass of the thing if I take it into my head to close one eye or to think of the perspective.'<sup>4</sup> What Shakespeare does here, through language, is stimulate our visual and sensory recall of the object, using metaphor to supplement and enrich that experience in the imagination. As Bruce R Smith comments, *King Lear* 'is replete with moments in which words become physical

presences.<sup>5</sup> Dessen and Thomson gloss the term 'chafe' as to 'display irritation'.<sup>6</sup>

Chafing conjures both image and sound, conveying a sense of mild friction, or a barely noticeable wearing-away. The water's gentleness is implied through the 'idle' pebbles. They are idle because the water is scarcely able to move them, if at all. Shakespeare subtly reinforces this idea by a trick of grammar: the sea lacks an adjective of its own, so it absorbs the quality associated with the stones. He uses the passive object to imply a description of the active one, creating the idea of idleness through the structure of the metaphor. The language evokes a beatific sense of peace and tranquillity. It suggests a slow, lazy movement and almost inaudible sound. Even though Edgar informs us that the sea is too far distant to be heard, we must imagine the sound in order to be able to imagine *not* hearing it.

Speech is direct and simple, adding to the accessibility and immediacy of the scene:

Gloucester	When shall I come to the top of that same hill?	
Edgar	You do climb up it now. Look how we labour.	
Gloucester	Methinks the ground is even.	
Edgar	Hark, do you hear the sea?	Horrible steep.
Gloucester		No, truly. (4.6.1-4)

The characters' lines are brief, but the whole is still contained within the verse structure. This accentuates Edgar's subterfuge, since it enhances a sense of performance throughout. The underlying rhythm is also a comfortingly familiar underscore that can help to foster a sense of complicity between Edgar and the audience. Gloucester's

repeated challenges, and Edgar's responses, all reinforce audience awareness of metatheatre. When Edgar suggests to his father that his 'other senses grow imperfect | By your eyes' anguish' (4.6.5-6), it is obvious from Gloucester's retorts that his other sense are, in fact, quite acute. Gloucester's insistence that Poor Tom has become 'better spoken' (10) draws audience attention to Edgar's altered style of speech: a sign that he is allowing his assumed character to slip. Foakes notes, 'a change marked for the audience by the verse; as Poor Tom, Edgar usually spoke in prose' (Note 4.6.7-8).

In the introduction to the Arden 1997 edition of *King Lear*, Foakes notes that '[c]ritics, directors and actors [...] also debate "how much of an illusion his [Shakespeare's] audience might have been under about the presence of a cliff"' (p. 62). After all, appeals to the audience to imagine various landscapes are regular occurrences in Shakespearean theatre. Edgar's occasional asides to the audience, however, his more refined accent – remarked by his father – and Gloucester's persistent challenges all serve to aid audience understanding and acceptance that it is watching a play within a play. The fascinating achievement of this scene is that, although it is carefully crafted so that its audience appreciates the action on several levels, it evinces a sense of such experiential immediacy. It does this partly through its appeal to the senses: 'how fearful | And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low' remarks Edgar (4.6.11-12). This description calls to mind Gloucester's previous image of the cliff, gazing fearfully downwards. It moves beyond the suggestion of visual imagery to an incredibly detailed imaginative experience that fuses art and poetry, sense and intellect in a perceptual response carefully crafted to create a slow-release effect in the mind's eye. As Jonathan

Goldberg explains, 'Edgar's description of Dover recasts a version of illusionistic representation upon which Renaissance painting depends. The lines offer a perspective on perspective.'<sup>7</sup>

Goldberg interestingly compares the linguistic content of Edgar's description with the mathematical and spatial organisation of a Renaissance painting. Perspective painting had just become fashionable in Shakespeare's time, and the new system replaced

an organisation of two-dimensional surface co-ordinates with a three-dimensional hierarchy that invited the translation of surface positions into perceptions of depth. Subordination replaced co-ordination.<sup>8</sup>

He points out that up until this fundamental change, understanding Renaissance art required familiarity with anamorphosis: looking awry at a painting to understand its hidden meaning or code. Perspective painting depends upon the relationship between lines of distance, particularly the exact positioning of the spectator viewing the painting, and the location of the 'vanishing point': a point in the painting that seems to disappear away from us into the horizon. In Edgar's detailed description of the view from Dover Cliff, Shakespeare seems to be experimenting with knowledge of this new visual technique, using verbal imagery to achieve his own effect in the mind's eye. He manages this with startling clarity. As Goldberg writes, '[t]he diminution in scale is insistent':<sup>9</sup>

The crows and choughs that wing the midway air  
Show scarce so gross as beetles. Half-way down  
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade;  
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.  
The fishermen that walk upon the beach  
Appear like mice, and yon tall anchoring barque  
Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy

Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge  
That on th'unnumbered idle pebble chafes,  
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,  
Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight  
Topple down headlong. (4.6.13-24)

Goldberg interprets the illusion this scene creates, coupled with its insistence on perspective, as another manifestation of the theme of 'nothing' running through *King Lear*. For Goldberg, Shakespeare creates the image of a perspective painting in our minds, positioning us before it, and therefore implying that we are able to gaze into its vanishing point: the play's own sense of self-annihilation. 'Vision depends upon both blindness and invisibility', he writes. '[I]t rests upon a vanishing point.'<sup>10</sup> Viewing a vanishing point in a painting, however, also implies that the spectator is looking at it from one fixed position, and Edgar's words suggest a multiplicity of perspectives: he takes us on an imaginative perceptual journey that abounds with movement. In fact, the experience is – in a modern sense – rather more filmic than painterly. The insistence on movement therefore suggests that the vanishing point we are trying to view is constantly shifting: we are offered different viewpoints, in order to empathise with, and understand, the experiences of others. Perhaps this also implies that the future is not necessarily self-annihilation, but that there are ways in which it can be changed, by altering our own perspective, and learning from experience.

From a theatrical standpoint, the scene is a self-conscious celebration of the power of theatre, and of language, over sense and imagination. It contrasts the scope and flexibility of language with the limitations of a static visual image. As States comments, Shakespeare 'would make us, his audience (we *know* the ground is even), blind to what we see by making us dizzy with what we hear.'<sup>11</sup> Gloucester's initial vision of a bending



cliff, peering down into the sea below, is now fused with an incredibly detailed view of that perceptual journey. The way Shakespeare methodically moves from diminishing object to further diminishing object controls the speed of that journey as each image is created and related to the one before. It has the bizarre effect of slowing down our perception, which in turn makes the sense of distance he wishes to convey part of our perceived sense-experience. Although she does not draw attention to the arrested speed of perception, Scarry notes that this image-by-image effect is used in cognitive psychology and hypnosis, where it 'demonstrates the same increased vivacity'<sup>12</sup> as that achieved through authorial instruction, where step-by-step attention to detail is used to vitalise the imaginative experience. In the above speech from *King Lear*, however, it is not purely the incremental approach to description that is responsible for its visceral impact, but its appeal to our bodily apprehension of size and distance. Merleau-Ponty explains that we grasp spatiality through our bodies: 'we know an object at a distance and of its true size without any interpretation', he writes.<sup>13</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, such experience therefore 'always comes into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body.'<sup>14</sup> Scarry echoes this idea of spatial perception in her exploration of authorial instruction. She reports that '[p]eople asked to describe the shape of a horse's ears [...] answer more quickly than people who (before being asked the shape of the ears) are first asked to picture the place where a horse's tail meets the horse's back.' She feels that this is because they must 'mentally move the long distance across the horse's back',<sup>15</sup> in order to reach the tail. In such cases, it would seem that imaginative perception becomes a journey, driven by our intuitive bodily grasp of movement and touch.

As Goldberg notes, Shakespeare's verbal imagery is often imprecise in its exact pictorial details. It conveys what we anticipate, what we sense and feel, within its suggestion of a visual image, thus giving us a whole, lived perceptual experience of the object or scene. In this case, Shakespeare seems intent on creating a perception of precise spatial awareness, drawing on our lived experience to shape the imaginary, intuitive one. Merleau-Ponty feels that our sense of size is apprehended by our physical relationship to an object, which is

big if my gaze cannot fully take it in, small if it does so easily, and intermediate sizes are distinguishable according as, when placed at an equal distance from me, they cause a smaller or greater dilation of my eye, or an equal dilation at different distances.<sup>16</sup>

As Scarry points out, experiments in cognitive psychology suggest 'that imaginary mimesis follows the spatial constraints of actual perception.'<sup>17</sup> In other words, we are able to intuitively sense, as well as picture, objects of the mind that we have experienced within the body, including our spatial awareness of them. She goes on to explain that 'what in perception comes to be imitated is not only the sensory outcome [...] but the actual structure of production that gave rise to the perception', in other words, 'the material conditions that made it look, sound or feel the way it did.'<sup>18</sup> As we recall our actual experience, therefore, we not only conjure a whole package of associations in which it is contained, but we relive the process of perception itself.

Goldberg focuses on the visual impact of the image. He implies that Shakespeare draws his audience into a mind-painting, and in this way the audience becomes part of its 'annihilative vision'.<sup>19</sup> He also sees the mind-picture as a silent one: 'Edgar's imagined Dover is a working out of illusion that rests on nothing: silence, invisibility,

blindness.<sup>20</sup> Yet Edgar's eyes, cast 'so low', invite us to trace his action with our mental gaze. Although the scene is full of movement, Shakespeare takes care to convey a sense of tranquil idleness, and slows down our perceptual response by pointing out each object in turn. Crows and choughs (instantly recognisable birds for his audience) are reduced to the size of beetles (also black and easy to picture), and 'wing the mid way air'. The use of 'wing' over 'fly', for example, conjures an image of soaring, outstretched wings: of effortless flight way below us. The location of the birds, half way down the cliff, helps to create the scene's sense of dizzying height. As States remarks, '[t]he optical law at work here is not only that the eye seeks a standard by which it can "compute" distance but that an object moving against a ground causes the gaze to drag at its anchor, in Merleau-Ponty's excellent metaphor.'<sup>21</sup> This comment once again underscores the importance of the body in Merleau-Ponty's research. 'The relation between the moving object and its background passes through our body', he observes.<sup>22</sup> This sense of physical to spatial relationship becomes part of our sentient store of memories: part of the recall of the structure of perception that Scarry feels is galvanised into action under the author's instruction.

The man gathering 'samphire' half way down the cliff '[h]angs' there to gather some 'aromatic leaves used in pickles' (Note 4.6.15). The fact that the man is reduced to the size of his own head provides both an immediately recognisable perspective, and the gross concept of a man shrunk into his own body: the body itself becomes an object. He is in all probability risking his life for a few pennies, to gather flavouring for a luxury food. His very size and precarious position, together with his proclaimed 'dreadful trade' (15), puts in perspective the helplessness of the poor in a materialistic world, and

the vulnerability of man against the might of nature. It also juxtaposes Gloucester's desire to wilfully terminate his existence, with another man's determination to cling to life for a few pence, doubtless to feed himself or his family. The insignificance of the man's size against the scenery creates a sense of detachment, a feeling that, as States puts it, '[w]hat the world does at a distance is none of your business'.<sup>23</sup> Shakespeare's description gives us a filmic wide shot, but refuses to zoom in for a close-up on those who people the world on and below the cliff, and this evokes an effective emotional backdrop for Gloucester's helpless predicament, should Edgar abandon him. It also heightens the importance of Edgar's love and support.

The metaphor of the fishermen on the beach, 'like mice', suggests both the concept of busy fishermen, and the quick, darting movements associated with mice. The fusion of mice and men into a single image achieves a strange mutating of size, speed and style of action. In the mind, men reduced to the size of mice also suggests tiny men moving with the rapidity of rodents, and this produces an effect oddly rather akin to an early silent film, where speed is out of kilter with our normal perception of it. The resultant feeling is of estrangement, a distancing from the norm in space and time that allows us to absorb the sense of the cliff's overpowering height from which we are viewing the beach. It also reinforces the insignificance of the men in relation to the huge cliff towering over them.

The 'tall anchoring barque' encourages the image of a graceful, proud ship that is then immediately diminished before the mind's eye to the dimensions of its own dinghy, and the dinghy thence to the size of a buoy. This shrinking of one object into another is productive of a telescopic effect: we imaginatively perceive the objects

mutating as they move into the distance, into each other, in fact, and to a point precisely designated by their interrelationship. Our gaze is now drawn to the sea, which 'cannot be heard so high', and we again respond to the memory of a sound, only to tune it out until we can barely, or no longer, hear it. The imagination, as Ihde notes, 'may "echo", "mimic", or "re-present" any "outer" experience. Imagination *presentifies* "external" experience.'<sup>24</sup> This is also true of the memory of sound: it is part of our battery of stored sensory information that helps us to form connections, produce memories and forge new images from the old. In this masterly scene, Shakespeare displays his knowledge of visual perspective, but supplements it by introducing a complementary aural and sensory dimension to enhance the image, thereby bringing the whole imaginative perception to one rich, unified experience. In order to achieve an instantly available and accurate visual perspective, he keeps language straightforward and metaphors instantly accessible, but the passage is deceptively complex in its careful layering of stimuli.

States also notes the simplicity of the scene's language – 'the relative absence of modifying adjectives and adverbs', which he sees as the 'key to the scene's neutrality.' He observes that '[w]e get the synopsis of a view, and between its "events" we create the illusion of immensity.'<sup>25</sup> Shakespeare's understanding of our ability to make connections, and experience images on a spontaneous, sensory as well as intellectual level, produces an ultimate triumph of words over visual. This focus on perspective can be seen ultimately as a challenge of poetry to the art of painting. In Sonnet 24, for example, although the poet appreciates the painter's skill: 'perspective it is best painter's art' (24.4),<sup>26</sup> he infers the superior power of language to encapsulate the complex fusion of mind, heart and senses that lies behind appearance: the eyes 'draw but what they see,

know not the heart' (24.14). The imagination, galvanised by the power of language, is able to provide multiple perspectives simultaneously. In this one scene, we look down in our minds from the cliff both with Gloucester and with the cliff; we look down with Gloucester into the sea, and then back up the cliff from the beach. As audience members, we observe the actor playing Gloucester lying on a flat stage, and at the same time imaginatively perceive the character on a flat piece of ground somewhere in or near Dover, and on a beach at the bottom of a cliff. As Goldberg writes, although representation is shown to be an illusion, 'words succeed only in perpetrating illusion'.<sup>27</sup> The scene 'shows up the power of the stage'.<sup>28</sup> In addition, as this argument reveals, Shakespeare's words provide a number of deeper perspectives on life in Lear's world, through an appeal to the senses and emotions.

When Edgar abandons his role as beggar, and confides to the audience: '[w]hy I do trifle thus with his despair | Is done to cure it' (4.6.33-4), from a practical perspective, his aside serves to confirm to the audience that it cannot expect to see a convincingly enacted fall. Foakes notes, however, that '[s]ome have seen here another act of gratuitous cruelty, as Edgar plays a rather unpleasant trick on his father' (*King Lear*, p. 62). Frank Kermode also discusses Edgar's attitude as part of the play's cruelty. He comments that Edgar 'insists on the "eyes' anguish" (6), on the act of casting down one's eyes, on the "deficient sight" (23), even as he is demonstrating what it is to see.'<sup>29</sup> But Edgar needs to draw attention to what he wishes Gloucester to visualise, for it is important that we, as readers or audience members, visualise it, too. Gloucester's blindness does not extend to his mind: he can still recall vivid mental images that are linked with sentient and tactile memories stored in the mind and blueprinted in the body.

Merleau-Ponty's research highlights the extent to which individual senses are grounded in the body: it is through the body that the fusion of senses seems to take place. The person who is born blind and then gains sight, he notes, cannot instantly translate what he knows about the world. He tries to touch rays of light, for example, or is amazed at how different a tree looks from a body. No amount of intellectual questioning and reasoning about the world can prepare him for the impact of sight, or substitute for that visual experience and its intimate relationship with our other senses: a fact that underscores the body's vital role in uniting the senses 'in one single experience.'<sup>30</sup> Because Gloucester has a store of these experiences, he is able to recall other senses connected with the memory of sight. He therefore experiences sight in an intuitive, kinaesthetic sense. The body becomes, in fact, 'the subject of perception', as Merleau-Ponty concludes.<sup>31</sup> Shakespeare's writing, rich in kinaesthetic appeal, triumphantly demonstrates that it is not necessary to look with the eyes, to see with the mind: words are a pathway to perception in the imagination. The Dover Cliff scene makes us fully aware of the power of language to shape what we see, sense and feel through imagination and memory. At the same time, Shakespeare also points out the potential danger of linguistic power. Gloucester believes so totally in the subterfuge, for example, that Edgar begins to fear for his father's life:

[*aside*] And yet I know not how conceit may rob  
The treasury of life when life itself  
Yields to the theft. (4.6.42-4)

After all, Gloucester's mind has proved to be malleable enough to believe Edmund's 'conceit' concerning his brother: a point that may also be in Edgar's mind during the

Dover Cliff scene. Edgar's words show that Gloucester's very life is under threat from the potential power of his ability to imaginatively perceive.

Edgar finally takes his father on an imaginative journey of miraculous recovery, though as Foakes points out, 'the play no more supports the idea that miracles happen, unless contrived by human agency, than it does the existence of the gods' (Note 4.6.55). Assuming yet another role – of a countryman who discovers the 'fallen' Gloucester – Edgar creates an image of the might-have-been for us (had Gloucester really fallen from the cliff) and for Gloucester (had he fallen from the cliff without miraculous assistance). '[T]hou'dst shivered like an egg', he exclaims (4.6.51). The line reminds us forcibly of the vulnerability of our own shell-like bodies, and is also suggestive of the miraculous in the Christian sense of the body as a shell that houses the spirit. Edgar tries to rebuild his father's self-image, suggesting a Gloucester whose spirit is strong enough to bear with the weakness of his body. At the same time, he reassures Gloucester that his body is still in fact physically sound. This is important, since although the fall is an imaginary one, the vivid images of the fall in Gloucester's imagination might induce a fatal sense of shock. Edgar anticipates and tries to reduce the possible effects of shock, while at the same time reinforcing Gloucester's belief in the fall: 'but thou dost breathe, | Hast heavy substance, bleed'st not, speak'st, art sound' (51-2). Edgar's suggestion that a superior power has shaped his father's destiny seems to help Gloucester to accept his disability, and Edgar endorses the miracle of his father's preserved life by guiding the latter's perception, willing Gloucester to understand that he may see, through his imagination, what he cannot witness with his eyes.



Now the perceptual journey is undertaken in reverse, as Edgar encourages his father to visualise the cliff from the beach below. Scarry points out that 'recomposition – the direction to undertake a picture that we have already successfully made in the past', is 'an important practice [...] in most works of the imagination: our third or fourth production of a given image is likely to be accomplished with less mental struggle and with greater vivacity.'<sup>32</sup> Here, the journey is set in the same imagined place, and therefore should seem familiar, but a closer look at the speech reveals that it is the perspective and spatiality suggested by the images that are the important aspects in creating visceral immediacy. Shakespeare invokes the familiar image of the tall sailing barque to enable us to measure in our minds the height of Edgar's cliff, as seen from below. 'Ten masts at each' (4.6.53) – one on top of another – creates an instantly graspable mental picture that is an immediate starting point for height comparison. The cliff, we are told, exceeds this height, for the ten masts 'make not the altitude' (53). Although the image does not present us with a mathematically accurate distance, many of those in the playhouse audiences would easily have been able to visualise a tall ship. The fact that they had been asked to do so only a few lines previously assists the ease with which this new idea of height can be envisaged. The perpendicular positioning of the masts in the metaphor helps to shape the perspective of our own gaze – we are looking straight upwards, through the centre of each ship.

Once again, Edgar asks us to imagine that we cannot hear a particular sound: the 'shrill-gorged lark' (58), although we already know the quality of the sound that we are asked to banish from our minds. This time, the bird we are asked to visualise is so far distant that we must also imagine that we cannot see it. Here, Edgar is asking his father

to picture something in his mind that he would, in fact, be unable to see with his eyes, even were his sight unimpaired. Gloucester and the audience, the blind and the sighted, are placed momentarily on an equal footing. Here, vision is only important as an experience in the memory: as an aid to creating new worlds in the mind. Because we can imagine the lark, we can also imagine its disappearance into the distance. We may even view it as a speck before it does so, in order to place the image in perspective, particularly since we have already been guided through this same process earlier in the scene. This subtle repeat of the former telescoping technique again reinforces our sense of the cliff's immense height and bulk.

This masterly scene uses only language, a staff and a flat stage to create a vivid perceptual journey in the mind. There is a risk that the use of actual scenery or stage properties might in fact reduce the potency of the speech by stiling its fluidity, or potentially robbing the scene of its layers of subtlety by introducing a conflict between verbal and visual stimuli. Suggestion needs no literal translation, as States explains:

the suspension of disbelief does not depend in the least on what we would today call a photographic likeness of the image to reality. It depends only on the power of the image to serve as a channel for what of reality is of immediate interest to the audience.<sup>33</sup>

The language in this scene is not heavily poetic. It does not use the sound of words as a mood-enhancer, to draw us into the scene, as *Macbeth* does. Instead, we respond to the suggested absence of sound. We are invited not to hear, but to listen: not to see, but to look. The very directness of the scene, its appeal to our physical senses through the imagination, enables us to stand with Gloucester, as it were, and experience the cliff from his perspective, through the mind's eye. Shakespeare displays, through the blinded

Gloucester, the enormous power of the spoken word to shape our perception. As audience members, on the same imaginative playing-field as Gloucester, our visual skills are not needed to take in Edgar's scene. Instead, Shakespeare uses the scene to encourage a sense of empathy between actor and audience, and to engender an understanding of how empathy works. He directs the audience's visual perception at Gloucester and Edgar, thus providing a double insight. An audience sees the world from within Gloucester's mind, as it responds to Edgar's suggestions; it also observes Gloucester's physical distress and Edgar's emotional pain as he witnesses his father's suffering. The play therefore triumphantly illustrates the audience's ability to see the world from multiple perspectives.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on *King Lear's* closing scenes, considering how – as in *Macbeth* – Shakespeare unites language and object onstage to suggest illusion: to tease his audience into a state of uncertainty as to how much it actually sees, or feels it might see. When a gentleman enters with a bloody knife in Act 5, Scene 3, he bursts in upon a scene in which Edgar has just finished describing his father's death – in eloquent verse that almost moves Albany to tears (5.3.180-220). Once again, Edgar's carefully controlled speech, with its hint of redemption in the relation of Gloucester's peaceful death, is violently juxtaposed with a passage that seems to want to tear itself away from the verse form that presents it. It is full of dislocation, thrusting forth snatches of information, and refusing to answer simple questions directly:

Gentleman Help, help, <sup>F</sup>O, help!<sup>F</sup>

Edgar What kind of help?<sup>F</sup>

Albany Speak, man. (5.3.221)

One line of iambic pentameter is roughly broken up into three speeches, reflecting the chaos of the moment. Edgar's '[w]hat kind of help?' sounds awkward, inadequate, and even slightly foolish. The Gentleman's inability to provide a direct answer conveys the sense of overwhelming horror he feels. Foakes notes the reassigning of the line '[w]hat kind of help?' to Edgar in the Folio version (the Quarto edition gives Albany the line), with the comment that 'Cam<sup>2</sup>, following Warren ('Albany', 101, 105), sees Edgar as beginning to take over "responsibility for events"' (Note 5.3.221). The Arden text clarifies that in Folio, Edgar is also given the line '[w]hat means this bloody knife?' (222), whereas in the Quarto text this is spoken by Albany. Foakes concedes that 'this slight strengthening of Edgar's role in F is no doubt connected with the assignment of the final speech in the play to him' (Note 221). The amendments in Folio may also reflect, however, the need to reinforce the sense of chaos in this part of the scene. Spreading the lines between the three actors produces a quick-fire of disjointed phrases, and allows each to react in confusion to the others' remarks. As Carson notes, '[t]he changes made do not radically alter the plot but they do affect characterisation, structure, emphasis and the pacing of scenes.'<sup>34</sup>

Although the characters struggle to make sense of the situation, the object on stage proves itself to be the most effective communicator at this point. The bloody knife speaks for itself, instantly announcing its presence as a messenger of violent death, and adding to the shock-value of the scene. To ensure that no audience member misses its appearance, however, Edgar's line draws attention to it: '[w]hat means this bloody knife?' (5.3.222). Jonathan Bate feels that the Gentleman's entrance 'heralds a truly abysmal passage of dialogue,'<sup>35</sup> yet the construction of the apparently clumsy lines has a

profound effect on the scene. It brings about a radical change of pace, creating an immediate state of doubt and uncertainty for the audience with its rough questions and bewildered responses, lack of clear information, and tantalising suggestion. Here, it is the unsaid that appeals to the imagination, causing it to seek for possible answers in response to the play's lack of clarification. As Ihde notes, '[t]here is an adherence of speech to the silence of the other.'<sup>36</sup> Although the speeches remain in verse, the whole section of this scene feels as though it wants to move into prose. David Crystal makes a convincing argument that sudden shifts between prose and verse are fraught with dramatic purpose in Shakespeare, and that 'a prose response shows a man knocked off balance'<sup>37</sup> in such a case. In the abrupt dislocation of the speech that follows, it is as though the lines themselves seem unsure which form they should be in:

Edgar	What means this bloody knife?
Gentleman	'Tis hot, it smokes, It came even from the heart of – <sup>F</sup> O, she's dead! <sup>F</sup>
Albany	Who <sup>F</sup> dead <sup>F</sup> ? Speak, man. (5.3.222-4)

Wright observes that, in his later plays, Shakespeare increasingly used short lines, which 'offered opportunities to be terse, curt, swift, ominous, surprising.'<sup>38</sup> He notes that characters' speech styles are organised 'according to [...] what the dramatic moment requires',<sup>39</sup> and in such instances, 'short lines [...] can develop their own counter-order or can modulate into prose.'<sup>40</sup> The overall effect of structure and style, in the above speech, is to throw the expectations of the audience off-balance: to create doubt, fear and dread. The passage is precipitated into a scene of hitherto well-ordered verse, the uncertainty of its own style creating a strong sense of authentic confusion, in

sharp contrast to the self-consciously theatrical mood engendered by Edgar's description of his father's death.

The direct style of speech accentuates the atmosphere of shock, stripping away any signs of artistic order and reflecting the total lack of law and order in the play at this juncture. The knife takes on an important role, here, as a visual symbol of violence, reinforcing the inadequacy of words in the face of a suggested act of brutality. The audience's attention fully arrested, it awaits the answer to Edgar's question. Instead, it receives a statement: '[t]is hot, it smokes'. If the actor playing the Gentleman says this line while focussing his gaze intently on the knife, guiding his audience to do the same, then the full impact of visual stimulus and suggestion will work together to influence what members of the audience think they see. Words, through imagination, subtly blend the concepts of heat and smoke or steam with that of blood, and the dramatic effect is intensified by the feverish entrance of the Gentleman, whose sense of urgency recalls Goneril's earlier recommendation to her sister to act 'i'the heat' (1.1.308). The combination of words and action prepares the dramatic mood and helps the play's audience to complete the perceptual connection it is encouraged to make. At this moment, with all eyes drawn to the knife by the Gentleman's words and actions, imaginative perception of the smoke would be almost irresistible. The fact that a small spire of smoke actually rising from a knife onstage would be impossible to see for most audience members, makes it easy for them to believe that the smoke might really be evident. At the very least, the structure of the scene engenders a sense of uncertainty, as proved to be the case in Trevor Nunn's 2008 RSC production. The moment is well portrayed on the DVD film version,<sup>41</sup> directed by Trevor Nunn and Chris Hunt, where

the Gentleman's erratic entrance, and his dramatic pauses between the lines, create maximum tension and expectation in the scene.

In Shakespeare's text, the Gentleman delays his news unbearably, but this both heightens tension and allows time for perceptual illusion to be evinced in the mind: for a 'taking up of others' thought through speech',<sup>42</sup> as Merleau-Ponty puts it. Albany's repetition of '[s]peak, man' (5.3.224) communicates the urgency and fear he feels. It seems he can think of nothing different to say, as though he cannot doubt that simple repetition will ultimately have some impact. Albany's question, '[w]ho dead?' must surely echo many audience members' thoughts at this point, and the revelation of the victim's name is therefore designed to act as a release of tension. It also sets up a false expectation that the play might proceed along more hopeful lines, with the wicked punished and the good redeemed. Indeed, Edmund's words to his brother a few lines earlier hint at the possibility of redemption:

This speech of yours hath moved me,  
And shall perchance do good; but speak you on.  
You look as you had something more to say. (5.3.198-200)

It is deeply ironic that at the very moment of this utterance, Cordelia's execution must be imminent. In Folio, the almost immediate entrance of the Gentleman with a knife distracts Edgar and Albany, who might otherwise have questioned Edmund's cryptic '[a]nd shall perchance do good'. Had Edmund made his confession without delay, Cordelia's life might have been spared. In the event, Kent's entrance, and his terse speech abruptly turns all attention to the fates of Lear and Cordelia:

I am come  
To bid my King and master aye good night.  
Is he not here? (5.3.233-5)

Albany's exclamation: '[g]reat thing of us forgot!' (235) has rather a comic tendency, in a similar way to Lear's eruption into the Dover Cliff scene. Indeed, Foakes notes, 'I have heard members of an audience titter with nervous laughter on this line' (Note 5.3.235), and it is omitted in both the 2008 Nunn/Hunt production and in the 1970 black and white film by Peter Brook,<sup>43</sup> both discussed in more detail later in the chapter. The distracted mood engendered by the Gentleman's abrupt entrance, however, reduces the risk of humour in the momentary break in onstage tension. That tension is immediately re-established and heightened by Albany: 'Speak, Edmund, where's the King? And where's | Cordelia?' (5.3.236-7). He draws Kent's attention to the dead bodies of Goneril and Regan, and in doing so, stirs some warmth and pity in Edmund: '[y]et Edmund was beloved' (5.3.238). This evidence of human mortality seems to galvanise him into a confession: '[s]ome good I mean to do, | Despite of mine own nature.' (5.3.241-2). His breathless, halting speech creates agonizing suspense, and Albany's cry for action: '[r]un, run, O run' (245) is subsequently charged with desperate fear. His repetition of 'run' gathers momentum with each cry, the final one sped on its way by the heartfelt 'O', a sound described by Smith as 'a burst of energy from within [...] a projection of one's body into the world.'<sup>44</sup> The line is therefore given explosive momentum by this one vowel, as though Albany hopes, by its sheer physical force, to precipitate the messenger from the scene. The long, rounded sound of 'O', if drawn out, is also reminiscent of the sound made by a single bell (we say a bell 'tolls', and imitate its sound with 'ding dong'). Single bells were rung to announce a death, so it is also possible for this one vowel to carry a prescient note of doom, amid the frantic hope conveyed by the repeated word 'run'.



Even at this point, the action is unbearably delayed, as Edgar realises that any messenger must carry proof of Edmund's wish to countermand his order. It is also vital that the Gentleman gets directly to the right person, to avoid the waste of precious minutes:

To who, my lord? Who has the office?  
Send  
Thy token of reprieve. (246-7)

The Gentleman is sped on his way, with Edgar's command: '[h]aste thee for thy life' (249). Meanwhile, Edmund confesses his order to hang Cordelia, and the audience is left in no doubt of her fate, should the messenger be too late. The mood of breathless urgency created in this part of the scene is designed to awaken a surge of hope and longing that the play will not give in to the darkness that threatens to engulf it. Yet even in this moment, before the Gentleman returns, the audience is shocked once more by the appearance of Lear, Cordelia lying limp in his arms.

Lear's howling is an expression that moves beyond words: a physical exhaling of pain and anguish. As David Scott Kastan observes, '[i]n a world where death is the ultimate reality one must – and perhaps can only – howl at the agonizing absurdity of existence.'<sup>45</sup> Lear's 'O, you are men of stones!' (255) recalls Albany's 'O run!' in its 'primal cry'.<sup>46</sup> As Smith writes, it is a sound that 'reverberates with "no, no life", with "no breath", with "come no more"'.<sup>47</sup> Shakespeare's imagery is visually suggested by the immobile onlookers, and by Cordelia's lifeless body. With the 'men of stones' as a backdrop, Lear is isolated in a barren landscape of dead earth and cold stone, with no promise of life and no comfort. In the Nunn/Hunt production, this scene is visually realised by the circle of men, Edgar and Albany among them, who hold up their hands to

the gods in a vain prayer for divine intervention. The image, strongly reminiscent of such monumental settings as Stonehenge, with its link to the supernatural, powerfully ironises Albany's line: '[t]he gods defend her' (254), as Lear enters the circle with the dead Cordelia in his arms.

In the text, Lear's emotional isolation makes him a spectacle designed to wrench the deepest pity from the audience, but such a response is likely to be stimulated largely through Kent's reaction to his master's plight. As members of an audience, like the onstage onlookers, we watch the escalating tragedy with horror, even disbelief. The play positions us as bystanders, but confronts us, through Lear, with the very limits of self-invoked human suffering. States observes that 'beneath [...] Kent's character in general – is a subtle collaborative tendency whereby serious drama manages to include its audience in the play without violating the representational convention.'<sup>48</sup> Kent's '[b]reak, heart; I prithee, break!' (5.3.311), he notes, 'serves as a lightning rod that grounds our own emotional investment in the play.'<sup>49</sup>

The significance of the carefully constructed passage in which the Gentleman enters with a bloody knife may now be fully appreciated in relation to this later part of the scene. The suspense created by the knife's appearance, the pauses, the stilted speech – all combine to tantalise the mind, to coax it to believe it can perceive a smoking dagger. This groundwork prepares the mind to respond irresistibly to a similarly subtle suggestion: the chance that we might perceive a feather move at Cordelia's lips. Lear calls first for a mirror, for '[i]f that her breath will mist or stain the stone, | Why then, she lives' (5.3.260-1). A real property is not required here: in fact, it would serve as a distraction. What is most important is the image of breath misting the stone, which

lingers in the mind, teasing the imagination with the perception of breath as precious evidence of life. Lear's call for the mirror also raises the uncertainty of Cordelia's ultimate fate, despite his earlier pronouncement, 'I know when one is dead and when one lives;' (5.3.258). It begs the question: is Lear slipping once more into madness, or does he see something which, from our more distant perspective, we cannot? The continual raising and dashing of hopes throughout the play now makes it impossible to be certain. The memory – the uncertainty - of the smoking knife is still fresh in the audience's mind. Shakespeare ensures that there is still just one, faint flicker of hope left to his audience. And so, when Lear holds a feather to Cordelia's lips, with a sentence that begins with a statement: '[t]his feather stirs, she lives' (263) (and the word 'if' is omitted, here), he lures his audience into a state of painful attention as it seeks to witness that tiny movement, just as it watched for the smoke from the Gentleman's knife, and with a similar fearful longing to that displayed by Othello, in his pursuit of material evidence of his wife's infidelity. Foakes notes that some actors 'have imagined the feather' (Note 263), but playing the scene in this way rather confirms Lear's madness, and leaves no opportunity for an audience to experience this last, agonizingly exquisite moment of participation. It would also weaken the tragic impact of Lear's next words, which express his final hope with childlike simplicity:

if it be so,  
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows  
That ever I have felt. (5.3.263-5)

Like the Gentleman's blood-stained knife, the feather serves to focus absolute attention on one onstage object. The very type of object used here is so light in substance that a watching audience can never be sure whether any slight manipulation of

it by the character is accidental or deliberate. The urge to focus intently on the feather, to wonder and to hope creates a vital moment of dramatic suspense before the finality of Lear's 'thou'lt come no more | Never, never, never, <sup>F</sup>never, never<sup>F</sup>' (5.3.306-7). As Foakes suggests, Folio's addition of the last two 'nevers' creates 'perhaps the most extraordinary blank verse line in English poetry' (Note 307). And then, after this stunning moment of relentless finality, Folio adds a surprising last speech for Lear:

<sup>F</sup>Do you see this? Look on her: look, her lips,  
Look there, look there! *He dies.*<sup>F</sup> (5.3.309-10)

Carson notes:

Shakespeare, the consummate man of the theatre, places his audience under a spell of focused inconclusiveness. Even reading the lines, it is possible to imagine the collective attempt by the audience to see what Lear sees.<sup>50</sup>

Lear's command or plea to look on Cordelia's lips is a potent reminder of the feather he held there a short time before, and by association, of the lingering image of breath misting a stone. The specificity of the direction cannot help but recall those painfully hopeful moments, and it therefore effectively evokes a sense of bewilderment, perhaps even renewed hope, in those watching. As Edgar's 'he is gone indeed' (5.3.314) finally confirms the death of father and daughter, Lear's haunting last vision remains his own. And yet, it leaves behind the shadow of that vision in the imagination: a confirmation of our own desire and need to seek for answers amidst confusion.

On stage, the use of a small but visible feather serves to focus our attention, as audience members, on an object that we can barely see, and that can be easily manipulated by the actor to create a sense of illusion. On film, this effect is harder to achieve: the intimate eye of the camera revealing more minute and exact visual detail

than is available to the audience member, who is likely to be some distance from the action. Illusion on stage is therefore often linked to audience supposition: our imaginations fill in any gaps in our visual perception. Directors of Shakespeare on film find alternative ways of creating a sense of illusion (as with Goold's production of *Macbeth*, discussed in Chapter Six), and avoiding the sometimes inconvenient scrutiny of the revealing camera. Both Brook's film and the Nunn/Hunt production show Lear holding a feather to Cordelia's lips, but both Lears curtail the action so that a feeling of uncertainty is still prevalent in the scene. Brook's Lear, played by Paul Scofield, rises quickly, still holding the feather, and thereby drawing our attention away from Cordelia. In the Nunn/Hunt production, Ian McKellan as Lear discards the feather almost immediately. The speed of the action in both cases leaves a lingering doubt as to whether the feather may or may not have been stirred by Cordelia's breath.

For Kastan, the text shows no shaft of hope: 'the promise of a release from suffering is illusory',<sup>51</sup> but the important point here is that we are able to imagine that release, and therein lies the play's one shaft of hope. What the above discussion shows is that *King Lear* uses the feather property, the illusion of the smoking knife, and the creation of the imaginary Dover Cliff, as tantalising visions that are shattered by the reality of the moments that follow them: moments that are created by man, and are subject to change by him. The play confirms, time and again, that our search for meaning and harmony, like our ability to see association through metaphor, 'is what the brain does in self-defense against disorder'.<sup>52</sup> *King Lear* encourages us to make connections and form images, and suggests the hope of redemption and the possibility of harmony, but places them amid scenes of chaos and disjunction. There is no room for

epic poetry, here. Language alone appears to be inadequate to communicate *King Lear's* sense of massive disorder and chaos. As the above examples illustrate, scenes pitch from distress to hope, to moments of utter despair. Passages of eloquent verse are jammed hard against moments of raw action, such as Edgar's speech in 5.3.180-98, telling of his father's death, and the appearance of a Gentleman with a bloody knife, heralding the deaths of Goneril and Regan. The latter entrance is driven by rough-hewn language, disconcerting in its lack of subtlety, particularly as it follows a finely-ordered speech written in verse. As Kiernan Ryan points out, the play conforms to poetic and dramatic structures only to heave against them:

[t]he problem is to reveal the truth of the prevailing reality, using the dramatic and poetic codes that conventionally secure it, but in a way that registers the work's rejection of that reality and its rationale.<sup>53</sup>

In its rejection of conventional form, through the consummately effective use of language, object and dramatic structure, *King Lear* offers us the opportunity to perceive its characters and events from multiple perspectives. Brook's film articulates the play's fascination with perspective in a heavily visual sense. Its opening shots exclude sound, and indeed all movement except for that of the camera that pans silently back and forth across countless grey faces and upper bodies crammed together, frozen into a myriad of poses that embody Lear's 'men of stones' (5.3.255). The production, with its indoor setting of rocky castles and outer bleak, snow-scattered landscapes, seems itself to be hewn from stone, with scenes chiselled into relief against the unrelenting backdrop. Paul Scofield's Lear is often barely mobile: his facial expression and bodily movements expressing the ruler who has no need to exert himself on his own and others' behalfs. His immense throne is seen, however, to surround and contain him, as though

symbolising the power that ultimately dwarfs the man. As Cordelia speaks, the camera positions the viewer behind her, so that Lear is seen in long shot, over her shoulder. The small and distant figure of the king is all but swallowed up inside his immense throne. Scofield's voice is a monotonous growl, as though his Lear sees no necessity to vary its tones. It, too, contains a quality of bleakness, issuing from the side of a mouth that seems sculpted in its immobility. When he does rouse himself to his feet, any movement he makes thus acts as a considered statement of power, and its impact is intense: his bulk and sheer weight of personality appear to cleave the atmosphere as he wades through it.

Brook's film reminds us insistently of the camera's presence. At times, it literally distances us from characters, as when Edgar is seen, in long shot on the beach, watching Lear and his father talking in 4.6. Edgar may not utter the words 'O thou side-piercing sight!' (4.6.85) in the film, but Brook illustrates the character's despair by visually removing him from the other characters, and alternating from long shots of Edgar to close-ups on the two old men on the beach. At other times, the camera zooms in for facial close-ups, or to explore sections of faces; or pings from one face to another with scarcely a pause, allowing no time for the viewer to absorb characters' reactions. This quick-fire alternating of close-up shots serves to emotionally distance, rather than involve, the viewer. When Regan, Goneril, Gloucester and Cornwall discuss Lear's disappearance in the storm (2.2.484-99), the camera seems to flash from one face to another, visually illustrating their separate perspectives, rather than capturing their emotions.

On occasion, there is a feeling that the camera is drawing its viewer physically into the scene. When Gloucester is blinded, for example, we initially see Cornwall's hand hovering above a row of kitchen utensils, until he stops to select a spoon with which to scoop out Gloucester's eyes. The camera initially looks over Cornwall's shoulder, as though determined to spy into the scene, even though the actors turn their backs upon it, apparently shielding us from the horrific action about to take place. As viewers, we are also momentarily plunged into darkness as the mutilation occurs. There is a literal screen blackout, as though the medium itself is looking through Gloucester's blank gaze. This visual starvation, however, allows time for the previous image of Cornwall's fingers, reaching for the spoon, to linger insistently in the imagination before viewing is resumed. The use of camera, actors and screen at this point creates a feeling of unbearable curiosity and frustration (or, as in my own case, relief that we are not to be treated to a gory mutilation), until a moment later normal service is resumed, and the camera zooms in on Cornwall in a reverse shot, as he scoops out Gloucester's other eye: a visual climax that is both shocking and abhorrent. The film thus echoes the text in teasing its viewers' perceptions: suggesting and withholding visual evidence, before finally confirming it.

The Dover Cliff scene is full of suggested action, presenting us with snatched images of Gloucester and Edgar from various angles: at one point even showing Edgar carrying his father on his back. The jumble of rapid images, punctuated by the sound of running feet, is designed to disorientate perception, so that the viewer understands the journey as a fevered physical process rather than a perceptual subterfuge, as suggested by the text. Gloucester is only seen on the beach a moment before he falls, as the camera



pulls back into a crane shot to reveal the flat landscape. Immediately afterwards, the screen is filled with a strange, skewed image that seems for a moment to be an enormous, black cliff, but which, when the camera pulls back into long shot, is seen to be a wooden groin on which Gloucester's head is leaning. The camera's eye, peeping inside the hole of the groin, initially presents a distorted view that makes the imagination momentarily race to match image with understanding. The idea of a cliff, already lodged in the mind, leaps naturally to the fore. The film thus visually questions our perspective, making the point that what we see is not always what is there: an idea stressed by the inclusion of the feather and the smoking dagger in the text.

Peter Holland explains that 'the lightning movement'<sup>54</sup> of Shakespeare's language inspired Brook to realise his vital translation of the text through a collage of rich images that prompt rapid changes in our own visual perspective. As J Lawrence Guntner observes, 'Brook consistently and insistently interrupts the narrative flow with the hand-held camera, rapid acceleration, out-of-focus shots, printed subtitles, zooms, fades, jump-cutting and cross-cutting', which he feels 'suggest the rupture and discontinuity of Lear's mind.'<sup>55</sup> However, such devices also create two distinct effects: they cause a sense of alienation between film and viewer, rendering the viewer 'uncomfortably aware of the mechanics – the separate components – of the medium of film.'<sup>56</sup> Such tactics engage, as Davies notes, 'almost exclusively with the intellect',<sup>57</sup> but they also interfere with the process of the viewer's intuitive perception. Although there are moments where this is not the case – such as in the blinding of Gloucester, for example – there are far more occasions in the film when the camera's voyeurism interrupts the perceptual link between viewer and character. The overall effect is one of

dizzying uncertainty for the viewer, reflecting the atmosphere of chaos, abandonment and disconnection that is created in the text. In this, the film sets out to influence our perceptions through the artistic medium of the camera: denying us the opportunity to anchor our own intuitive and emotional responses in the film. As Guntner suggests, 'humanity has alienated itself from its humanness, and Brook reinforces this alienation with his camera.'<sup>58</sup> Holland notes, 'the characters seem terrifyingly isolated as they appear alone on the screen'.<sup>59</sup>

Brook's film is nevertheless about exploring characters' faces: from different angles and places, in different portions and sections of the face, and even from the backs of necks and heads. As Holland writes, 'the camera endlessly interrogates the faces of the characters [...] desperately trying to understand what lies behind the look.'<sup>60</sup> Again, this very different approach distances us from our normal mode of instinctive perception, prompting us to seek the reason for such an approach, and therefore foregrounding intellect over intuition. Holland feels that this technique is 'teaching us that there is no means to know, to make sense and meaning out of the surfaces of what we see.'<sup>61</sup> His comment is a telling one. In exploring surfaces, the camera acts as a surrogate instrument of touch: an invisible finger that traces the faces and expressions in what seems an almost bewildered attempt to understand them. The film therefore engages our perception in a different, highly visual sense, as Brook finds a new way to experience and explore the text through film.

Trevor Nunn's 2007 RSC production of the play was filmed at Pinewood Studios in 2008. As a contrast to Brook's heavily visual production, therefore, I propose to discuss the screen rather than the stage version, looking particularly at how Trevor

Nunn and Chris Hunt achieve an entirely different stage-to-screen translation. This production, in fact, very much reflected Nunn's experience of tackling the potentially difficult stage-to-screen adaptation of *Macbeth* with Philip Casson. As with *Macbeth*, the Nunn/Hunt production of *King Lear* foregrounds words and faces. Characters emerge from pools of darkness that suggest, rather than emphasise the indoor set, their faces and hands prominently visible in the gloom of candle-lit rooms. Stone floors and heavy furniture are glimpsed, and therefore help to set scene and atmosphere, but are made more prominent to the viewer's perception through sound. Echoing footsteps on the stone floor, for example, herald a character's approach, so that we feel and sense it, rather than see it through tracking or establishing shots. The opening scene features a procession in which Lear, arrayed in what Carolyn Sale describes as 'Tsarist robes',<sup>62</sup> is at one point shot from above, so that the camera follows Lear's erratic and rather stumbling procession around the room as though seeking him out in the uncertain light cast from a ring of flickering candles. His expression seems one of slightly unhinged benevolence, prefiguring his madness on the heath scene. Darkness threatens to enclose him, its dense presence made almost palpable by the halo of light that surrounds his face: a feeling intensified by the burst of organ music that evokes memories of the musty dimness of an abbey or cathedral.

As one scene melts into another, characters' faces are cast into relief by their white shirts and collars and colourful braiding on military costumes that reflect any available light and help to illuminate them. This visual concentration on individuals' expressions and reactions highlights the production's intense focus on Shakespeare's text, and the actors' emotional and physical interpretations of it. During the indoor

scenes, the darkness acts almost as a partial blindfold, shrouding the set and drawing our attention to the play's language, as though the production is urging us to '[I]ook with thine ears' (4.6.147). This approach is a consummately successful way of translating a successful but verbally dense stage play to the small screen. A potential problem for small screen productions of Shakespeare's plays lies in audience expectations of the varied visual setting that film uses to create atmosphere and convey key themes of the plays. As Graham Holderness points out, our experience of modern cinema involves 'isolation in the darkness',<sup>63</sup> whereas television is communal, it 'interacts with known and familiar surroundings'.<sup>64</sup> On the heath, and in the Dover Cliff scene of the Nunn/Hunt production, however, there is no attempt to create a landscape that can rival film in its realism. The scenes suggest (and indeed are) a form of stage setting: a studio in which the camera acts as an audience that has become mobile, freed from the static visual perspective of a theatre seat.

One way in which the production does draw our attention to visual effects is through its insistent groupings of characters, a directorial choice that reflects the opening and closing tableaux encasing the text. In the darkness that enshrouds characters, and the light that picks out faces and features in detail, such groups are sharply reminiscent of Renaissance paintings, resonating with the text's preoccupation with perspective. The opening tableau presents an unsettlingly stereotypical fairy-tale portrait of Cinderella. Goneril and Regan, reminiscent of the evil stepsisters, are clad in dark, formal silk dresses with high, upstanding collars, in stark contrast to Cordelia, who wears a lighter, more modern dress. This initial visual inference is soon overturned, however, by Goneril's agonized reaction to her father's curse: a portrayal that defies a

stereotypical reading of her character. McKellan takes full advantage of the hissing sibilants and 'spitting dentals'<sup>65</sup> that make Lear's curse serpent-like in its cruelty, and Goneril is visibly affected by the ferocity of her father's attack. As Dessen also points out, in the stage play, one of Goneril's female servants was manhandled by Lear's knights, 'providing some justification for Goneril's critique',<sup>66</sup> and encouraging the audience to empathise with her. In the stage performance I attended, Cordelia's marked preference for Burgundy made his ultimate rejection of her obviously painful, giving her portrayal unexpected depth.

In the Nunn/Hunt film, McKellan portrays a Lear who is indeed 'old and foolish' (4.7.84), and whose journey entails a poignant coming-to-terms with the mental and physical restrictions of age. Part of that process is the ominous and somewhat desolate realisation of the need to rely on and trust others – primarily family – for help and succour. From a modern perspective, his gathering isolation, through the physical constraints of increasing age, is a familiar scenario. In this production of *King Lear*, Goneril and Regan become impatient mothers to an increasingly unstable parent. Regan's attitude towards her father fluctuates from the scolding tones a nurse might use to a sick child, to flashes of steely-eyed cruelty. Lear's bitter curse on his eldest daughter does appear vitriolic in the extreme, yet ultimately, through McKellan's performance, it can also be read as a distressing side-effect of a debilitating disorder brought on by age. The significant looks exchanged between Goneril and Regan in the opening scene, when Lear announces his erratic decision to divide up his kingdom, hint at their recognition of Lear's declining reason.

Sale argues that in the stage play, 'McKellan's performance did not grant that this play's tragedy devolves from the violence of Lear's rolling ego', so that 'audiences had a very limited range of emotional responses available to them.'<sup>67</sup> Certainly, his portrayal of Lear in the film marks a movement away from the perception of a bombastic king whose will of iron is not to be crossed, and challenges our understanding of the tragedy that drives this interpretation of the play. Through McKellan's performance, it is from Lear's own perspective, as a man whose 'mental vacuity'<sup>68</sup> is becoming his own biggest fear, that we realise the powerlessness of age, and its instability and uncertainty. The line that most illuminates McKellan's portrayal is his own despairing cry, 'reason not the need!' (2.2.453): a plea that is a poignant expression of his dissolving powers not simply in material or physical form, but in mental and physical capacity.

The outstanding roles of minor characters in the play greatly enhance this production's overwhelming sense of poignancy. Whereas the servants' lines are severely cut in Brook's film, reducing their roles, those in the Nunn/Hunt production who help and attend Gloucester, those who carry the news of Gloucester's blinding to Albany, and the Gentleman who brings on the smoking dagger are all effectively used as verbal and visual emotional transmitters for the viewer. In his review of the stage play, Dessen notes the 'distinctive choices' Nunn made in casting the 'second servant at the blinding and the Old Man of 4.1' as an actress, and in extending the role of the Doctor.<sup>69</sup> In the screen version, these choices were upheld, and the sincerely empathetic quality of the Doctor's performance lends great emotional depth to the scene in which Lear awakes to see Cordelia. Such reactions among the minor characters are explored by the camera in

close-up, allowing the viewer time to absorb their responses, and to empathise with and through them.

This production foregrounds the power of the imagination over visual presentation. The deliberate 'staged' feel of the studio heath scene enhances the sense of subterfuge underlying the Dover Cliff scene. Edgar, as Poor Tom, closes his eyes as he imagines the scene he describes, putting himself on an equal sentient plane with his father. Enclosing himself in a momentarily dark world, Edgar seems to shape his words by feel: an approach that effectively illuminates the perceptual journey that Shakespeare crafts in his speech. The character's physical action of shutting his eyes cues the viewer to expect a non-visual translation of the scene, and thus a visual medium is used to show the power of the imagination over the visual.

Like Brook's film, the Nunn/Hunt production ends on a note of desolation, in Edgar's realisation of the futility of praying to the gods for assistance. Despite its insistent bleakness, however, *King Lear* still holds a fascination for audiences, critics and scholars, who, like the questioning camera in Brook's film, and Edgar in the Nunn/Hunt production, seek an answer to its density of despair. Kiernan Ryan believes 'its gaze is fixed on horizons that still lie ahead of our time'.<sup>70</sup> We are not drawn into *King Lear*'s world in the same way that we are into *Macbeth*'s, for we are meant to be spectators in a broader sense: horrified witnesses to the destruction of a world in some ways mirroring our own. *King Lear* constantly affirms its awareness of the power of performance, of its own ability to shape our perception, even as it desperately reaches beyond the bounds of performance to influence our reality. In Brook's film, Lear's final words are said into the camera: '[l]ook there! look there!' (5.3.310), as though he is

asking the characters to look beyond their own world of the play, into ours. The action seems to encapsulate the twin shafts of longing hope and desolate hopelessness that this play conveys. In other words, it seems to say, the choice of perspective is ultimately ours.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusion: 'the swelling scene'

(*Henry V*, 0.4)

[T]he image has touched the depths before it stirs the surface<sup>1</sup>

This study began by considering the role of stage properties in Shakespeare: a line of research that quickly led to the realisation that objects in Shakespeare are inextricably bound up with the plays' language, characters and dramatic structure. In Shakespeare, objects are not experienced purely in material form: they are created through language in the imagination, sensed and experienced in the mind and body. Shakespeare utilises the 'deep structure'<sup>2</sup> of our perception to evoke images through language, with stunning visceral effect. He also employs potent metaphor, sound and rhythm to mould, augment or even transfigure our visual perception of onstage objects, or to prepare us to perceive more than is effectively realised. Language creates atmosphere and mood, shapes our perception of characters, and conjures vivid imaginative backdrops for action that teem with visceral images, bringing his plays alive in the senses. This skilled manipulation of our intuitive perceptual abilities has formed the focus of this study.

In order to explore and articulate the techniques Shakespeare uses to shape our imaginative and visual perception, this thesis has undertaken a close-reading of selected plays, informed by basic principles of phenomenology. As explained in Chapter Two,

phenomenology is a way of seeing: a process of focussing intently on an object or phenomenon, making it the absolute centre of subjective attention, and allowing it to permeate the mind and senses. Close reading has encompassed textual examples and excerpts from stage or film performances (using DVD recordings of the staged performances, so that particular examples may be closely studied through replay).

Elaine Scarry infers that we use a similar process to perceive images that are created under authorial instruction, as we do when we view real objects,

because we are given procedures for replacing the deep structure of perception, and because the procedures themselves have an instructional character that duplicates the 'givenness' of perception.<sup>3</sup>

The term 'givenness', she explains, means 'the sense of something received and simultaneously there for the taking.'<sup>4</sup> This comment implies that our perception of objects is a fusion of experiencing the essence of the object, and the process of perceiving in itself: a principle that heavily informs phenomenological enquiry, and the approach taken by this study. Phenomenological investigation calls for a descriptive style of reporting, which again is most suitable for literary and performance analysis, and is therefore the method undertaken here. The highly visceral quality of Shakespeare's language and the dual role of his texts as objects of literary study and blueprints for performance, make Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* an eminently suitable reference for this work. Merleau-Ponty clearly stresses the vital role of the body in perception, and the complex way we experience objects within the mind, body and senses:

[a] thing is [...] not actually *given* in perception, it is internally taken up by us, reconstituted and experienced by us in so far as it is bound up with a world, the basic structures of which we carry with us.<sup>5</sup>

Here, Merleau-Ponty infers a deeply intuitive process of perception that is a physical as well as cognitive experience: a way in which we take experiences or impressions of phenomena into the mind and body, where they are stored as memories and etched into the body as a form of kinaesthetic blueprint, so to speak. In response to a powerful visual or verbal stimulus, the perceptual re-run, activated through a blend of memory and imagination, becomes vivid on a number of levels. It can also be imaginatively varied, augmented or transfigured through language, as this study has repeatedly shown. Chapters Six and Seven also illustrate how the imaginative element in our perceptual process can be used to create moments of dramatic illusion or uncertainty, for example, through the feather that Lear holds to Cordelia's lips, or the suggestion of a moving wood in *Macbeth*. To use another of Merleau-Ponty's examples, what we are sometimes certain we perceive, is not always what is materially present:

[i]f, on a sunken path, I think I can see, some distance away, a broad, flat stone on the ground, which is in reality a patch of sunlight, I cannot say that I ever see the flat stone in the sense in which I am to see, as I draw nearer, the patch of sunlight. The flat stone, like all things at a distance, appears only in a field of confused structure in which connections are not yet clearly articulated [...] my body has no grip on it, and [...] I cannot unfold it before me by any exploratory action. And yet, I am capable of omitting this distinction and of falling into illusion.<sup>6</sup>

His comments clearly show how the imagination leaps to complete gaps in our responses to visual stimuli, so that we are sometimes momentarily unsure of what is real and unreal. Until other senses are able to verify the visual perception – in this case when the stone is close enough for Merleau-Ponty to perceive it in its detailed surroundings, to anticipate the feel of it with his body (having a 'grip' on the object), or to actually touch it, he is unable to confirm its solid presence. Shakespeare creates such a moment of

uncertainty in *King Lear* in the Gentleman's description of the smoking dagger: an audience, seated at a distance from the stage, would not reasonably expect to see the smoke, but that does not mean that it might not be there. The suggestion of possibility creates the suggestion of illusion.

This thesis has explored the complex range of stimuli that Shakespeare uses to trigger perceptual recall that can supplement or shape our visual response to objects in his plays, or indeed create objects of the mind and senses. It has also examined the role of language in setting scene, mood and atmosphere through our intuitive and imaginative perception. Although the main focus of this work is on the text as a blueprint for performance, each of the case studies has included a discussion of two benchmark performances. Due to considerations of time and space, however, there has been no attempt to cover a full performance history, and discussions have therefore been limited to relevant points, focussing on aspects that are particularly effective in shaping our perception through the media of film or staged performances. The purpose of this chapter is to conclude the findings of the case studies, at the same time reviewing the aptness of the plays and examples used, and suggesting similar work that might be undertaken in the future.

The case studies open with an investigation of language, object and perception in *Othello*, since the play demonstrates, through Iago's manipulative speeches and Othello's potent description of the handkerchief, how perception may be subtly transfigured through language. In *Othello*, characters transform the way they understand each other, themselves and their lived worlds. At the same time, the play's language and action subtly shapes and influences what the audience sees or imagines, feels and



understands. Chapter Three focusses on one famous stage property in *Othello*, showing how the material handkerchief is transfigured in our perception through an incremental account of this process. The discussion illustrates how vivid imagery in Iago's speeches lends visceral immediacy to fictional objects and events, by appealing to our sentient memories of touch, sound, smell, physical movement and texture. Images containing suggestions of bodily movement, and references to temperature and touch seem to be conjured in the mind with particularly vivid clarity. Chapter Three's discussion shows that pauses and hesitations carefully crafted in Iago's speeches – a technique I will refer to in future discussions as 'withholding' – effectively imbue his eventual disclosures with a false sense of veracity. The final section of the chapter, that comments on one stage and one screen performance of the play, draws attention to the directors' inability to resist making visually manifest an object that is so often absent in the text. In these stage and screen versions of the play, the handkerchief is presented in various understudy forms, reflecting each director's seeming need, like Othello's, to establish visual and material confirmation of its existence.

The discussion on performance in each case study highlights the different conditions and considerations that shape any reading of a film or stage play. As the close-readings of staged productions were in fact accomplished through DVD recordings of live performances, this perspective has been taken into account when presenting the findings. Phenomenological close study can also be effectively carried out on live performances, but due to the desire to use benchmark productions as examples in this thesis, the use of DVD recordings was deemed useful and necessary.

What proved to be most interesting in the performances of *Othello* were the different approaches each production took to establishing audience contact: the use of physical theatre and tremendous vocal energy that created tension and a sense of intimacy in Milam's production at the Globe, and the subtle visualisation of mood and atmosphere in Parker's film. As Chapter Three shows, Parker's setting proclaims filmic realism, but offers a visual subtext that communicates the play's concerns through imagery, lighting and technique. The tragic mask that Othello uses to cover his face in the opening shot, for example, not only confirms the play's genre, but infers that we should not necessarily trust visual appearance in this film. The mask prefigures Iago's line, 'I am not what I am' (*Othello*, 1.1.64), but also encapsulates Othello's propensity to write his own history in story-book terms. The film's initial setting, among the canals in Venice, creates an atmosphere of dark fluidity that is reflected in the photographic style. The camera takes its time exploring the water and the gondolas with their passengers, as they glide past in the gloom. Its slow movements engender a dream-like feeling for its viewer that echoes Othello's growing nightmare of anxiety. Strong threads of visceral immediacy are created by close-up shots of physical intensity: for example, Othello's fingers writhing among the dungeon chains, or squeezing Desdemona's fingers as they clasp the white sheets of the couple's marital bed, crushing the rose petals that lie scattered upon them.

Such filmic moments visually translate the high level of tension created by Iago's speeches in the text. In Milam's production, although the audience could not gain such close-up perspectives as afforded by the camera lens in Parker's film, tense moments were effectively communicated through vocal and physical power in

performance in the shared space of the theatre. Here, McKinnerny's voice became a powerful weapon whose physical force seemed to drive the vivid images in Iago's speeches into Othello's imagination, subduing his body as well as his mind. Like Parker's film, Milam's production also used visual imagery to suggest underlying themes in the play. Characters were seen at one point to be playing chess in the background, for example, symbolising the complexity of Iago's psychological and political strategies. However, the stage play's consummate success in communicating the tension that runs through the text lay ultimately in the physical, vocal and emotional expression of its language that created a powerful surge of intimacy between audience and actors. In film, the lens of the camera is able to explore objects, hands, eyes and features in close-up detail, making visual statements more intimately effective. In the shared space of a theatre, the actors' presence is felt as well as heard: pauses can become viscerally charged spaces between actor and audience, as they did in the case of McKinnerny's performance. From the perspective of an audience member watching the performance on DVD, the audience tension was palpable even from the isolated position of the viewer.

What each case study, including that on *Othello*, makes apparent is the powerful impact of imagery that includes references to bodily movement or senses – in the metaphor 'as hot as monkeys' (*Othello*, 3.3.406), for example, and in the image of 'an old black ram' that is 'tupping' Brabantio's 'white ewe' (1.1.87-8). It seems, from these and other examples, that images evoking touch, smell, sound or temperature are more instantly graspable in the intuitive senses. They can also trigger a flood of associations that resonate briefly before the image settles into a more finite form in the imaginative

perception: igniting fleeting thoughts and sensations that may be revisited at leisure for deeper examination. As Gaston Bachelard aptly notes, the flash of insight inspired by a metaphor often reaches us before the full impact of the image is understood: 'after the original reverberation, we are able to experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of our past.'<sup>7</sup>

In an initial phenomenological reading, a deep focus on small sections of text or performance can therefore harvest a plethora of associations or nuances in the moment of reading or watching and listening that seem to quiver at the very edges of our consciousness. These responses can in turn prompt a consideration of a broad sweep of interrelated thoughts and ideas. While noting impressions from Iago's speeches from a readerly perspective, for example, I was simultaneously aware of their potential impact on an audience member. This gave rise to a consideration of the way speeches can be effectively structured to shape the actor's delivery: to cue him to make those hesitations and pauses implied in the text that fill moments of the play with tension and expectation in performance. This analytical process in turn highlights the fact that the reader, like the audience member, is able to view multiple perspectives at the same time. We can choose to frame, bracket or ground our analysis by focussing on a particular viewpoint: by projecting ourselves, as readers, into an imaginary audience, for instance, and attempting to look at the play from this single perspective. It can, however, be difficult to attempt to limit the imagination in this way. Phenomenological analysis calls for intense concentration on a single example, but the process of allowing that example to impact intensely on our consciousness can involuntarily evoke a broad range of images and associations that become vital threads, connecting the subject to the stimulus. These

threads can later be reflectively traced back to their source, so that we can consider exactly what it was that prompted or produced them. Such considerations can therefore serve to illuminate the perceptual process itself, and to highlight the methods Shakespeare employs in galvanising that process. Like Merleau-Ponty, therefore, my study has aimed to show, 'in relation to perception, both the instinctive substructure and the superstructures erected upon it by the exercise of intelligence.'<sup>8</sup> As an initial case study, *Othello* provides a useful example of Shakespeare's considerable skill in utilising our 'deep structure of perception',<sup>9</sup> as Scarry terms it. Chapter Three therefore highlights Shakespeare's ingenuity through a close-reading that uses phenomenology as a way of seeing and understanding the methods he uses to shape our perception of his plays, and his use of objects.

There were a number of reasons for choosing *Titus Andronicus* as the next case study. Firstly, there is an interesting contrast between its success in performance, and the heavily negative criticism it has attracted in its textual form: a factor that suggests the play may affect reader and audience perception in very different ways. As an early play, *Titus* demonstrates an interesting friction between what seems to be excessive descriptive poetry in the light of overwhelming visual presentation. As Chapter Four illustrates, the play therefore provides a good model for exploring the effects of visual stimuli that are hindered, rather than helped by language. The discussion sets up a vital contrast between *Titus* and *Henry V* – a play in which Shakespeare creates stunning scenes and backdrops through linguistic images. My close-reading of *Titus* in Chapter Four explores the play's tense conflict between word and visual: its apparent internal textual strife that seems strangely palpable from the reader's perspective, as though the

text is seeking to communicate its own conflict with the classical sources on which it is based, through the uncomfortable convergence of heightened poetic language and vivid visual stimuli. In *Titus*, visual presentation thus becomes a metaphor for textual mutilation.

Chapter Four reveals, however, that within this overarching conflict there are also moments of verbal and visual partnership in the play that illuminate a consummate use of metaphor. The chapter therefore contrasts these examples with instances where Shakespeare's language warps, rather than shapes visual perception, considering the gap that is opened up in our perception when verbal and visual stimuli conflict with one another. My argument proposes that this contrast of effective and disruptive presentation is a deliberately engineered part of Shakespeare's rejection of traditional approaches to classical tragedy. The gap that he opens up in *Titus*, between visual and verbal stimuli in our perception, is in fact seen as a way of drawing our attention to this idea.

What the discussion in Chapter Four also reveals, however, is that Marcus's speech creates a disjunctive gap in our perception when it becomes rooted in a classical mythology that is beyond the immediate grasp of our experience. When the speech links Lavinia's body to a natural form within our range of lived experience (a tree), we are immediately able to connect with this visceral image through our sentient store of memories concerning trees: their feel to the touch, appearance against a skyline, the strangely mutilated aspect of trees recently pruned. In cognitive poetics, this distinctive metaphor might be analysed through a process of 'conceptual blending', whereby concepts are diagrammatically organised into areas known as mental spaces, so that it becomes easier to visually track or unravel the writer's complex use of words and ideas.

It is then possible to 'hold properties of two spaces together'<sup>10</sup> by mapping them onto a third blended space that contains the properties of both (the process known as 'conceptual blending'). In the Lavinia/tree metaphor, for example, the conceptual properties of tree and body, occupying their own mental spaces, are mapped onto a third blended space where they are intimately intertwined. Mental space theory and the study of conceptual blending therefore offer, through the visual unpacking of metaphors, an effective way of tracing complex associations triggered by language.

The primary concern of this study, however, is the visceral thread that connects the metaphor with the reader's or audience member's intuitive perception, and in the above example, this link is forged through Shakespeare's appeal to our complex perception of trees: our past memories of their appearance and texture, for example. The immediacy that we sense in Chiron's and Demetrius's speeches, as they taunt the mutilated Lavinia, also helps to connect Shakespeare's text with his audience or reader. Their use of imperatives establishes a strong sense of urgency: 'go tell' (*Titus Andronicus* 2.3.1), 'write down' (3), 'go home' (6). Even though, like Tamora, we may fail to understand the classical allusions in Lavinia's speech as she begs Tamora for mercy, the sense of immediacy evoked by imperatives or images that relate directly to our lived experience can powerfully affect us. These appeals to our perception are general enough, but also intimate enough, to remain as vital to our readers and audiences today, as they might have been in Shakespeare's own time. Chapter Four examines the effectiveness of imagery that appeals to us in the immediate present, in that it draws on our own lived experience, or urges action in a way that elicits a strong feeling of

personal involvement for a reader or audience member. It also suggests that images referring to living forms or bodily movement often have a particularly vivid impact.

Both stage and film productions of *Titus* discussed in Chapter Four find ways of negating the visual/verbal disjunctions evident in the text. There are moments in each production when their directors deliberately choose to merge the concepts of art and genre, by presenting Lavinia as a horrific, yet strangely beautiful, artistically sculptured image. This visual statement reflects the play's mutilation of classical texts through the juxtaposition of highly charged poetic speeches with shocking visual presentation. In Bailey's production, Marcus's tender exploration of Lavinia's injuries foregrounded the visual impact of the scene still further, transforming his speech, with its classical subtext, into a gentle background patter that became soothingly inconsequential. The performance therefore effectively realised and disguised verbal and visual disjunctions in the text, so that the audience absorbed Marcus's speech as part of an overall mood and setting.

Bodily contact also helped to create a sense of immediacy between audience and actor: for example, when Lavinia bent to kiss her brother's dismembered heads, or pick up her father's dismembered hand in her mouth. The arrival of the dismembered heads in cloth bags acted to some extent as a perceptual glove for the audience, as it stilted any vivid anticipation of contact between cold flesh and warm lips. On the other hand, it also allowed the audience to imagine the heads, and prevented any disruption in the suspension of disbelief at this point, by the presentation of obviously gruesome stage properties. In Taymor's film, the presentation of heads in specimen jars, placed on shelves in the side of a bizarre travelling show vehicle, was effective in its strong and



unexpected visual impact, particularly when the scene had prepared its audience (and the watching Andronici) for an entertaining diversion. However, as Lavinia kissed her father rather than the glass jars containing the heads, the potentially visceral impact of the scene was lost. In Bailey's production, as Lavinia scooped up her father's dismembered hand in her mouth, however, the perceptual contact was supremely effective, especially as the actress's movements were slow and deliberate, accentuating Lavinia's disability and giving the audience time to anticipate the feel of contact between her warm lips and her father's cold, lifeless flesh. As Bruce R Smith notes, '[i]n the theater of cruelty analogical disturbances are set off by touch.'<sup>11</sup> This point can be confirmed by the audience's reaction to Lavinia's exit in Bailey's production, when a frisson of revulsion was evident in the auditorium, even from the perspective of a viewer watching a recording of the live performance.

As this study has repeatedly shown, however, such intense reactions can also be elicited through language alone, when the same process of tactile perception is recalled and rehearsed. Scarry explains this phenomenon in cognitive terms, in that '[m]ental picturing uses the same neuronal paths in the brain that sensory perception uses', so that 'mental imaging [...] piggybacks on sensory nerve paths'.<sup>12</sup> As Chapter Four shows, for example, Alarbus's sacrifice is described in a way that powerfully evokes the anticipation of smell and temperature, in the suggestion of burning flesh that perfumes the air. There is also a vivid reference to movement in the image, as Alarbus's limbs are to be hewn 'till they be clean consumed' (1.1.132). This precise description vividly suggests the hacking and consumption of flesh, to the senses as well as the mind, without the need for visual representation. In Bailey's production, however, the use of

incense to perfume the air also seemed to powerfully affect some audience members (as Chapter Four's discussion notes), although possibly more in terms of general atmosphere, rather than specifically in reaction to the image of Alarbus's sacrifice.

Chapter Four makes clear that both stage and film productions discussed in this thesis work to influence audience perception in a number of ways. In Taymor's film, the 'withholding' technique – described above and demonstrated so aptly by Iago – is used in a strongly visual sense in the hand-chopping scene, for example. The camera cuts from shot to shot of faces, poised axe and chopping board, creating a sense of tension that is both comic and gruesome. The delayed action and explicit sound effects convey the mutilation in a very physical sense. The sickly crunch of axe severing flesh and bones is the more effective because the very lack of visual evidence allows the viewer's imagination to fully conjure the moment in the mind and senses. As the camera denies us a final view of the mutilation, there is no visual distraction to overwhelm the imaginative perception. The potentially comic effect of the argument between Lucius, Marcus and Titus over who might sacrifice his hand is, however, diffused in the film through the characters' frantic chase to reach the house. This directorial decision frames the moments immediately prior to the mutilation as the essentially humorous elements of the scene, whereas Bailey's staged production highlighted the potential dark comedy of the argument through comic stage business. The examination of such choices illuminates the different ways directors can subtly shape our perception as viewers or audience members. Bailey's production created a heavy atmosphere in which it engulfed its audience, invading its aural and olfactory senses: an effective approach that worked to temporarily destabilise audience expectations connected with the theatre space, or

with original practices productions. Sound effects such as the snapping of Lavinia's neck created moments of uncomfortable and visceral reality that palpably affected many audience members, as the front of house reports show.

Both film and stage productions in *Titus* created a visual and aural feast for their audiences, Bailey's production literally engulfing its audience in an atmosphere created by texture, colour, scent, sound and temperature, and Taymor's film realising issues that resonate within the text through stunning visual imagery. Moments of verbal and visual disjunction implied in the text were smoothed over in performance in both cases, by textual cutting or through the actors' modes of delivery, and therefore the tension evident in the text was not present in the same way in performance. Both directors drew their audience's attention to it, however, through their presentation of Lavinia as a beautiful but horrifyingly deformed artistic image: a moment that was in both cases juxtaposed with shocking visual evidence of her physical suffering. The play operated on its audience in strongly visual terms in both productions, although in Bailey's stage play, a visual assault on the senses was only one aspect of its sentient impact.

The above discussion on the first two case studies is necessarily detailed, in order to establish the following important points. From these observations drawn from *Othello* and *Titus*, a pattern begins to emerge that highlights some of the techniques used by Shakespeare to vivify our response to his plays. These approaches include: the 'withholding' technique (hesitation and pauses in speeches that create a sense of tension or illusion, allowing the audience or reader to anticipate responses before they happen); withholding touch or action (when Macbeth reaches for the imaginary dagger, allowing the audience to anticipate the action of imaginatively grasping the object); references to

the body, bodily senses or functions and mobility (for example, images that suggest swallowing, vomiting, temperature, mutilation and burning, and tactile contact such as stroking, kissing or clutching); the use of potent verbal imagery to transfigure audience perception of onstage objects or bodies (as in Marcus's description of Lavinia as a dismembered tree), or to create vividly visceral images, such as the sacrificial mutilation and burning of Alarbus's body; and finally, the use of imperatives to appeal directly to the audience and reader or viewer by engendering a sense of immediacy (as in Chiron's and Demetrius's taunting of Lavinia). In addition, the case studies on *Henry V*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear* explore two more important techniques that lend Shakespeare's work a highly visceral quality: the textural layering of language through sound, shape and metre to create mood and atmosphere, and the creation of a sense of perspective, distance, weight, space or mass through evocative imagery.

In *Henry V*, the 'withholding' technique used by Iago in *Othello* becomes a form of questioning, of doubt and longing – that through its very suggestion of impossibility creates the possible. The Chorus's longing for 'a muse of fire' (*Henry V*, 0.1), a 'kingdom for a stage, princes to act' (3) gives way to an apology for the 'flat unraised spirits' (9) that are unable, he infers, to bring forth these wonders. The apology in turn becomes a question: '[c]an this cockpit hold | The vasty fields of France?' (12). The very inference of physical impossibility in this question involuntarily suggests the image to the mind. From *Henry V*, as from *Othello*, this study concludes that to create doubt is to suggest the object of that doubt. The Chorus establishes a vital connection between audience and actor, particularly in 3.0 before Harfleur, when his speech is full of implied actions, sounds and movement. Ships are dancing on the waves, 'silken

streamers' flying (3.0.6); sails are '[b]orne with th'invisible and creeping wind'. The audience is adjured to '[p]lay' (7), '[h]ear' (9), 'think' (13), '[g]rapple' (18), and so on, but the imperatives are not only resonant with urgency, they are full of longing and excitement that is infectious: designed to evoke a sense of unity and belonging, lightness of heart and excitement within the body, as well as the mind. As Chapter Five shows, the Chorus's words effectively engender a sense of perspective and distance: the audience is 'upon the rivage' (14); facing the ships as it helps to '[d]raw the huge bottoms through the furrowed sea' (12); at the 'sternage' (18); or within the siege itself. An apprehension of distance from the bank is created within us by the fleet seen as a 'city' that dances on the waves. A sense of temperature is evinced through the 'creeping murmur and the poring dark' in 4.0.2., in an image that makes atmosphere mobile: a hum of sound that, like the dense darkness, creeps over the ground and gradually, imaginatively invades the space around us and seeps into the body.

The Chorus's speeches are imbued with a vivid, visceral quality through their teeming images of frantic activity and tactility that draws on our sentient store of memories, allowing us to use those experiences to anticipate movement and tactile contact within our own bodies. The horses that we imagine '[p]rinting their proud hoofs i'th'receiving earth' (0.27) are also sensed in terms of their weight and mass, as well as their very precise movements: we feel as well as envisage their hooves sinking just below the surface of the moist ground. Scarry's observation that 'one in-itself weightless image' can be used to 'calibrate and confirm the weightedness of a second in-itself weightless image'<sup>13</sup> is borne out in this case: the image of the ground acts as evidence of the animals' weight. Shakespeare's choice of words also aptly communicates the exact

quality of the movement: the action of horses stepping across the soft ground is likened to the careful and deliberate process of block printing, where each letter is individually selected to make a particular indentation. To imagine movement guided by language in this way is to experience that movement coursing through us, rather than seeing it as a mind picture before our gaze. Even the act of thinking is mobilised in our own imaginative perceptions, as the Chorus urges our very thoughts to leap, 'jumping o'er times' (29). The suggestion that thoughts can move lends them an air of material presence, as well as a sense of force and energy. Ship boys clamber up the 'hempen tackle' (3.0.8), ('hempen' appealing to our tactile senses through its inference of texture), and the 'silken streamers' (6) conjure the feel and sound of a lively breeze rustling through the material of the banners. Amid images bustling with activity, moments of stillness within the images create memorable, static mind-pictures: robes described as 'silken dalliance' (2.0.2), hanging in the wardrobes, embody an emptiness that is almost palpable, and sits in the mind with startling clarity, simply because of its immobility, and the inference of the bodies that once filled these garments. Like Desdemona's handkerchief, the bodies become an absent presence.

Chapter Five is an important case study, as it shows how language alone creates vital contact with the audience, and how image can transfigure image in the space of our imaginations. It explores the way that subjects are imbued with objective qualities in Shakespeare: cannons become disturbingly hungry beasts '[w]ith fatal mouths gaping' (3.0.27), while the 'two mighty monarchies' (0.20) are personified as huge 'abutting' foreheads (21). The heaving movement suggested in 'upreared' (21) fills the mind with a sense of powerful, brooding immensity, which is in turn fused with the concept of

might attached to the two monarchies. Once more, it is the surge or movement itself that we intuitively experience, and rehearse within the body, as well as the mind. As in *Titus*, objects and subjects are transfigured as we watch or imagine and envisage, but in *Henry V*, there are no material objects to draw the visual gaze. Instead, one image overlays or transfigures another in the imaginative perception.

Scarry suggests various ways that images are made to move easily in the mind. 'What is solid or substantive', she writes, 'is often strangely coupled with what is not – namely, the quality of the imagined image itself, which, filmy and tissuelike, can be physically manipulated'.<sup>14</sup> She implies that the image itself, because of its filmy quality, may be literally stretched, folded or tilted in the mind. Images of characters leaning, stretching or twisting, for example, mean, for Scarry, that 'the reader actually sees the action occurring on the mental retina.'<sup>15</sup> Scarry also notes the importance of sound – or our imaginative grasp of sound – as an aid to vivifying our experience of an image. She discusses this point in relation to a passage from Gustav Flaubert's *Emma Bovary*. When the story is read aloud, she notes, as well as imagining the sound of a character walking, there is an 'auditory registration' of sounds conveyed by the words: for example, 'the small slapping sounds' that are 'sensorially present' through Flaubert's description. 'If one is reading silently', she observes, 'then there is a double acoustical scrim, since we imagine the sound of the words and, lightly piggybacking on that, an auditory image of the walking sounds.'<sup>16</sup> Like Shakespeare, then, Flaubert supplements what his reader sees in the mind's eye with a sentient undertow conveyed through the sound and texture of the words he chooses. A further, most important point, however, is that the character's actual movement is also sensed in and through the reader's body, and as this

study has repeatedly shown, it is the anticipation of movement or touch in the body that lends our experience of images such vital immediacy.

This thesis suggests that references to bodily mobility are important ingredients of effective visceral imagery in Shakespeare's work. Henry's threatening speech to the Governor of Harfleur in 3.3 is full of suggested movement. His words conjure terrifying pictures of '[t]he blind and bloody soldier with foul hand' who, unchecked, will '[d]efile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters' (3.3.114-5). The lines evoke the writhing movements of the soldiers' fingers as they tangle the maidens' hair: an image that in turn suggests the more intimate entanglement of writhing bodies. Scarry reports that 'longstanding research in sensory perception' shows that 'the size of the region of the brain devoted to sensations in different parts of the body varies greatly'. In addition, she notes, 'a map of the relative size of body parts as they exist not in the body but in neural activity shows by far the largest body part is the hand.' She concludes that '[s]ince we know that mental picturing uses the same neuronal paths in the brain that sensory perception uses, it may be that alluding to the hand brings large resources of the brain to bear on the project of making an image move.'<sup>17</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, however, the body is far more than a receiver of messages co-ordinated and transmitted by the brain. 'Before becoming the indication of a concept', he indicates, a word 'is first of all an event which grips my body'.<sup>18</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, the hand is an extension of the body-subject: a limb that is thrust into the world around us to explore, and a point of the body that makes the most immediate contact with objects, helping us to register and consequently analyse our tactile experiences. Images of hands recall such intensely physical acts. In Henry's speech, for example, the image of Harfleur's 'pure maidens' at



the 'hand | Of hot and forcing violation' (3.3.100-1) is made viscerally powerful by the suggestion of temperature and movement connected with the hand itself. It is the movement and feel of the hand – anticipated within the body – that makes the speech so vital for the audience or reader.

Once again, the studies of stage and film performances in Chapter Five reveal a marked difference in their directors' approaches, and in the way each director seeks to influence audience perception. In Olivier's production, as Chapter Five points out, Mark Rylance deliberately diffused the violence suggested in the Harfleur speech through humour, thus stressing the play's strong sense of meta-theatricality. Shakespeare's rich, visceral imagery was therefore in some ways less effective, as the audience was encouraged to perceive Henry's speech as a tactical construction, encouraging an intellectual rather than an intuitive response. Rylance's performance encouraged us to perceive him as an astute leader, but this approach removed the raw impact of Shakespeare's imagery that is palpably evident in Branagh's film. Branagh's Henry gives us a Harfleur speech full of ferocity, effectively conjuring the disturbing images created in the text. His portrayal of momentary but profound relief when the Governor capitulates, however, ultimately robs Henry's words of serious intent, but such tactics also still allow the speech to do the job of communicating the ruthless violence of war. Both productions shape their audience's perception of Henry's speech in different ways, yet neither encourages us to perceive him as a merciless conqueror. Williams's speech is also effectively delivered in Branagh's film, where the camera intensely observes the actor's face, effectively transmitting his fearful tension, and barely concealed horror. As

viewers, we are therefore able to sense the effect of the images filling Williams's mind, as well as imagine them for ourselves.

Chapter Five explores how Branagh's performance illuminates the tone and texture of Henry's St Crispin's Day speech, his vocal delivery actively helping to shape the viewer's perception of Henry at this point as the heroic leader of his men. In contrast, Rylance's Henry appeared exhausted: his voice portraying his weariness at the start of his speech. Once again, however, his wryly humorous delivery, and his willingness to sustain contact with his audience, shaped a Henry who was approachable, and who conveyed the speech as an obvious performance – again, stressing the play's artifice, but also underlining history as a form of recorded story. The ultimate triumph of Branagh's film was in the vital translation of moods and nuances transmitted by Shakespeare's language. The film used Shakespeare's text to create a vocal soundscape that pulsed through its realistic visual presentation. Whether we ultimately see the film as an espousal of jingoistic nationalism, or as a refutation of heroism, Branagh's overall achievement was in the irresistible quality of the spoken word that persuaded, urged and cajoled its audience to believe in Henry's cause, whatever its underlying motivation.

The 'withholding' technique used so effectively by Iago in *Othello* is also effectively deployed in *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. Disjointed, hesitant speeches create tensions and pauses that open up an imaginative space in which the reader or audience can anticipate action or reaction, as in the servant's description of 'a moving grove' in *Macbeth* (5.6.38), and the arrival of the Gentleman with the smoking dagger in *King Lear* (5.3.221). The illusory dagger in *Macbeth* and the feather in *King Lear* work in similar ways to draw audience focus directly into the empty space where Macbeth sees

his dagger, or to the feather held at Cordelia's lips. Both examples stimulate our imaginative perception through powerful imagery, or in the case of *King Lear*, by arousing a vital anticipation of the faintest shiver of movement that as an audience member, we may or may not ever fully perceive. *Macbeth* sets out to supplement what we see with what we feel and imagine, as in the appearance of Banquo's ghost, and the moving Birnam Wood.

As in *Henry V*, language in both *Macbeth* and *King Lear* is used to evoke mood as part of its atmospheric backdrop. *Macbeth*'s hypnotic rhythms and dark vowels evoke a heavy feel of nightmare, whereas in *King Lear*, Shakespeare juxtaposes highly poetic speeches with language that seems intensely raw and lacking in lyrical quality, jamming one style against another in a way that reflects the stormy heart of *King Lear* through its textual organisation. Our perception of mood and tension in the play is therefore shaped directly through dramatic structure that creates a feeling of wide-open spaces and tempestuous instability, in marked contrast to *Macbeth*'s intense, claustrophobic atmosphere.

The theme of dismemberment, evident in *Titus* and *Henry V*, also runs through *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. In *King Lear*, sight itself is dismembered: the physical blinding of Gloucester reflecting the metaphorical blindness of Lear. At the same time, both plays show how our perception can be narrowed, split or skewed, so that our normal expectations are destabilised. In *Macbeth*, mind and limbs begin to appear as isolated entities, when Macbeth's horrified fixation with his bloody hands seems to magnify the limbs in our perception. In Goold's production, as Chapter Six notes, this sense of perceptual dismemberment is visually reflected in Lady's Macbeth's expression, posture

and gait, as she returns with the two bloody daggers. Her movements become oddly disjointed and puppet-like, as though body and mind have lost kinaesthetic contact with each other, and lack organisation and co-ordination.

In *King Lear's* Dover Cliff scene, Shakespeare experiments with the idea of creating, for his reader and audience, a strong apprehension of perspective, height, distance and speed, through images that exploit our kinaesthetic and spatial awareness. Edgar's cleverly crafted speech takes his father, and the reader or audience on a perceptual journey that teems with life and movement, bringing sounds, objects and people vividly to life. Through Edgar's speech, Shakespeare shows how we understand height and distance through our bodily relationship to objects. As we look up, with Edgar, for example, from the beach to the top of the cliff, the cliff is imaginatively and intuitively measured by the image of '[t]en masts' one on top of another (*King Lear*, 4.6.53). Although these objects cannot be measured in a material sense, as Scarry points out, we imaginatively perceive objects in a spatial sense. 'An imagined elephant is placed further away from the imaginer's face than an imagined rabbit', she writes, 'just as in visual perception an actual elephant must be placed further away from us, so that we can see its entire surface.'<sup>19</sup> In the case of the tall ships, Shakespeare creates an impression of immense height, by conjuring the image of an object that we might associate with height. The fishermen on the beach are likened to mice, suggesting speed and movement as well as size, and therefore relative distance. Shakespeare uses images that directly reach into our intuitive understanding of our physical relationship with our world: thus he vividly shapes our perception. As Merleau-Ponty points out, before something such as distance or space becomes a concept, it is sensed within us, in 'a

communication with the world more ancient than thought'.<sup>20</sup> The body is the primary tool that we use, as children, to measure, weigh and explore objects through touch. Through such experience, we are able to sense distances, weight and density in the body: a skill that is called into use when we imaginatively perceive objects under a skilled writer's instruction.

Despite the highly visceral appeals to the senses contained in the Dover Cliff speech, the scene still insistently draws attention to its meta-theatricality, illuminating our ability to experience several perspectives at once, through imaginative perception. In the Nunn/Hunt production discussed in Chapter Seven, the actor playing Edgar closes his eyes during the speech, showing his commitment to the imaginative and intuitive journey he and his father are taking, and encouraging the audience to make that same journey while visually anchored to the fairly static on-stage scene. Again, this highlights the fact that we can, as audience members, perceive imaginatively and visually in the same moment. Conversely, for Peter Brook, perspective in *King Lear* becomes the object of technical experimentation, rather than a purely imaginative journey for the audience. He therefore orientates, tilts and skews the camera, and with it our visual perception, keeping us constantly aware of the film's artifice. The film therefore distances the viewer to some extent by constantly changing the camera's perspective, so that portions of faces and bodies are evident from various angles, as though the camera is itself desperately seeking to understand the lack of cohesion in this bleak play from as many perspectives as possible. The Nunn/Hunt production conversely brings us closer to the characters through intense close-ups of their expressions, and through the skilled performances of minor characters, whose reactions help to evoke a sense of pity, in their

own display of empathy. Once again, the discussions on these performances in the case studies show how the very different approaches of two directors can influence the way in which we perceive and understand the plays, but it is also interesting to note the way the text shapes the director's own perception. In Brook's case, for example, as in Taymor's, themes or issues underlying the text are translated through the practicalities of the performance medium itself, as though vital essences of the text become fused within the material means of production. The camera becomes a form of text.

This study has discussed the role of object and language in shaping perception in five of Shakespeare's plays from among his tragedies and histories: genres that are rich in visceral images. It has considered how Shakespeare's objects of the stage and of the mind make vital connections with us as readers or audience members, through our imaginative and visual perception. It has therefore approached the plays in an investigative spirit, exploring techniques used by Shakespeare to vivify our response to his plays. Although its methodology involves an analytical approach that is underpinned by general principles of phenomenology, my study also acknowledges the importance of the newly emerging disciplines of cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics, that share one of Merleau-Ponty's primary concerns, in their recognition of the importance of the body in the process of perception and cognition. Cognitive poetics also shares a similar investigative aim with phenomenological close-reading, since it tends to question 'how [...] we do what we do when reading',<sup>21</sup> as Craig Hamilton suggests: a comment that underlines the importance attached to the process of reading itself. Although the emphasis in cognitive poetics is still, in the main, centred on the cognitive aspects of our response, the role of the body in our intuitive reaction is firmly acknowledged, bringing

cognitive poetics and phenomenology in some ways into the same arena. As Peter Stockwell notes:

on the one hand you could argue that readers reach a primary interpretation before any analytical sense is made apparent. The purpose of a cognitive poetic analysis would then be to rationalise and explain how that reader reached that understanding on that occasion.<sup>22</sup>

This observation gives strong credence to the idea that our first response to a text is instinctive, that there is an 'in-between arena',<sup>23</sup> as Smith terms it: a gap in which we experience the 'felt quality of thought *before* words.'<sup>24</sup> Merleau-Ponty sees this instinctive, pre-verbal reaction as part of the fluid relationship between thought and speech that allows one to leap ahead of the other. '[s]peech cannot be regarded as a mere clothing for thought', he writes; '[t]he speaking subject [...] must be enabled to outrun what he thought before, and to find in his own words more than the thought he was putting into them'.<sup>25</sup> This idea suggests a molten state of creative discovery that exists between language, thought and intuition, that may be activated through an effective stimulus, such as potent imagery. This study suggests that Shakespeare's language, both in its content and through its form, appeals to our ability to grasp, experience and yet cognitively outrun our initial intuitive reactions in almost the same moment. It can therefore transfigure our perception of objects or bodies-as-objects, even as we view them on stage. The phenomenological reading, with its emphasis on experiential immediacy, seeks to secure those first intuitive responses, together with the associations that stream from them that can at leisure be traced back to their source, and can thus assist our understanding of how Shakespeare shapes and moulds our perception of his work.

Cognitive poetics offers a way of rationalising our initial responses, but its extremely varied and complex analytical frameworks are too detailed to expound and apply within the boundaries of this work. Its new approach recognises our response to reading as a complex 'feat of conceptual juggling' that 'has to be sensitive to many different disciplines',<sup>26</sup> as Stockwell notes, but at the moment it is still grounded in literary criticism, although it also offers exciting possibilities for study in the area of drama. In Shakespeare studies, as this thesis has claimed, the reader is also able to become part of an imagined audience, and in the theatre, as Smith observes, 'the reader becomes a sensor and the text becomes the bodies, actions and speeches of other people'.<sup>27</sup> As this study has also noted, Shakespeare's plays can appeal to us on the levels of both reader and audience member. Strongly visceral imagery can in fact enhance what we see on stage, bringing us into close-up focus with characters' sentient and tactile experiences, creating mood or atmosphere through the sounds and texture of language that envelop us within the world of the play. It would therefore seem that we respond to Shakespeare's work on a number of levels simultaneously, depending on the practical, psychological and social framing that informs our individual approach to the text or performance. This work has considered the plays from the perspective of the reader, the reader as part of an imagined audience, as an audience member and viewer. In all cases, it has become apparent that Shakespeare's linguistic and dramatic techniques appeal directly to our intuitive imagination, so that we draw on our sentient store of lived experiences in response to his complex combination of language, visual presentation and dramatic structure. As such, this study has found the experience of phenomenological reading effective for analysis of both text and performance, as a way



of exploring the fusion of stimuli and multiple perspectives that such an exploration involves.

In conclusion, what emerges from an overall consideration of the findings gleaned by this thesis, is the observation that particularly effective, vivid images are in some way grounded in the body as well as the mind: in our grasp of bodily experience. There are obvious examples that verify this theory, such as Alarbus's sacrifice or Lavinia's body imagined as a dismembered tree in *Titus*, or the transfiguration of human faces with animal characteristics, as in Henry's Harfleur battle speech in *Henry V*. Yet there are also less obvious instances of powerfully visceral imagery that comes alive in the senses through our spatial understanding of distance, or our apprehension of weight, mass and density, such as the image of horses making imprints in the ground in *Henry V*, or of ships dancing on the waves. These images create a feeling as well as a mental picture of movement and distance that our intuitive bodily grasp of spatiality and mobility allows us to sense as well as to visualise. Our experience of objects in Shakespeare is therefore complex in its strong sense of immediacy: what is seen on stage can be brought into close-focus in a tactile sense, through the visceral quality of linguistic imagery that supplements visual presentation of stage properties. Objects of the mind are equally – or in some cases arguably even more powerfully – evoked in the senses, without the need for their material presence on stage.

In this way, Shakespeare's texts continue to fascinate and absorb us, to draw us as readers and as audiences, to tempt us to find out what stimulates our complex reactions to his plays. Through his visceral language, we can grasp, stroke, see and touch objects in the imaginative perception. Desdemona's handkerchief remains an

iconic stage property *because* of its visceral link to her body. Its magic, or its fascination for us, lies in Othello's description of the *art* of its production: a fusion of bodily movement (spinning) and bodily materials (fluids from the virgins' hearts). It is, in fact, a surrogate body that cannot ultimately be dismembered from the material body of the text: its potent language.

The brief exploration of examples from performances in this study indicates the ways in which phenomenological close-reading can illuminate directorial and performance choices that shape our perception of the plays. There is yet a great deal of scope for investigation this sense, including a more detailed consideration of the differences between and similarities within reader and audience reactions. There is also much work to be done in textual study across the remainder of the Shakespeare canon, particularly in the area of comedies and the late plays or romances. Such research might consider how objects are presented in these different genres – and the role that language plays in shaping our perception of them.

Although this study began with a consideration of stage properties in Shakespeare, its overriding conclusion is that objects cannot be divorced from the language that surrounds and interweaves them within the text, and brings them to life for the reader and audience. Shakespeare's objects of the mind are as effectively present in the imaginative perception, as his stage properties are to the visual gaze. That gaze is also shaped and even transfigured by the power of potent imagery in Shakespeare's language that fuses what we see, what we sense and imagine into one vital, phenomenal experience. Shakespeare draws on our memories of lived experience, on the bodily blueprints left by past contact with our world, to enhance our perception – both visual

and imaginative – of his plays. It is this element of his work that surely makes it so currently vital to today's readers and today's audiences. As Chapter One illustrates, historicist studies have been of great importance in helping us to understand Shakespeare's world, and how it may have informed his writing. However, such criticism often regards stage properties as time-capsules with off-stage social or cultural lives that inform our understanding of the plays as historically rooted entities. Smith feels that in 'recovering the felt experience of "Shakespeare" in the past we may be able to recover the felt experience of "Shakespeare" that often goes missing in the here-and-now'.<sup>28</sup> Catherine Richardson also writes that

if we want to understand Shakespeare's audience's response to the material culture of the stage it is that experiential, visceral appreciation of early modern possessions which we need to investigate, to see how knowledge of objects might have been brought into play by the electrifying connections between words and things in performance.<sup>29</sup>

What this study illuminates, however, is an intensely vivid connection between object, language, readers and audiences that remains as powerfully visceral for us, as it might have been for audiences in Shakespeare's own time. What it offers is a way of exploring that potentially electrifying connection – in all its complexity – in the here-and-now.

#### END NOTES

1. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. xxiii.
2. Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book*, p. 38.
3. Scarry, p. 38.
4. Scarry, p. 34.

5. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 381.
6. Merleau-Ponty, p. 346.
7. Bachelard, p. xxiii.
8. Merleau-Ponty, p. 61.
9. See Note 3.
10. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, p. 97.
11. Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare*, p. 171.
12. Scarry, p. 147.
13. Scarry, p. 28.
14. Scarry, p. 89.
15. Scarry, p. 115.
16. Scarry, p. 115-6.
17. Scarry, p. 146-7.
18. Merleau-Ponty, p. 273-4.
19. Scarry, p. 49-50.
20. Merleau-Ponty, p. 296.
21. Craig Hamilton, 'A Cognitive Grammar of "Hospital Barge" by Wilfred Owen' in *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, eds. Gavins and Steen, pp. 55-65, (p. 64).
22. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, p. 7.
23. Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare*, p. 54.
24. Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare*, p. 55.
25. Merleau-Ponty, p. 452.
26. Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, p. 60.

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27. Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare*, p. 32.
28. Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare*, p. xvi.
29. Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture*, p. 14.

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