

Reut Barzilai
University of Haifa

“It is required you do awake your faith:” Cunning Dramaturgy in *The Winter’s Tale*

“Never mislead an audience, was an old rule,” wrote George Bernard Shaw in 1891. Indeed, one of the implicit assumptions of theater audiences is that the information they are given about the fictional world (information that helps them imaginatively co-create this world) is truthful and authoritative. Misleading or deceiving an audience breaches this implicit trust.

It is therefore unsurprising to find that—especially at a time of considerable anxiety about the gap between essence and appearance, and in the face of antitheatrical accusations that the theater is fraudulent—early modern English playwrights repeatedly reassured their spectators that they were not being tricked, deceived, or misled in the playhouse. When representing acts of deception, they tended to place the audience in a privileged position of knowledge, creating gratifying dramatic irony; playwrights also repeatedly employed various metatheatrical elements to remind their customers that they were not being fooled by the mimetic illusion.

There **are**, however, instances in early modern English drama in which playwrights commit what Fredson Bowers termed “the unforgivable dramatic sin of misleading the audience.” My paper will explore one of these: Shakespeare’s tricking of his audience in *The Winter’s Tale* into mistakenly believing that Hermione is dead. In contrast to other plays by Shakespeare in which a character fakes her death or is erroneously presumed to be dead, the audience is not privy to the characters’ secret. When Paulina lies to the other characters in *The Winter’s Tale* Sicilia, Shakespeare lets his audience, too, be deceived.

In exploring this relatively rare instance in which Shakespeare deceives his audience, I hope to learn more about the ethics of the relationship between an audience and an implied playwright in this play, and beyond.

Roya Biggie

Assistant Professor of English

Knox College

Occult Cunning and Race in *Antony and Cleopatra*

In this paper, I argue that Cleopatra's racialization is the effect of not only somatic, cultural, and religious difference from the play's Roman characters, but also remarks that note her "cunning," "enchanted" qualities, and capacity for "witchcraft" (1.2.144, 127, 2.1.22). Shakespeare associates the Egyptian queen with the occult, endowing her with the unique ability to manipulate and command aspects of her environment. She predicts, for instance, that her music will attract "tawny-finn'd fishes," which she imagines as Antony, and upon learning of his remarriage, she demands that Egypt "melt...into Nile! And kindly creatures/ Turn all to serpents (2.5.12, 78-79). While the interspecies collaborations Cleopatra describes may suggest what Enobarbus refers to as her "storms and tempests," the passionate ravings of a temperamental queen, I demonstrate that early modern audiences would have understood these comments as examples of occult interspecies sympathetic bonds. As I show, natural philosophers, such as Pliny and Giambattista Della Porta, underscored the power of human-nonhuman relationships, and the potential for both humans and nonhumans to adopt attributes innate to the things to which they are bonded. On the one hand, Cleopatra's susceptibility to these cross-species bonds naturalizes the dehumanizing comments made by Roman characters, the suggestion that she is, for example, Antony's "Egyptian dish" and "serpent of Egypt" (2.6.124, 2.7.26). At the same time, Shakespeare alludes to the desirable effects of Cleopatra's occult "cunning," her ability to access the sympathetic potential of her environment in moments of longing, distress, and rage.

Ani Govjian

Cunning as a Register of Will in *Romeo and Juliet*

In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my 'havior light:
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware,
My true love's passion: therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love,
Which the dark night hath so discovered. (2.2.947-955)

Juliet teaches us how to read her by telling us what she is not. She makes claims of “truth” and asks Romeo (and the audience) to trust her reading of herself, promising that she will “prove more true” than those who only offer “light love.” She is cornered when making these declarations because her love for Romeo has been shared with him against her better judgment and her will. Her speech, however, is a reassertion of her will. She maneuvers Romeo to see her according to her own views of herself, which is a powerful move that is itself cunning.

In attesting to her love, Juliet uses a significant instance of the term “cunning” in the play. She uses the term as a foil to her own behavior: she is neither cunning nor strange, she argues. By drawing this comparison, the scene becomes a metatheatrical commentary as well: Juliet announces that her love is real to both Romeo and the audience, pushing back against the notion that her love is a performance even though it must be performed.

In being accidentally earnest, she has shown herself as rejecting any *game* of love. Her appeal to her lack of cunning, however, replaces the performance of a familiar trope of resistance and denial (being “strange”) with something stranger still: a request for Romeo to be honest about his feelings.

Her own behavior here is cunning both because she recoups the emotional intensity that a chase would create by turning the question of fidelity onto Romeo and because she assures that her own surprising behavior or lack of “cunning” is perceived in a way that maintains her status as an appropriately chaste recipient of masculine love. In this way, her speech here, as well as the play more broadly, expands the possibilities of what “cunning” means and why Juliet invokes the term in service of managing others’ perceptions of her own love.

Hilary Gross

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Sir Anthony Love: Wit, Drag, and Legacy on the Restoration Stage

This paper, tentatively titled “*Sir Anthony Love: Wit, Drag, and Legacy on the Restoration Stage*,” explores Southerne’s play’s engagement with the Restoration’s witty rake as well as the Early Modern’s ‘drag magician,’ a distinguishable character type beloved by Shirley and Shakespeare amongst others. Thomas Southerne, who wrote the role for Susanna Mountfort (soon to be Verbruggen) in 1690, credits the play’s success to a certain “Gaiety and Air, particular to her Action” which “turn’d every thing into the Genius of the Character” (Southerne). In her 10 years acting, she had not yet been a leading lady; though she wasn’t quite here either. *Sir Anthony* was her first star turn, receiving top-billing of the men in the cast, and establishing her reputation as an actress particularly adept at sexual wit with impressive comedic range and transformational abilities. Colley Cibber writes about how “she transform’d her whole Being, Body, Shape, Voice, Language, Look, and Features, into almost another Animal” on stage, made “no scruple of defacing her fair Form,” and was, “while her Shape permitted, ...a more adroit pretty Fellow, than is usually seen upon the Stage” (Cibber). It is her transformation that is exemplary, an expression of her skill and wit, just like Anthony’s. Anthony moves through the world for most of the play as a man, enjoying the potential of play in drag, and only using feminine-dress as a disguise when the plot requires it. Anthony’s drag, their camp-masculine performance, and the slipperiness of their rambling gender throughout, is a direct expression of their cunning. More than a disguise or a device, though it is also those things, theatrical drag works as a mode of performance which exceeds the bounds of the diegetic, in an affective network of awe, surprise, and admiration for the laminated drag performer/role at its center.

Jillian Linster

University of South Dakota

jillian.linster@usd.edu

“Cunning for all commers”: The Counsel of Women in John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie*

John Lyly’s plays have long been recognized for their “see-saw oppositions of euphuistic prose” (Scragg 32). This paper explores how a key linguistic opposition underpins the dramatic action and characterizations of *Mother Bombie* (1594). The play’s title figure, in her first of only four appearances, establishes her identity by directly asserting, “I am a cunning woman” (D2^v). She is not the only character to use the word “cunning,” or to be described by it. The play’s various deployments of the term “cunning” are juxtaposed with frequent use of the term “cozening,” particularly by the clowning pages Dromio and Riscio. For example, while the cunning woman’s predictions are solemnly delivered and all ultimately realized (no matter how improbable they initially sound), the servants repeatedly acknowledge that their drunken scheming is manipulative and deceitful, and it is correspondingly thwarted; similarly, the cozening pages are motivated by the prospect of financial gain, whereas the cunning Mother Bombie solemnly avows, “I take no monie, but good wordes” (E1^v). In its comic but joyous ending, the play ultimately depicts its range of male characters (old and young, wealthy and poor) as pointedly foolish in comparison to wise Mother Bombie and the women who confidently consult her.

Ian Munro, UC Irvine

Polypi mentem obtine

This essay (excerpted from my book project on Shakespeare and wit) argues for the importance of classical *mētis* to Renaissance thought through the zoological example of the polypus or polyp, representative of what Detienne and Vernant call "octopus-like intelligence": supple, mutable, and entrapping, associated with politicians and sophists. After discussing the role of the polyp in Plutarch's *Moralia* (the principal conduit for Renaissance understandings of the figure), the essay turns to its use by Erasmus, Jean-Luis Vives, and a few other Renaissance writers; if I can boil all that down enough to stay within shouting distance of the length restrictions, the essay will conclude with a turn to Hamlet and "the very cunning of the scene."

N. Amos Rothschild

**The Problematic Prestige of Learned Service in Early Modern England; or, Claiming “policy
without cunning” Isn’t Easy**

“The highest degree wherunto learned valure doth prefer,” the educator and pedagogical theorist Richard Mulcaster declares in his *Positions Concerning the Training up of Children* (1581), “is a wise counsellour, whose learning is learned pollicie: not as pollicie is commonly restrayned, and opposed to plainnesse, but as we terme it in learning and philosophie, the generall skill to judge either of all, or of most thinges rightly, and to marshall them to their places ... as shall best beseeme the present government, with least disturbaunce, and most contentment to the settled state, of what sorte soever the thinges be, divine or humaine, publike or private, professions of minde, or occupations of hande.” Even as Mulcaster works to present the “wise counsellour” as a position “worthyest to be preferred,” the virtue on which his recommendation for preferment is based—“learned pollicie”—threatens to shade into a vice. He struggles to give “pollicie” a positive valence and restrict its meaning to something like “prudent conduct; politic or expedient behavior; prudence, shrewdness, sagacity” (*OED*); however, his strained effort to stipulate that he intends the term not as it “is commonly restrayned, and opposed to plainnesse” inevitably evokes its less savory meaning: “cunning, craftiness.” In this paper, I will show that Mulcaster is far from alone in his struggle to fix the meaning and merit of policy. Indeed, a brief survey of Tudor-Stuart discourse on policy reveals a persistently unstable term that holds a particular and vexed significance for efforts to claim social recognition and prestige via erudition. While many who assert learnedness in the period seize on the potential power of policy, such assertions often threaten to deconstruct themselves, earning (what Mulcaster terms) the “professions of minde” not preferment for the civic-mindedness—even the manliness—of their applied learning, but denigration for the underhandedness and self-serving cowardice of their suspect cunning.

Tanya K. Schmidt

Bashful Cunning in Shakespeare's Female Speech

In multiple pivotal scenes in Shakespeare's plays, female characters associate, on the one hand, silence and modesty with cunning and, on the other hand, speech with candor but also potential lack of wit. This contrast seems particularly interesting in moments when witty female speech advances female desire.

For example, in *The Tempest*, just before Miranda tells Ferdinand that she will be his wife if he will marry her, she exclaims, "Hence, bashful cunning! And prompt me, plain and holy innocence! I am your wife, if you will marry me" (3.1.1374-76). Before Miranda asserts her wish to be Ferdinand's wife, what kind of "cunning" does she claim to banish?¹ To the extent that "cunning" means "wit," is she rejecting wit (perhaps because wit would instruct her to keep silent or bashful; or because, rather than wit, she assumes the role of "fool" in love), or is she rejecting the absence of wit (i.e. she embraces a wit that is not silent but rather uses grammar like chiasmus connected by a bold conditional)? Put another way, what kind of "cunning" is "bashful," and what does Miranda declare to be guided by instead? To the extent that "cunning" can mean "knowledge and learning" or "knowledge how to do a thing, a skill," is Miranda rejecting knowledge (and if so, what kind of knowledge—perhaps that of supposedly typical bashful female behavior in scenes of courtship, which she has never witnessed?), or the absence of knowledge (which leads her to propose and advance marriage plans)?

I'd like to explore these tangled questions in my paper, hopefully in conversation with a different example from *Troilus and Cressida*. In this play, Cressida says to Troilus in her witty speech: "Sweet, bid me hold my tongue, / For in this rapture I shall surely speak / The thing I shall repent. See, see, your silence, / Cunning in dumbness, from my weakness draws / My very soul of counsel! Stop my mouth" (3.1.1779-83). Here, Cressida describes the silence of Troilus as "cunning," and her voluminous speech as "weakness," uncontrollably spilling out from a leaky vessel that she herself asks to be stopped. For these female characters, what makes silence the locus of cunning, and how is their speech cunning nevertheless? And, an experimental twist: might we consider these scenes of cunning in love as other examples of figures embodying the diva's passion that Pam Brown argues Shakespeare inherits from the Italian stage?

¹ This is assuming, as I believe is standard, that we interpret "hence" here to mean "to send away" as in "to go hence." But it might also be fruitful to think about "hence" meaning the exact opposite—as in, "consequently, from now on." In other words, what if Miranda was saying, "from now on, bashful cunning and plain and holy innocence prompt me to propose to Ferdinand"?