

“SUCH FAIR QUESTION”: RHETORIC, EDUCATION, AND  
THE USE OF QUESTIONS IN *OTHELLO* AND *KING LEAR*

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine the relationship between early modern rhetorical education and Shakespeare's use of the question in *Othello* and *King Lear*, two plays that contain some of the greatest proportions of questions in Shakespeare's canon. I argue that even in the plays that seem most skeptical of rhetorical performance, like *Othello* and *King Lear*, the protagonists' development, and developing self-awareness, is heavily dependent upon their use of rhetorical methods. In both plays, rhetoric and early modern methods of teaching it together constitute a force that has the power to harm, even ruin, both its adherents and its detractors. Simultaneously, however, rhetoric and early modern rhetorical education provide indispensable tools for self-examination and self-reflection, tools that benefit conscientious students of rhetoric in a variety of ways. Both of these views are played out through the use (and abuse) of questions in the two plays.

I concentrate primarily on how the characters in these plays succeed and fail in employing the kinds of rhetorical practices emphasized in grammar school instruction. For example, in *Othello*, I consider Othello's and Iago's aptitudes for arguing *in utramque partem*, on both sides of the question, and in *Lear*, I analyze the characters' facility in *imitatio*. The rhetorical successes and failures of the characters reveal much about Shakespeare's complex relationship with rhetoric. As I hope to show, the characters in *Othello* and *King Lear*, like early modern students, either internalize or fail to internalize these principles to their ultimate benefit or detriment. By examining how the characters apply and fail to apply the principles of rhetoric, I

aim to illustrate the plays' complex views of rhetoric as an art that can lead to self-knowledge or to self-destruction—and sometimes to both.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: THE BASTARD'S CATECHISM

In the first scene of Shakespeare's *King John*, the Bastard Falconbridge is revealed as the illegitimate son of Richard Coeur-de-lion and subsequently knighted by King John. In his first soliloquy, the Bastard contemplates his "new-made honor" by rehearsing a series of imaginary conversations:

"Good den, Sir Richard!"—"God-a-mercy fellow!"—  
An if his name be George, I'll call him Peter;  
For new-made honor doth forget men's names:  
'Tis too respectful and too sociable  
For your conversion. Now your traveler,  
He and his toothpick at my worship's mess,  
And when my knightly stomach is suffic'd,  
Why then I suck my teeth, and catechize  
My picked man of countries: "My dear sir,"—  
Thus, leaning on mine elbow, I begin,  
"I shall beseech you,"—that is Question now;  
And then comes Answer like an Absey book:  
"O sir," says Answer, "at your best command;  
At your employment, at your service, sir:"  
"No, sir," says Question, "I, sweet sir, at yours:"  
And so, ere Answer knows what Question would,  
Saving in dialogue of compliment,  
And talking of the Alps and Apennines,  
The Pyrenean and the river Po,  
It draws toward supper in conclusion so.  
But this is worshipful society... (1.1.185-205)

The Bastard, now Sir Richard, engages in fanciful roleplaying to satirize "worshipful society" and to imagine his new life within it. As the perfect courtier, he will establish his superiority by nonchalantly forgetting the names of his inferiors and, significantly, by "catechizing" them. As

the dominant figure in his conversation with a traveler, the Bastard becomes “Question” and his subject is “Answer.” This imagined catechism, however, soon turns into a “dialogue of compliment,” in which Question and Answer exchange meaningless courtesies but never truly respond to each other. The questions of Question do not really require an answer—they are merely the vehicle through which Sir Richard’s imagined self establishes his preeminence as a courtier. This exchange between superior and inferior is framed in the style of an “Absey book,” a kind of manual that instructed schoolchildren in catechisms or taught them their ABC’s through question and answer and often through dialogues between student and schoolmaster. The Bastard imagines Question and Answer themselves as personified characters in this dialogue and imagines himself and his traveler imitating such characters. Their school training informs not only the style of their conversation, but also their conceptions of social hierarchy: the nobility question and their inferiors answer questions, each mimicking the style of their schoolbooks and the florid language of the court.

Performance and imitation, education and rhetoric, subordination and authority—all of these intersect in the Bastard’s short soliloquy, and all are discussed in relation to question and answer. In the Bastard’s world, questions are rhetorical tools used to perform power. They are the means through which the nobility maintain social power and through which the Bastard, as a new nobleman, fancifully imagines establishing his own influence over others. To do so, he will use question and answer strategically, rhetorically, and imitate “worshipful society”—a practice mirrored in the Absey book, which establishes hierarchies between student and schoolmaster. As he shifts identities from Phillip Falconbridge to the knighted son of Richard Coeur-de-lion, the Bastard inserts himself into this imitative cycle, adopting new speech patterns as readily as he

adopts his new title. His grammar school education in rhetoric informs his new education in the ways of “worshipful society.”

It is not surprising that the Bastard, or indeed Shakespeare himself, would formulate associations between questions, authority, and the rhetorical education of the Elizabethan grammar school. In addition to providing a format for many school textbooks, question and answer was, as many scholars have noted, a common instructional scheme in the Elizabethan grammar school, and question and answer conversations between student and schoolmaster were designed to train students in original Latin composition and oration.<sup>1</sup> While younger students were catechized, older students were frequently asked to compose extemporaneously on a theme or thesis put in the form of a question. Early modern educational theorists also found it useful for students to ask their own questions: in *The Scholemaster*, Roger Ascham notes that in order to have “good wit” for learning (27), a child must be “naturally bold to ask any question, desirous to search out any doubt” (31). John Brinsley’s *Ludus Literarius*, which is itself a dialogue partially of question and answer between two schoolmasters, recommends the use of question and answer for teaching grammar and religion. Brinsley includes a number of examples to illustrate his method, which asks students to repeat a series of questions and answers posed by the schoolmaster and is designed to facilitate quick understanding and memorization.<sup>2</sup>

The repetition and imitation that Brinsley asks his students to perform also help establish the social hierarchies with which the Bastard is so concerned. Lynn Enterline and others have pointed out that schoolmasters were expected to serve not only as models for students’ speaking and writing but for their behavior as well: “The humanist idea of authoritative model and

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<sup>1</sup> See Leonard Barkan, “What Did Shakespeare Read?” *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta De Grazia and Stanley W. Wells, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 35-36.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Chapter VI, in which he presents a method for teaching accidence through the use of questions and Chapter XXIII, in which he presents a modified catechism for remembering “moral matters.”

imitation...also structured the school's hierarchy of personal relations" (34).<sup>3</sup> In this hierarchy, students were rewarded or punished, and sometimes elevated to positions of authority, based on their rhetorical performance.<sup>4</sup> Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine argue that the foundational activities of memorization, repetition, and catechism on which humanist education was built produced students "accustomed to taking their orders and direction from an authority whose guiding principles were never revealed, much less questioned" (24). Though I disagree with the authors about the extent to which these programs inculcated docility and passivity in their students, Grafton and Jardine's analysis nevertheless indicates that hierarchy and authority played a large role in the Tudor schoolroom. Since students' performance in memorization, repetition, and catechism helped them place themselves within a social hierarchy, it is no surprise that the Bastard would relate the social hierarchies of "worshipful society" to the question and answer schemes of rhetorical education.

The triangular relationships among questioning, rhetoric, and authority, however, reach far beyond the early modern schoolroom. As scholars like Wayne Rebhorn and Neil Rhodes have argued, many rhetoric texts intended for adults aimed to teach their readers how to harness the power of words primarily to "control the will and desire of [their] audience" (Rebhorn 15). These texts also figure rhetoric as a way to create social hierarchies headed by the orator. In the beginning of his *Art of Rhetorique*, one of the most frequently reprinted vernacular rhetoric books in early modern England,<sup>5</sup> Thomas Wilson emphasizes the power of rhetoric as a

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<sup>3</sup> See also Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991. He notes that in the Tudor schoolroom, imitation "governs the mastery of prescribed social behaviors as well as the mastery of literary style" (33).

<sup>4</sup> See "Imitate and Punish: The Theatricality of Everyday Life in Elizabethan Schoolrooms" in *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Though Wilson's rhetoric can be seen as representative, it should be noted that rhetorical textbooks were predominantly in Latin. Throughout this thesis, I will move fluidly between a number of vernacular rhetoric texts, which are similar and relatively consistent.

civilizing force and ultimately characterizes the orator as “half a god” (43) who uses his eloquence to order society:

For what man, I pray you, being better able to maintain himself by valiant courage than by living in base subjection, would not rather look to rule like a lord than to live like an underling, if by reason he were not persuaded that it behooveth every man to live in his own vocation, and not to seek any higher room than whereunto he was at the first appointed? Who would dig and delve from morn till evening? Who would travail and toil with the sweat of his brows? Yea, who would for his king’s pleasure adventure and hazard his life, if wit had not so won men that they thought nothing more needful in this world, nor anything whereunto they were more bounden, than here to live in their duty and to train their whole life according to their calling? (42)

It is by rhetorical means, by the “wit” and eloquence of the orator, that men take up their appropriate roles in society. Likewise, George Puttenham, in *The Arte of English Poesie*, characterizes poets as “the first lawmakers to the people, and the first polititiens, devising all expedient meanes for th’establishment of Common wealth, to hold and containe the people in order and duety by force and vertue of good and wholesome lawes” (7). An ideal society consists of a well-ordered and complacent population led and instructed by an eloquent, benevolent orator. Rhetoric, both in and out of the classroom, provides its students with a means of establishing social hierarchies and, as the Bastard knows, of climbing the ladders of these hierarchies.

Since questions, as the Bastard has shown, play a large role in establishing and navigating authority, they also play a large role in these rhetorical texts. In *The Arte of Rhetorique*, Thomas Wilson begins by defining rhetoric, outlining “the matter whereupon an orator must speak,” and establishing the kinds of “questions” on which an orator should be able to speak (45).<sup>6</sup> For Wilson, rhetoric’s very premise is questions. Just as a schoolboy might compose an oration based

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<sup>6</sup> “An orator must be able to speak fully of all those questions which by law and man’s ordinance are enacted and appointed for the use and profit of man, such as are thought apt for the tongue to set forward...Every question, or demand in things, is of two sorts. Either it is an infinite question and without end, or else it is definite and comprehended within some end” (45). See *The Art of Rhetoric* (1560), ed. Peter E. Medine, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

upon a question, so a disputation or debate in the public arena begins with a question. Joel Altman emphasizes this point when he observes that in the sixteenth century, formal rhetoric “was considered to be not only an art of persuasion, but also an art of inquiry” (3).<sup>7</sup> Such an inquiry begins with a question and is often answered through the use of questions, whether in the form of rhetorical figures (Gideon Burton’s *Silva Rhetoricae* identifies ten different terms for rhetorical questions<sup>8</sup>) or through question and answer dialogues. Hannah Gray has noted that for early modern rhetoricians, “[t]he development of a dialogue could demonstrate how questioning was essential to the illumination of truth” (513).<sup>9</sup> That questioning is essential to the pursuit of truth and thus to rhetorical practice in this period is not surprising given that the model for many early modern rhetoricians was Cicero, who saw truth as contingent and possibly unreachable. In *Academica*, Cicero suggests that questioning, and specifically arguing on both sides any given question, is the best way to “draw out and give shape to some result that may be either true or the nearest possible approximation to the truth” (475).<sup>10</sup> The journey toward truth begins with a question and that question is debated on both sides before the orator reaches some “approximation to the truth.” Many scholars have noted that as a result of this Ciceronian influence, the practice of rhetoric led to “the production of a world view that is necessarily tentative, exploratory, and dialogic” (Rebhorn 14) and ultimately to the production of literature that was “self-questioning” about rhetoric (Rhodes 59).

Nearly all of Shakespeare’s plays consider the power of language in some way and many are clearly “self-questioning” about rhetoric. As Russ McDonald observes in *Shakespeare and*

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<sup>7</sup> See *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> See the website *Silva Rhetoricae*, Brigham Young University, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> See “Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24.4 (1963): 497-514.

<sup>10</sup> For Cicero’s discussion of arguing *in utramque partem*, see *Academica* II.iii.7-9, trans. H. Rackham, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1933.

*the Arts of Language*, “From the early days of his career as a playwright, Shakespeare’s conception of language was broad and fluid, combining enthusiasm with anxiety, optimism about its benefits with suspicion of its dangers” (164). In their multiple, complex attitudes toward language, Shakespeare’s plays engage larger cultural debates surrounding rhetoric and its uses.<sup>11</sup> Many early modern rhetoricians wrote about rhetoric as a noble art with persuasive civilizing power and the orator as semi-divine, an “emperour of mens minds,” to use Henry Peacham’s memorable phrase. Few early modern rhetorical texts considered the ways in which rhetoric might be used for unsavory ends—the prevailing assumption seems to be, as Thomas Wilson famously stated, “the good will not speak evil and the wicked cannot speak well” (244).<sup>12</sup> Most rhetoric texts aligned themselves with Cicero and Quintilian who claim that a good orator must first be a good man.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, some were skeptical about the art of rhetoric, viewing it as a practice designed to ornament words and thus obscure, rather than illuminate, truth or as a practice more concerned with word than with matter.<sup>14</sup>

While multiple viewpoints are often expressed in any one play, critics have tended to see Shakespeare’s comedies as optimistic and the tragedies as pessimistic about the uses of language

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<sup>11</sup> For overviews of these debates, see Benjamin V. Beier, *Studies in Philology* 111.1 (2014): pp. 34-39; Scott F. Crider, *With What Persuasion: An Essay on Shakespeare and the Ethics of Rhetoric*, New York: Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 3-5; Wayne Rebhorn, *Emperor of Men’s Minds: Literature and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995; Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992, pp. 1-65; and Brian Vickers, “‘The Power of Persuasion’: Images of the Orator, Elyot to Shakespeare,” in *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, pp. 411-435.

<sup>12</sup> For more on this positive view of rhetoric, see Brian Vickers, “‘The Power of Persuasion’: Images of the Orator, Elyot to Shakespeare,” in *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, pp. 411-435.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the Ciceronian and Quintilian legacies of the *vir bonus*, see Hanna H. Gray, “Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24.4 (1963): 497-514; Peter G. Platt, “Shakespeare and Rhetorical Culture,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, pp. 277-296; Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992; and Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 74-87.

<sup>14</sup> For the former, see John Jewel’s comment that rhetoric “renders good causes obscure and adorns evil ones and makes them resplendent,” in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. Wayne Rebhorn, 172. For a discussion of the latter, particularly of Francis’s Bacon’s views on the subject, see Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992, pp. 58-63.

and of rhetoric. This is not, perhaps, surprising, given that, as McDonald observes, many of the rhetorical speakers in Shakespeare's most famous tragedies are either fools or villains (43-44). Certainly, plays like *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Othello* are skeptical of rhetorical performance and how it can be used to gain and maintain authority. But Shakespeare's attitude toward rhetoric in these plays is more complex than many critics acknowledge. As a student in the Stratford grammar school, Shakespeare would have had a rhetorical education, and would doubtless have developed Cicero's rhetorical habit of arguing on both sides of the question.<sup>15</sup> I suggest that even in the plays that seem most pessimistic about rhetorical performance and the uses of rhetoric, Shakespeare is still arguing both sides of the question. Even the plays in which villains are the most adept rhetoricians, rhetoric still provides methods and tools that become useful, even indispensable, to the development of their protagonists.

Perhaps it is no coincidence, given the relationship between rhetorical education and questions I have outlined, that some of Shakespeare's plays that seem most skeptical about authority and rhetorical performance also include the most question marks.<sup>16</sup> The tragedies in particular follow this pattern: *Othello*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *King Lear* top the list of tragedies with the highest proportion of question marks, and all are "self-questioning" about rhetoric (Rhodes 59). An examination of the relationship between early modern rhetorical education and Shakespeare's use of the question in these plays will reveal both Shakespeare's anxiety about rhetorical performance and his optimism about rhetorical methods. I propose to undertake such an examination in this thesis. In both *Othello* and *King Lear*, rhetoric and early modern methods of teaching it together constitute a force that has the power to harm, even ruin,

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<sup>15</sup> For more on how the habit of arguing both sides of the question, *in utramque partem*, affected the early modern student and thus early modern literature, see Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

<sup>16</sup> See appendix.

both its adherents and its detractors. Simultaneously, however, rhetoric and early modern rhetorical education provide indispensable tools for self-examination and reflection, tools that benefit conscientious students of rhetoric in a variety of ways. Both of these views are played out through the use (and abuse) of questions in the two plays.

Throughout this thesis, I concentrate on how the characters in these plays succeed and fail in employing the kinds of rhetorical practices emphasized in grammar school instruction. For example, in *Othello*, I consider Othello's and Iago's aptitudes for arguing *in utramque partem*, on both sides of the question, and in *Lear*, I analyze the characters' facility in *imitatio*. Many critics have analyzed the influence of these exercises on Shakespeare as a writer. But these practices and principles did not just implicitly inform Shakespeare's thought and writing processes; they explicitly influenced the action of his plays. *Imitatio* and arguing *in utramque partem* were more than just rhetorical exercises; they also formed the basis of the thinking, speaking, and writing habits for students of rhetoric in the early modern period and thus for the characters in Shakespeare's plays. The rhetorical successes and failures of the characters reveal much about Shakespeare's complex relationship with rhetoric. As I hope to show, the characters in *Othello* and *King Lear*, like early modern students, either internalize or fail to internalize these principles to their ultimate benefit or detriment. By examining how the characters apply and fail to apply the principles of rhetoric, I aim to illustrate the plays' complex views of rhetoric as an art that can lead to self-knowledge or to self-destruction—and sometimes to both.

## CHAPTER 2

### *IN UTRAMQUE PARTEM: TWO FACES OF RHETORIC IN OTHELLO*

Of all Shakespeare's plays, *Othello* has the highest proportion of question marks, with a question mark roughly every 6.7 lines. Many reasons may explain this, but chief among them is that *Othello* is largely a play about doubt and uncertainty. It turns on the doubt of Othello, who begins the play speaking mainly in the declarative or imperative but speaks more and more in the interrogative as the play proceeds. His doubt is engendered by Iago, who frequently uses the question as a rhetorical tool. Questions make up a large part of the dialogue between Othello and Iago, and Iago seems particularly at home within that medium, using questions at key points in the "temptation scene":

Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,  
Know of your love? (3.3.94-95)<sup>17</sup>

You would be satisfied?...  
And may—but how? how satisfied, my lord?  
Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on?  
Behold her topped? (3.3.396-399)

Tell me but this,  
Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief  
Spotted with strawberries, in your wife's hand? (3.3.436-438)

On one occasion, he even works his inquiry on the audience:

And what's he then that says I play the villain?  
When this advice is free I give and honest,  
Probal to thinking and indeed the course  
To win the Moor again? (2.3.331-334)

How am I then a villain

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<sup>17</sup> All quotations are taken from the Arden edition of *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann, London: Bloomsbury, 1997.

to counsel Cassio to this parallel course  
directly to his good? (2.3.343-345)

Iago's questions are rhetorical in the most basic sense: they are not designed to inquire but to persuade, and furthermore, to persuade in a manner that is undetectable. Iago's and Othello's uses (and misuses) of questions throughout the play reveal much about their rhetorical habits, and thus reveal much about Shakespeare's complex attitude toward rhetoric and its power for both self-reflection and destruction.

In the first part of this section, I argue that the characters in *Othello* have two conflicting understandings of rhetoric and rhetorical ability and thus represent two different faces of rhetoric in the early modern period. While rhetoric primarily provides Othello with a pleasing, ornamented style of speech, it is, for Iago, a malleable medium that allows him to speak in many different voices. Othello uses rhetoric to carve a place for himself inside of Venetian society, and Iago uses rhetoric to subvert the order Othello has so carefully created. Most importantly, though Othello understands the tropes, figures, and ornaments of rhetoric, he has not mastered its underlying principles and habits of mind, as Iago has. For example, though Iago's speech is not, like Othello's, ornamental, not apparently rhetorical, he possesses the ability to speak spontaneously and persuasively on any subject; to imitate the speech of others to add weight and authority to his own; to perform not just with his words, but with his whole body; and perhaps most importantly, to see all sides of an issue at once, arguing both sides of any question. He understands that a rhetorician is an essentially a role-player, and this philosophy informs his actions. Othello does not share with Iago these fundamental abilities and habits of mind, and this rhetorical deficiency ultimately helps to bring about his downfall. In the second part of this section, I explore Othello's and Iago's abilities in the familiar rhetorical practice of arguing both

sides of the question—in *utramque partem*. While arguing both sides of a question is one of Iago’s main strengths, it is one of Othello’s primary weaknesses.

As noted in the introduction, Cicero recommended arguing *in utramque partem* in order to “draw out and give shape to some result that may be either true or the nearest possible approximation to the truth” (475).<sup>18</sup> This practice formed the basis of rhetorical exercises for grammar school students, in which they were required “both to promote and deny a political or philosophical position derived from history” (McDonald 49).<sup>19</sup> But arguing *in utramque partem* is more than just an academic exercise: it is also a rhetorical philosophy that informs one’s view of the world. Its effects on the early modern pupil are concisely summarized by Russ McDonald:

Learning to promote opposing positions in equally convincing terms appears to have generated in the apt pupil a kind of perspectival understanding of the world, a consciousness of the provisional nature of all philosophical positions and of the contribution of rhetoric to the validity of all ideas...The ultimate effect of rhetorical training, in other words, must have been not only verbal but also philosophical. (49)

Wayne Rebhorn notes that for many scholars,

[T]he rhetoric of the period is remarkable for its connections to skepticism, its sense of the contingency and uncertainty of the world of experience, its recognition of the gap between language and reality, and its resulting commitment to dialogue and debate rather than dogmatic assertion...In their analyses, perhaps the most important aspect of Renaissance rhetoric is its practice of training students to argue on both sides of issues, the *argumentum in utramque partem*, a practice directly based on the skeptical epistemology built into the art and leading almost logically to the production of a world view that is necessarily tentative, exploratory, and dialogic. (14)

Though, as Rebhorn argues, early modern rhetoricians were more interested in the use of rhetoric as a means of power or control, this “perspectival understanding of the world” was nevertheless a consequence, whether intended or unintended, of early modern education. Certainly, it is, as

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<sup>18</sup> For Cicero’s discussion of arguing *in utramque partem*, see *Academica* II.iii.7-9, trans. H. Rackham, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1933.

<sup>19</sup> Many writings on education, including those of Juan Luis Vives, Roger Ascham, and John Brinsley, encourage such a practice, and many recommend the exercises of Aphthonius’s *Progymnasmata*. See Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 26-30.

McDonald points out, a “defining feature” of Shakespearean drama (49). Joel Altman goes further, suggesting that it is a defining feature of *all* early modern drama—that “these plays did not merely raise questions, in the general sense, but literally were questions,” questions that are argued on both sides but never fully resolved (3).<sup>20</sup> My argument in this section will apply the philosophy of the argument *in utramque partem* on a more local level. I am not examining how *Othello* is itself an argument *in utramque partem*, but how its characters employ the technique and how the philosophy of arguing in this way informs (or fails to inform) their thoughts and actions.

Though he proves himself an adept orator in the first acts of the play, Othello does not, like the rhetorician, dwell in ambiguity and thus lacks the vital skill of arguing *in utramque partem*. Iago, whose ability to argue both sides of a question is unequalled by any character in the play, manipulates this deficiency by using questions rhetorically to provoke doubt within Othello. While Iago comfortably busies himself in role-playing, arguing all sides of the question at hand to all his listeners, he forces Othello into a position of doubt that is unfamiliar to him. Othello, who moves through the world speaking in commands and declarations, cannot navigate the questions and doubts provoked by Iago, cannot argue both sides of any question. Because of this rhetorical deficiency, he inevitably comes to the fatal conclusion that Desdemona has been unfaithful to him. Though Iago’s rhetorical skill proves to be Othello’s undoing, rhetorical methods also provide the only means by which to uncover truth in the face of Iago’s rhetorical manipulation. The only way for Othello to thwart Iago’s destructive rhetoric is by using the very method Iago epitomizes: the ability to argue *in utramque partem*.

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<sup>20</sup> See *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

Brian Vickers has called Iago “Shakespeare’s greatest rhetorician,” and most critics concur (434).<sup>21</sup> But while Iago is indeed a skillful rhetorician, he is not the play’s greatest orator. That title belongs to Othello, who speaks in formal and ornamental verse for most of the play and whose characteristic feature, according to Ian Smith, is eloquence (176). Unlike Iago, who is comfortable in both prose and verse, Othello only uses prose just before and in the immediate aftermath of his epileptic episode. His verse is generally hyperbolic and image-rich, and his first speech alone uses a number of words that are unique or rare in Shakespeare: “out-tongue,” “promulgate,” “demerits,” “unbonneted,” “unhoused,” and “circumscription” (1.2.19, 21-23, 26-27). Even on the brink of a skirmish, Othello retains his eloquence: “Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them” (1.2.59); “Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it / Without a prompter” (1.2.83-84). But though his speech is ornamental, he speaks primarily in simple, confident declaratives and imperatives.<sup>22</sup>

I fetch my life and being  
From men of royal siege, (1.2.21-22)

My parts, my title and my perfect soul  
Shall manifest me rightly. (1.2.31-32)

Hold your hands,  
Both you of my inclining and the rest: (1.2.81-82)

That I have ta’en away this old man’s daughter  
It is most true; true, I have married her. (1.3.79-80)

She loved me for the dangers I had passed  
And I loved her that she did pity them. (1.3.168-169)

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<sup>21</sup> See Brian Vickers, “‘The Power of Persuasion’: Images of the Orator, Elyot to Shakespeare,” in *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983; Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare Use of the Arts of Language*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1947, p. 234; Ken Jacobsen, “Iago’s Art of War: The ‘Machiavellian Moment’ in Othello,” *Modern Philology* 106.3 (2009), p. 498; and Marion Trousdale, *Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982, p. 162.

<sup>22</sup> For more on Othello’s declaratives, see Madeleine Doran, “Iago’s ‘If—’: Conditional and Subjunctive in Othello,” in *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Language*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976, pp. 65-70.

When we first meet Othello, he is a confident, cool commander, but also an eloquent orator, full of metaphor and poetry.

Throughout the play, and beginning in the very first scene, Iago bemoans both Othello's command and his grandiose style: he complains that Othello has evaded the "great ones of the city" (1.1.7), whom Iago has sent to recommend him for the lieutenantcy, "with a bombast circumstance / Horribly stuffed with epithets of war" (1.1.12-13). He criticizes Othello's overblown vocabulary, seizing on his pretentious use of the word "certes" (1.1.15). He continues to mock Othello's style of speech when he speaks to Roderigo of Desdemona: "Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor, but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies—and will she love him still for prating?" (2.1.220-222). He has similar objections to Othello's choice of second, "One Michael Cassio" (1.1.19) whose soldiership is "Mere prattle without practice" (1.1.25). Cassio, upon his arrival at Cyprus, speaks lines that rival even Othello's bombastic speeches. His orations on Desdemona, set against the blunt and simple questions of Montano and the soldiers of Cyprus, illustrate the excessiveness of his speech, his almost ridiculous use of *copia*. When Montano inquires about Othello's marriage, Cassio replies that Desdemona "paragons description and wild fame," "excels the quirks of blazoning pens," and "in th'essential vesture of creation / Does tire the inginer" (2.1.62-65). Furthermore,

    Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds,  
    The guttered rocks and congregated sands,  
    Traitors ensteeped to clog the guiltless keel,  
    As having sense of beauty, do omit  
    Their mortal natures, letting go safely by  
    The divine Desdemona.           (2.1.68-73)

When Desdemona finally arrives on the scene, he proclaims,

                                  O, behold,  
The riches of the ship is come on shore:  
You men of Cyprus, let her have your knees!

Hail to thee, lady, and the grace of heaven,  
Before, behind thee, and on every hand  
Enwheel thee round! (2.1.82-87)

A bombast circumstance, indeed. His prayers to Jove for the guardianship of Othello are no less extravagant. No one else in the scene, “the divine Desdemona” included, seems to match his enthusiasm or rhetorical excess. Iago later calls Cassio “a knave very voluble” (2.1.235-236), which, in light of Cassio’s grandiose speeches earlier in the scene, seems generous.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, bound up in Iago’s “resentment of privilege,” as E. A. J. Honigmann terms it (35), is a resentment of Cassio’s and Othello’s courtly rhetoric, as the play consistently makes clear.

Othello’s florid style, mocked by Iago, along with his abilities as a rhetorician, shows most prominently in the third scene of Act 1, Othello’s trial before the senate. The trial gives Othello an admirable opportunity to showcase his rhetorical abilities in a setting not unlike that of a school. Immediately before the senate scene, Brabantio accuses Othello of having beguiled Desdemona with “foul charms, / Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals / That weakens motions” (1.2.73-74). He then declares, “I’ll have it disputed on,” calling to mind the school exercise of disputation (1.2.75).<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the whole scene, and especially Othello’s defense of himself, resembles such an exercise. Disputations were premised on questions, and the question here is, of course, the means by which Othello has won Desdemona: whether by “indirect and forced courses” or “request and such fair question / As soul to soul affordeth” (1.3.112, 114-115). In an “overt test” administered by the Duke (1.3.108), both disputants,

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<sup>23</sup> And Iago is not the only one who notices Cassio’s extravagant, courtly speech: the clown in 3.1 also mocks him (28-29).

<sup>24</sup> Brinsley recommends grammatical disputations (from a textbook by John Stockwood) to prepare grammar school students for disputations on “moral philosophy” practiced at universities. For more on disputation, see Olga Weijers, *In Search of the Truth: A History of Disputation Techniques from Antiquity to Early Modern Times*, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013.

Othello and Brabantio, present their own side in the debate. Othello, with the aid of Desdemona, not only wins this debate but impresses the senate with his oratorical ability.

Othello's defense is in fact designed to remind his audience of his rhetorical skill, justifying his place in Venetian society and thus proving his innocence, as both Lynn Enterline and Ian Smith point out.<sup>25</sup> Othello, in a popular rhetorical move, claims to be "Rude...in my speech / And little blest with that soft phrase of peace" (1.3.82-83) and pledges to "a round unvarnished tale deliver / Of my whole course of love" with Desdemona (1.3.91-92). But it is unlikely that anyone in the senate believes his claims to rude speech, and his tale is not quite "unvarnished." Though his story is indeed simple, he uses a variety of rhetorical tropes and figures in its telling and the language, as is typical with Othello, is ornamental. Additionally, he proves his rhetorical worth by telling a story about how his telling of stories won Desdemona, pointing to rhetoric as the "only...witchcraft I have used" (1.3.170). Othello further emphasizes his rhetorical ability by highlighting his sophisticated sense of decorum, which Peter Mack defines as "the doctrine of suiting style to subject-matter and oration to audience" (332).<sup>26</sup> When relating his conversations with Brabantio, he notes that Brabantio's questions provided "my hint to speak" (1.3.143); a few lines later, he relates Desdemona's forward comment that Othello's story could woo her and says, "Upon this hint I spake" (1.3.167). Othello speaks the right words at the right times to the right audiences, and makes a point of emphasizing his knowledge of rhetorical convention.

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<sup>25</sup> For more on this, as well as the relationships among rhetoric, barbarism, race, and gender, see Ian Smith, "Barbarian Errors: Performing Race in Early Modern England," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49.2 (1998), pp. 168-186 and Lynn Enterline, "Eloquent Barbarians: Othello and the Critical Potential of Passionate Character," in *Othello: The State of Play*, ed. Lena Cowen Orlin, London: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 145-179.

<sup>26</sup> See the useful "Glossary of Rhetorical and Dialectical Terms" in Mack's *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric 1380-1620*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Significantly, the word “question” figures prominently in this scene, and its use provides additional insight into Othello’s relationship with the Venetians and with rhetoric.<sup>27</sup> Othello, in the act of being questioned by the senate, implies that Brabantio’s more innocent questioning has put him in this position in the first place: he declares that Brabantio “loved me, oft invited me, / Still questioned me the story of my life” (1.3.129-130). Othello obediently responds to Brabantio’s interrogation, telling his story “even from my boyish days / To th’ very moment that he bade me tell it” (1.3.133-134). From Brabantio’s questioning arises Desdemona’s own interrogation—perhaps what the senator hints at when he asks Othello:

Did you by indirect and forced courses  
Subdue and poison this young maid’s affections?  
Or came it by request and such fair question  
As soul to soul affordeth? (1.3.112-115)

These last two lines, though somewhat perplexing, indicate the senator believes it possible not only that Desdemona initiated their relationship by request but that her questioning of Othello was the beginning point of that relationship. Othello, it seems, is often questioned by the people of Venice, and he has developed rhetorical strategies for answering such questions, thus assimilating himself into Venetian society. He consistently uses ornamental language and rhetorical techniques to navigate his adopted society, responding, for example, to Brabantio and Desdemona with varnished tales of his past and then to the senate with a rhetorical defense of his courtship. When the Duke observes, “I think this tale would win my daughter too” (1.3.172), he might mean either Othello’s tale to Desdemona or his “unvarnished tale” before the senate—both are designed to answer and to please Othello’s auditors.

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<sup>27</sup> There are six uses of the word “question” in the play, and three of them are in this scene (1.3.24, 114, and 130).

But not everyone is taken with Othello's rhetoric. After the matter is settled, the Duke offers words of advice to Brabantio, telling him that what's done is done and encouraging him not to "rob himself" by spending a "bootless grief" (1.3.210). But Brabantio is not encouraged:

These sentences to sugar or to gall,  
Being strong on both sides, are equivocal.  
But words are words: I never yet did hear  
That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear. (1.2.217-220)

In this speech, Brabantio responds to the sentences of the Duke, which both sweeten and embitter him equally, being "strong on both sides." But since he has called for a disputation in which both sides have presented their case, he might just as well be referring to the arguments that he and Othello have both put forward. For Brabantio, these arguments are equivocal, one side being as strong as the other, and he ultimately discounts them as "mere words," rhetorical flourishes that have little power to move him. The disputation before the senate and Brabantio's words here prepare audiences for what is to come. There will be more arguments on both sides throughout the play, and there is more to be said about the ability of words to pierce the "bruised heart."

*Othello's* characters consistently associate ornamental speech and rhetorical ability with those who have ambitions or pretensions related to the military and the court, particularly with Othello and Cassio. It may seem surprising that soldiers should wish to develop rhetorical skills. However, as Mack notes, "Under Elizabeth even members of the military aristocracy had to learn (and had to present themselves as possessing) skills of presenting persuasive arguments if they wished to be attended to in council" (3).<sup>28</sup> It is obvious from the senate scene that Othello has successfully learned these persuasive skills, while Iago, though a persuasive speaker in his own right, converses without the courtly elegance exemplified by Cassio and Othello. Based on

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<sup>28</sup> See *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Iago's resentment of Othello's and Cassio's courtly rhetoric, it seems possible that Cassio was promoted and Iago passed over in part because of the differences in their rhetorical abilities or at least because of their skill in relating to the Venetian aristocracy. Because they associate rhetorical ability with courtliness, characters like Othello and Cassio tend to overlook Iago's rhetorical skill, consistently regarding him as an "honest," plain-speaking soldier. In the beginning of the second act, shortly after their arrival on Cyprus, Cassio tells Desdemona that Iago "speaks home...you may relish him more in the soldier than in the scholar" (2.1.165-166), which, significantly, occasions Iago's first real promise to take his revenge on Cassio. ("With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio...I will gyve thee in thine own courtesies" [2.1.168-170].) If Iago has been passed over because of his rhetorical failings, he will make up for it by taking advantage of the rhetorical failings of Cassio and Othello to work their destruction.

Though Cassio and Othello never seem to notice it, Iago proves his rhetorical ability early in the play. While some critics have been troubled by bawdy exchange between Iago and Desdemona that occasions Cassio's disparaging comment,<sup>29</sup> this scene particularly showcases Iago's natural and proficient use of rhetorical techniques. Like Othello, he begins by insisting on his lack of ability, explicitly referencing rhetorical invention: "indeed my invention / Comes from my pate as birdlime does from frieze" (2.1.125-126). But the scene reveals that he does in fact possess sophisticated rhetorical skills, though these skills differ widely from the skills of Cassio and Othello. Important to this scene is Iago's aptitude for improvisation, which will be

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<sup>29</sup> In the seventh edition Arden (1958), M. R. Ridley calls it "one of the most unsatisfactory passages in Shakespeare" and notes that "[i]t is distasteful to watch [Desdemona] engaged in a long piece of cheap backchat with Iago, and so adept at it that one wonders how much time on the voyage was spent in the same way" (54). In *Disowning Knowledge*, Stanley Cavell remarks on "that difficult and dirty banter between [Desdemona] and Iago" (136). For more on this scene and its critical reception, see Harry Berger, Jr., "Desdemona on Cyprus" in *A Fury in the Words*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, pp. 109-119.

essential to his scheme later in the play, as he takes advantage of lucky chances like Emilia's discovery of the handkerchief and Cassio's opportune appearance in 4.1.<sup>30</sup> Desdemona asks him to compose wittily on different types of women, and he improvises a number of rhyming couplets on fair, black, foul, witty, and foolish women, proving his ability to speak quickly and cleverly on any subject. His witty compositions also exhibit his apt use of commonplaces and proverbs, an ability which will become essential to his interactions with Othello in the subsequent acts.<sup>31</sup> In this scene and in others, Iago uses a number of proverbs, and generally succeeds in making his own speech *sound* proverbial, to give his assertions weight and authority.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps more importantly, he is adept at mimicking authoritative speech, and imitation will become an important part of his manipulation of Othello. Additionally, in this scene and in others, Iago makes use not just of his speech but of his whole body by using gesture or *actio*, one of the five divisions of rhetoric, to sway and entertain his audience.<sup>33</sup> Though Iago uses gesture or facial expression to great effect throughout the play, he does so here by pretending to be stuck at the end of his rhyme for rhetorical effect, indicating a particular kind of facial expression or posture:

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<sup>30</sup> For more on Iago and improvisation, see Stephen Greenblatt, "The Improvisation of Power," in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 222-254.

<sup>31</sup> For more on this, see Joseph T. McCullen, Jr., "Iago's Use of Proverbs for Persuasion," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 4.2 (1964): 247-262. In this scene, E. A. J. Honigmann cites the proverb noted by R.W. Dent, F28: "Fair and foolish, black and proud, long and lazy, little and loud." See *Shakespeare's Proverbial Language: An Index*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

<sup>32</sup> For example: "Our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners" (1.3.321-322); "But men are men, the best sometimes forget" (2.3.237); "How poor are they that have not patience! / What wound did ever heal but by degrees?" (2.3.365-366); "Good name in man and woman... / Is the immediate jewel of their souls" (3.3.158-159); "Poor and content is rich, and rich enough, / But riches fineless is as poor as winter / To him that ever fears he shall be poor" (3.3.174-176); "It is a common thing...To have a foolish wife" (3.3.306, 308); "Her honour is an essence that's not seen, / They have it very oft that have it not" (4.1.16-17); "'tis the strumpet's plague / To beguile many and be beguiled by one" (4.1.97-98).

<sup>33</sup> Many early modern rhetoric manuals that are divided into Cicero's five parts contain sections on *actio*, sometimes called by other names. For example, Wilson uses "utterance," which he defines as "a framing of the voice, countenance, and gesture, after a comely manner" (50). Though this component was not, like the first three parts of rhetoric (*inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio*), privileged in rhetoric manuals, it evidently played a larger role in classroom instruction. For an in-depth discussion of *actio* in the schoolroom, see Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, pp. 38-48.

IAGO	She was a wight, if ever such wights were—
DESDEMONA	To do what?
IAGO	To suckle fools and chronicle small beer. (2.1.158-160)

Though these examples may, perhaps, seem insignificant, the rhetorical abilities Iago displays in this scene will all reappear later in his manipulation of Othello.

Iago's exchange with Desdemona and Emilia, coming as it does between Cassio's florid welcome and Othello's equally grandiose greeting to Desdemona, explicitly contrasts Iago's rhetorical abilities with those of Cassio and Othello: while Cassio and Othello are rhetorical orators, Iago is a rhetorical actor. But Othello and Cassio can neither share nor recognize Iago's rhetorical expertise. At the heart of the contrast between Othello's and Cassio's ornamental speeches and Iago's improvised banter are the characters' fundamentally different conceptions of rhetoric and its purposes. For Othello and Cassio, rhetoric is essentially artifice, in its most positive sense, or ornament. It is designed to be visible, ostentatious. Elevated style is a way to prove one's worth in the courtly society of Venice. Their rhetoric is meant to be seen, heard, and savored, and primarily provides a means of making their words pleasing, their speech refined and thus persuasive. By contrast, Iago's rhetoric is invisible, the art that conceals itself. He uses rhetorical methods not to beautify his speech so much as to manipulate his audiences. He does not bother to ornament the verbal surface of his words—his "rhetoric of simplicity," as Madeleine Doran calls it, is persuasive, deceptive, and most importantly undetectable to others (67). As Quentin Skinner observes, ancient rhetoricians all recognized plainness of speech as an essential element of persuasion,<sup>34</sup> and Iago's plainness allows him to succeed in a way that Cassio and Othello cannot. Unconcerned with verbal ornamentation, Iago is nevertheless proficient in his use of the foundational rhetorical principles. Iago's improvisational ability and

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<sup>34</sup> For a brief, useful discussion of plainness and ornament, see Skinner's *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 47-51.

use of his whole body make him the consummate actor, the worst nightmare of rhetoricians like Thomas Wilson who contend, echoing Quintilian, that “the wicked cannot speak well” (244).<sup>35</sup> His banter with Desdemona and later interactions with Othello reveal that Iago’s understanding of what rhetoric can do is deeper than either Cassio’s or Othello’s because he understands that rhetoric is more than ornament. It asks its user to become an improvisational, imitative role-player, able to shift in and out of identities as necessary and able to see the world from multiple perspectives.

Othello and Iago represent two different faces of rhetoric, which seem to vie for dominance throughout the play: while Iago, the actor, intuitively grasps rhetorical mindsets that enable him to play a variety of roles and see the world from others’ perspectives, Othello, whose understanding of rhetoric has developed as a result of his desire to please the Venetian aristocracy, understands rhetoric as pleasing ornamentation, persuasive verbal surface. This is a fundamental and dangerous misunderstanding of rhetoric on Othello’s part, primarily because it leaves him vulnerable to the invisible, unadorned rhetoric of Iago. As Bassanio observes in *The Merchant of Venice*, written a few years earlier, “The world is still deceived with ornament” (3.2.74). Othello is likewise deceived with ornament and verbal surface, using them as substitutes for a deeper understanding of rhetorical ability. While he succeeds in using tropes and figures to make his speech eloquent and persuasive, he does not understand rhetoric’s animating principles and works from a view of the world that is fundamentally un-rhetorical. Skinner notes that for Cicero and Quintilian, “[a]n orator can never hope to prove or demonstrate his conclusions beyond doubt (*demonstrare*); he can only hope to discuss and debate the rival merits of different points of view (*disserere*)” (103). Iago’s view of the world allows for such debate;

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<sup>35</sup> For more on the opposing styles of Othello and Iago, see Ken Jacobsen, “Iago’s Art of War: The ‘Machiavellian Moment’ in Othello,” *Modern Philology* 106.3 (2009), p. 502 and Giorgio Melchiori, “The Rhetoric of Character Construction: *Othello*,” *Shakespeare Survey 34: Characterization in Shakespeare* (1981), pp. 62-64.

Othello's does not. Moving confidently through a world of absolutes, Othello alternates between command and declaration and is, as I shall demonstrate, unable to dwell in rhetoric's world of question and possibility. Iago immediately sees the major weaknesses of this perspective, and he will exploit them using his own sharpened rhetorical ability.

Perhaps the most important rhetorical habit that Othello lacks is the ability to dwell in ambiguity, to argue *in utramque partem*. Iago uses this skill more effectively and more consistently than any other character in the play. His ability to argue both sides of the question is perhaps most evident in his statements about reputation and good name.<sup>36</sup> He first tells Cassio, "Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser" (2.3.264-267) and assures him that his lost reputation will not hamper him in winning back Othello. In the next act, Iago reverses course, telling Othello,

Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,  
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:  
Who steals my purse steals trash—'tis something-nothing,  
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands—  
But he that filches from me my good name  
Robs me of that which not enriches him  
And makes me poor indeed. (3.3.158-164)

If the question is about the importance of reputation, Iago can see and argue both sides, without really being committed to either one of them. He exemplifies Richard Lanham's *homo rhetoricus* who

assumes a natural agility in changing orientations...From birth, almost, he has dwelt not in a single value-structure but in several. He is thus committed to no single construction of the world; much rather, to prevailing in the game at hand...Rhetorical man is trained

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<sup>36</sup> For more on this, see Joel Altman, *The Improbability of Othello: Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, pp. 74-75.

not to discover reality but to manipulate it...He can play freely with language. For him it owes no transcendental loyalties. (4)

Iago's ability in arguing both sides of a question is both a cause and an effect of this worldview. Being committed to no single construction of the world, he can argue both sides of a question, as he does with the issue of reputation. But more than that, he can place himself on opposite sides of an issue in order to see things from the point of view of external others. This is, in part, why he can so effectively manipulate Othello. One of the primary advantages of being able to argue *in utramque partem* is the ability to predict opponents' reactions and anticipate counterarguments. Iago's Janus-like double vision allows him to exploit Othello's anxieties about his age, race, and outsider status as well as his "free and open nature" (1.3.398); Cassio's effusive, courtly demeanor; and Desdemona's generosity. Stephen Greenblatt notes this when he points out Iago's improvisational skill, enabled by his sense of empathy.<sup>37</sup> The ability is, in essence, a rhetorical one. Iago is able to succeed primarily because he can argue *in utramque partem*, see every side of an issue at once.

If Iago is Lanham's rhetorical man, Othello is his *homo seriusus*. Though Othello has learned to use rhetoric to his advantage in navigating Venetian social and political circles, he is missing the vital rhetorical ability that Iago possesses. Othello does not dwell in ambiguity, does not, as Doran notes, "entertain *if's*" (64)<sup>38</sup>: "to be once in doubt," he declares, "Is once to be resolved" (3.3.182-183). Iago responds, "I am glad of this" (3.3.196)—and what rhetorician would not be glad of an audience so easily persuaded, who cannot exist in doubt even for a moment? Iago is so assured of Othello's resoluteness on this point that later in the scene he can urge patience, telling Othello, "your mind perhaps may change" (3.3.455). Othello responds:

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<sup>37</sup> See Greenblatt, "The Improvisation of Power," *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. 222-254.

<sup>38</sup> For more on this point, see Doran, "Iago's 'If—': Conditional and Subjunctive in *Othello*," *Shakespeare's Dramatic Language*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976.

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 the Hellespont:  
Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace  
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love  
Till that a capable and wide revenge  
Swallow them up. Now by yond marble heaven  
I here engage my words. (3.3.456-465)

Othello here pronounces a florid, ornamental speech, vowing never (the words appears four times in nine lines) to change his mind. Though such a speech makes use of rhetorical techniques, its ideas are against the foundational principles of such techniques, resistant to the exploratory mindsets that characterize the rhetorical injunction to argue all sides of a question. Othello can ornament his words but cannot recognize and make use of rhetoric's animating assumptions about the complex nature of truth.

This deficiency is most plainly depicted in Othello's reactions to Iago's questions. Doran asserts that Iago's method is "to introduce doubt into Othello's confidence" (67-68). While Doran concentrates on Iago's use of conditional sentences, I will concentrate here on his use of questions to provoke doubt, as Iago uses the question in a variety of ways in his manipulation of Othello. Because Othello lives confidently in a world of command and declaration, Iago uses questions, which are foreign to Othello, to dismantle his surety. His primary strategies are illustrated in the very beginning of Othello's temptation. Iago's first move is to provoke questions from Othello himself. It is a strategy that forces Othello into a position of agency; it is not Iago who questions Othello, but Othello who questions Iago. To Iago's simple "Ha, I like not that" (3.3.34), Othello responds, "What dost thou say?...Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?" (3.3.35, 37). Othello is, significantly, the first of the two to mention Cassio's name in relation to Desdemona. Iago will use this strategy multiple times throughout the play, because it

allows Othello to take the active part of questioner while Iago skillfully steers his thoughts from behind the scenes, rendering his manipulation invisible. Iago's next move is to question Othello directly: "Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady, / know of your love?" (3.3.93-94). This provokes from Othello yet more questions: "Why dost thou ask?...Why of thy thought, Iago?" (3.3.96, 98). In prompting these questions, Iago allows Othello to do much of his work for him. The mere inkling of doubt in Iago can provoke an avalanche of doubt, and thus an avalanche of questions, in Othello.

Othello's eager questions lead to Iago's most effective rhetorical move, the use of mimesis. His manipulation consists not simply of questioning or being questioned by Othello but rather of using the question, along with various rhetorical figures of repetition, to reflect Othello's doubt back to him, imitating and amplifying it in the process of its repetition. This is illustrated most clearly in the sequence that follows Iago's first question about Cassio. Othello tells Iago that Cassio served as a go-between in his courtship with Desdemona. Iago characteristically responds with a cryptic exclamation:

IAGO	Indeed?
OTHELLO	Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught in that? Is he not honest?
IAGO	Honest, my lord?
OTHELLO	Honest? Ay, honest.
IAGO	My lord, for aught I know.
OTHELLO	What dost thou think?
IAGO	Think, my lord?
OTHELLO	Think, my lord! By heaven, thou echo'st me As if there were some monster in thy thought Too hideous to be shown. (3.3.101-111)

As Stefan D. Keller observes, this strategy involves the use of *anadiplosis*, which Puttenham terms "the redouble" (200), the rhetorical figure in which, according to Peacham, "the last word of a first clause is the beginning of the second" (46). Significantly, as Keller notes, the

*anadiplosis* in these lines is split between two speakers, rather than being employed by one speaker only (404).<sup>39</sup> In this short exchange, the beginning of Othello's larger temptation, Iago draws Othello into his rhetorical web, as Othello's thoughts and then his words fill in the gaps of Iago's cryptic speech. Iago sets this remarkable trap primarily by using questions to draw out Othello's doubts, and then repeat them back to him. The "monster" is not in Iago's thought, but in Othello's. Iago simply uses repetitious questions to place the monster continually in the forefront of Othello's mind.<sup>40</sup>

At this point, the play interrupts itself, with a short scene between Desdemona and the clown, in which Desdemona inquires about Cassio's lodging. Honigmann observes that the episode "arrests the play as it gathers tragic momentum" and is "self-absorbed." But like *Macbeth's* porter scene, to which Honigmann compares it, Desdemona's exchange with the clown is thematically significant. After some punning banter about where Cassio "lies," the clown finally comes to the point:

CLOWN	I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a lodging and say he lies here, or he lies there, were to lie in mine own throat.
DESDEMONA	Can you enquire him out and be edified by report?
CLOWN	I will catechize the world for him, that is, make questions and by them answer. (3.4.11-17)

Just as Othello's problem is becoming clear, the clown's witty response offers a solution, the way to find out where Iago "lies": Othello must "make questions and by them answer" the question of whether or not his wife is unfaithful. Question and answer is, after all, the mode in which catechisms and textbooks were written, the way to dispute and settle matters of law and philosophy, and ultimately, as some pedagogues have contended, the only way to truth. Rather

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<sup>39</sup> See "Combining Rhetoric and Pragmatics to Read Othello," *English Studies*, 91.4 (2010): 398–411.

<sup>40</sup> Since Iago also has a tendency to mock others by repeating them, as Honigmann observes (301), this may give Iago the secret added pleasure of ridiculing the oblivious Othello. For Iago's repetitions of others, see the mimicry of Othello at 1.1.15-16 and his echoes of Brabantio at 1.1.116-117, Roderigo at 2.1.249, Emilia at 3.3.305-310 (Emilia picks up on this at 311), Othello again at 3.3.442-443, and finally Bianca at 5.1.74-75.

than openly question Desdemona about Iago's accusations, Othello enters this scene with a fixed mind. Desdemona's hand is moist; therefore he concludes she is liberal and lustful. Believing that she has given away her handkerchief, he tells her a superstitious tale of its magic before he asks her where it is. This makes it virtually impossible for Desdemona to admit to its loss—something she might have done before hearing its story, since she believes that Othello is “true of mind, and made of no such baseness / As jealous creatures are” (3.4.27-28). But in light of the handkerchief's importance, her confession would have mattered little, since Othello would likely not have believed her. Othello does not share the rhetorician's “commitment to dialogue and debate rather than dogmatic assertion” (Rebhorn 14). He lives in the world of declaratives and absolutes. Missing the rhetorical skill of arguing both sides of a question, he is unable to handle the questions and doubts of Iago—questions and doubts that too quickly become his own—or even to question his own wife effectively about her supposed infidelity.

By the beginning of Act 4, the bulk of Iago's work is done. Othello will do much of the rest himself. Since to be once in doubt is once to be resolved, Othello is practically resolved already, needing little proof for his resolutions. Iago must only make sure he comes to the appropriate conclusion—easily done by fabricating the evidence of Cassio's dream, the handkerchief, and finally Cassio's confession. By the fourth act, Othello is so caught in Iago's web that their roles reverse: rather than Iago echoing the questions and doubts of Othello, Othello now echoes the questions of Iago. Like Brinsley's schoolchildren repeating the questions of their schoolmaster, Othello repeats Iago's questions:

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



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!—To confess, and be hanged for his labour! First to be hanged, and then to confess: I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips. Is't possible? Confess! handkerchief! O devil! (4.1.35-43)

Iago's repetitions of questions and reflections of doubt have made Othello an echo chamber within himself. Othello insists that, "It is not words that shakes me thus," glossed by Honigmann as "mere words." But Othello's insistence on this point only foregrounds the fact that it *is* mere words that shake him. Iago himself admits, not much earlier, that "yet we see nothing done, / She may be honest yet" (3.3.435-436). Though his careful use of the word "yet" implies that it is only a matter of time before a discovery is made, Iago is right: Othello has seen nothing done. He has not even, at this point, "seen" Cassio "confess" to his crimes or spotted the damning handkerchief in Bianca's hands. Though one could argue that Othello is not shaken by words but by images begot of his own imagination, these images are still conjured by words—the words of Iago that Othello adopts as words of his own. Words powerful enough to throw Othello into an epileptic fit and motivate the murder of his wife and the attempted murder of his lieutenant.

In the next scene, Othello has regained command of himself, as evidenced by his resumption of verse for prose. Having resolved his doubts, he returns to the declarative and imperative and resumes his ornamental speech. Even when he asks questions, as in his short conversation with Emilia, he is assured of their answers. Despite Emilia's protestations, he declares, "Yes, you have seen Cassio and...she together" and assures himself that Desdemona is a "subtle whore," daring her to swear to her loyalty and damn herself in the process (4.2.3, 21). He returns to the ornament that trimmed his first scene in a speech that uses a number of rhetorical techniques:

DESDEMONA            Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?



question. Classical authorities like Aristotle and Cicero assert that the goal of arguing both sides of a question is to begin approaching truth. Through Cicero sees truth as contingent and obscure, he advocates for debating *in utramque partem* to come as near to the truth as possible.

Developing the ability to argue both sides of the question might have led Othello to a more skeptical viewpoint, to a “sense of the contingency and uncertainty of the world of experience,” a “recognition of the gap between language and reality,” a “resulting commitment to dialogue and debate rather than dogmatic assertion” (Rebhorn 14)—all things such a practice promotes—which would have allowed him to argue both sides in the question of his wife’s unfaithfulness and ultimately prevented his tragedy. But Othello has a fundamental misunderstanding of rhetoric, and though he is a skillful orator, he has not learned these kinds of rhetorical practices. Thus, while Iago’s rhetoric proves to be Othello’s undoing, it is only by adapting himself to the foundational principles and skills of rhetoric that his tragedy could have been prevented.

### CHAPTER 3

#### IMITATION, INNOVATION, AND IMPERIUM: RHETORICAL EDUCATION IN *KING LEAR*

“It has often been said of late,” observed Arthur Kinney in 1976, “that *King Lear* is written in the imperative mood, but it is not; its natural mood is the interrogative. Proclamations, commands, and prayers all transform into questions and debate....This tragedy has fewer soliloquies and more questions; fewer rhetorical set-pieces and more oaths, cries, and silences” (711). Twenty-five years later, Russ McDonald remarked similarly: “During a performance of *King Lear*...although the audience may not be consciously aware of it, the King’s style of speech shifts radically from the grand imperatives heard at his first entrance to the more vulnerable interrogative mood he assumes on the heath” (7).<sup>41</sup> Kinney and McDonald both make apt observations, for in a ranking of Shakespeare’s tragedies by number of question marks, *King Lear* comes in third. It ranks fifth in a count that includes all of Shakespeare’s plays.<sup>42</sup> And written just two years after *Othello*, it shares the same preoccupation with the rhetoric of questions and questioning.

In this section, I argue first that the use and abuse of questions in *King Lear* reveal Shakespeare’s profound skepticism about eloquence as a gateway to, or marker of, authority and about the textbook view that rhetoric, and early modern methods for teaching it, is a means to moral improvement. I explore the rhetorical skillfulness of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund and

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<sup>41</sup> See Arthur Kinney, “King Lear,” *The Massachusetts Review* 17.4 (1976): 677-712 and Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>42</sup> See appendix.

discuss their proficiency in imitation, which Richard Halpern calls the “principle that animates not only humanist stylistics but also humanist pedagogy” (29), arguing that imitative practices allow these students of rhetoric to create their own voices through the voices of others. As good grammar school students, they borrow the language and styles of their elders and begin to develop patterns of speech that both emulate and transform their models. The speech of Lear’s rhetoricians, like Shakespeare’s plays themselves, is both imitative and innovative, copied and original. The rhetorical skill of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund that allows them to adopt and manipulate the speech patterns of their elders ultimately facilitates their rise to power. The rhetorical education of these characters has produced subjects who are skilled in imitating obedience to authority, able to mask their subversive tendencies with an outward show of deference when such a show is warranted but also able to throw it off when such deference is no longer useful.

The ultimate deaths of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, along with the fall of Lear, reveal that the play also views the ambition that rhetoric can provoke and the authority that it can gain as an impediment to self-reflection, a barrier to productively questioning the self and the larger world. But this skeptical view of rhetoric and rhetorical methods is complicated by Lear’s own development throughout the play, as I argue in the second section. In his journey toward self-awareness, Lear is aided by early modern teaching methods and rhetorical devices, specifically by the fool’s catechistic questioning and his own developing skills in imitative rhetorical questioning. This development is demonstrated by a marked shift in Lear’s patterns of questioning. As he sheds his “grand imperatives” (McDonald 7), his questions become for the first time truly interrogative, and he develops a worldview that is more aligned with the rhetorical understanding of the world discussed in the last chapter: a “perspectival

understanding” that is “tentative, exploratory, and dialogic” (McDonald 49; Rebhorn 14).

Rhetorical ability is, in this play, the root of self-destruction or of self-knowledge. For Lear and Edmund, it is the root of both.

*King Lear*'s concern with rhetoric is apparent from its very first scene, in which Lear makes of his daughters an unusual request:

Tell me, my daughters—  
Since now we will divest us both of rule,  
Interest of territory, cares of state—  
Which of you shall we say doth love us most,  
That we our largest bounty may extend  
Where nature doth with merit challenge. –Goneril,  
Our eldest born, speak first. (1.1.48-54)<sup>43</sup>

Oddly, Lear directs this question to himself—“Which of you shall *we* say doth love *us* most” (emphasis mine). But his commands, “tell me” and “speak first,” make his intention clear: though he predictably keeps the focus on himself, he is asking his daughters to respond to a request. The request, however, is grammatically confusing, beginning with a command (“Tell me, my daughters”) and moving, at least in the quarto editions which omit lines 49-50, directly into a question (“Which of you shall we say doth love us most”).<sup>44</sup> This confusion is reflected in various editions of the play. Though the query here is evident, no question mark appears in either the second quarto or the folio. The first quarto, however, perplexingly includes a question mark at the end of line 54: “Gonorill our eldest borne, speake first?”<sup>45</sup> (Perhaps the compositor also found this speech perplexing.) The passage I have quoted here, from R.A. Foakes’s Arden

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<sup>43</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotations are taken from R.A. Foakes’s Arden edition of *King Lear*, London: Bloomsbury, 1997.

<sup>44</sup> Even in the Folio, lines 49-50 (“Since now we will divest us both of rule, / Interest of territory, cares of state”) are printed in parentheses.

<sup>45</sup> Quotations of particular folio or quarto editions are taken from the *Internet Shakespeare Editions*, ed. Michael Best and Pervez Rizvi.

edition, follows the folio, including no question mark at all. In modern editions of the play, however, the omission of the question mark is not standard. Many editions include a question mark either after line 51 (“Which of you shall we say doth love us most?”) or after line 53, the end of the grammatical sentence (“Where nature doth with merit challenge?”). The ambiguity here is further complicated by the fact that audiences of the play have no access to the question marks (or lack thereof) in the text—an actor might choose to deliver the line in the tone of a question or of a command. The confusion extends even to the characters in the play: while Goneril and Regan respond to the request as if it were a command requiring prompt obedience, Cordelia responds as if it were a question requiring truthful reply. And though Cordelia believes herself to be obedient (1.1.98), Goneril informs her sister that she has “obedience scanted” (1.1.280).<sup>46</sup>

Most critics have, implicitly or explicitly, characterized Lear’s declaration as *either* question or command. Both Madeleine Doran and William Downes, however, have recognized it as simultaneously imperative and interrogative.<sup>47</sup> Here, I follow Doran and Downes and characterize the request as a power-question, a query that is used primarily to command or to establish the speaker’s authority. As Doran notes, Lear’s questions “are not truly queries, but demands” (95), making them rhetorical in the strictest sense: they are not meant to inquire. Lear’s questions, here and throughout the play, are also rhetorical in the sense that they are meant to exert control. Wayne Rebhorn observes that when early modern rhetoricians define rhetoric and describe its uses, “they stress its power above all else, specifically the power it puts

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<sup>46</sup> The final lines of Lear’s first speech do not comprise the only ambiguous utterance in the play’s first scene. Burgundy’s first line reads like a demand, but interestingly, all original editions of the play punctuate it with a question mark: “I crave no more than hath your highness offered— / Nor will you tender less?” (1.1.195-195).

<sup>47</sup> See Madeleine Doran, “‘Give me the map there!’ Command, Question, and Assertion in King Lear,” *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Language*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976, p. 95 and William Downes, “Discourse and drama: King Lear’s ‘question’ to his daughters,” *The Taming of the Text*, ed. W. van Peer, London: Routledge, 1988.

in the hands of the orator to control the will and desire of the audience” (15). Lear’s questions function in similar ways. In Lear’s usage, the power-question is deliberately ambiguous, meant both to display power and to concede power—but only under certain conditions—through the giving of land. Though Lear does indeed ask a question of his daughters, its purpose is not strictly to learn how much they love him, but to command them to make predictable, if not rehearsed, declarations of their love. Lear uses the question to establish his authority over his daughters by presenting his intention to give out the land he chooses based on the degree to which their answers please him. The paradox here is, of course, that Lear claims to be dividing his authority as monarch but at the same time seeks to establish and maintain his power, even through the act of giving it away. As will later become evident, Lear’s daughters appropriate the power-question for similar purposes throughout the play.

The practical aim of Lear’s power-question is to engage his daughters in a battle of wits. He is, in effect, asking them to play a rhetorical game, a game with very high stakes indeed. By this game of question and answer, audiences are immediately aware of the rhetorical world in which the characters operate and the rhetorical skill that is required for social elevation within it.<sup>48</sup> The love-test both lays the groundwork for a rhetorical interpretation of the play and reveals the rhetorical abilities of Lear’s daughters. Goneril and Regan, as apt courtiers and rhetoricians, agree to play the game, responding ceremonially to Lear’s request with speeches that are highly ornamental. Though it is possible the speeches are rehearsed, it seems equally likely that the daughters are making impromptu declarations of their love, composing extempore. I am inclined to agree with Richard Strier on this point: the love-test is likely not a planned ceremony but the

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<sup>48</sup> In fact, social mobility was, in many cases, the purpose of rhetorical education or at least often a direct consequence of it. For more on the links between social mobility and rhetorical ability, see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-century Europe*, London: Duckworth & Co., 1986 and Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

first in a “set of spontaneous bad decisions” Lear will make in the course of the scene (180).<sup>49</sup> If this is true, then his daughters are reacting to his power-question equally spontaneously. The replies of the elder daughters, however, indicate that they are not wholly unprepared for such a challenge. Even under extreme public scrutiny, Goneril and Regan skillfully employ the “language of pageantry,” as Kinney has called it, taking up their appropriate roles in the ritual and ceremony of the first scene (678).<sup>50</sup>

This public, theatrical display is not unlike many scenes that played out in early modern schoolrooms across England. In more ways than one, Lear resembles an early modern schoolmaster administering an examination, as his daughters play the parts of schoolboys composing themes or declamations.<sup>51</sup> Like an Elizabethan schoolmaster, Lear both commands and questions his pupils, expecting them to perform their declamations spontaneously and eloquently and respond to his question rhetorically by persuading him of their love. His daughters have been trained for such a rhetorical exercise like grammar school students, and their orations are, in fact, in the style of such educational compositions: in humanist pedagogical exercises such as these, “[t]he pupil is not expected to develop original or independent ideas; he is not to express his own emotions, or to treat the topic in a fresh or striking manner. Rather, he is to execute a stylized set-piece in a stylish way” (Grafton and Jardine 17).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, pp. 177-184.

<sup>50</sup> See “Lear,” *The Massachusetts Review* 17.4 (1976): 677-712.

<sup>51</sup> For an example of how this might work in the classroom, see Brinsley’s *Ludus Literarius*, Chapter XIII, “Of making Theames full of good matter, in a pure stile, and with iudgement.” Brinsley begins the exercise of theme-writing by asking his students a question, then uses a series of questions to correct the “faults” in their themes.

<sup>52</sup> According to Brinsley, reading and memorizing *sententiae* furnish students with “presidents and patterns” and form the basis of their themes. Their compositions should be “full of the graue testimonies and sentences of many of the auncientest, wisest, and most experienced; all fitly applied, without any matter to corrupt or offend, and in a most familiar, easie, and pleasing stile.” (See Chapter XIII, “Of making Theames full of good matter, in a pure stile, and with iudgement.”) The exercises also follow one general pattern, moving through *exordium*, *narratio*, *confirmatio*, *confutatio*, and *conclusio*. Themes and declamations imitated or were pieced out of other authoritative voices, not the author’s own voice, and always followed a certain pattern; such exercises are not meant to encourage the development of “independent ideas,” as Grafton and Jardine observe.

It is evident that Goneril and Regan are proficient in these kinds of exercises. They not only satisfy Lear in stylishly “excute[ing] a stylized set-piece” but also deftly employ methods that would satisfy an Elizabethan schoolmaster. Their skill lies partly in their recognition that Lear is commanding a performance rather than asking for the truthful reply with which Cordelia answers. Their success depends upon their public performance as rhetoricians, not upon their replies as daughters, and while Cordelia responds as an obedient daughter, Goneril and Regan respond as obedient students. The first speech, by Goneril, indicates that she is a particularly good student of rhetoric and composition:

Sir, I do love you more than word can wield the matter,  
Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty,  
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,  
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour.  
As much as child e'er loved, or father found,  
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable,  
Beyond all manner of so much I love you. (1.1.55-61)

Goneril shows herself master of rhetorical figures here, employing hyperbole to great effect and further, making use of *adynaton* by indicating the impossibility of fully expressing her love.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, like the early modern student carefully collecting and redeploying *sententiae*, she peppers her speech with commonplaces designed to win the approval of her audience, weaving together her voice and the authoritative voices of others.<sup>54</sup> In her succinct, seven-line speech to Lear, she makes use of at least three and possibly as many as seven proverbs.<sup>55</sup> Goneril, like any good grammar school student, practices imitation, seamlessly fusing her own words with others'

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<sup>53</sup> For a fuller analysis of the daughters' speeches and their use of rhetorical figures, see Paolo Valesio: *Novantiqua: Rhetorics as Contemporary Theory*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 47-55.

<sup>54</sup> For more on authority and the gathering and framing of aphorisms and commonplaces, see Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

<sup>55</sup> See R.W. Dent, *Shakespeare's Proverbial Language: An Index*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981 and Christy Desmet, *Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics, and Identity*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992, pp. 122-123.

words in an act of persuasion. Regan picks up these threads of imitation by stating that she must mimic and enlarge on the declarations of her sister:

Sir I am made of that self mettle as my sister,  
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart  
I find she names my very deed of love:  
Only she comes too short, that I profess  
Myself an enemy to all other joys  
Which the most precious square of sense possesses,  
And find I am alone felicitate  
In your dear highness' love. (1.1.69-76)

Regan employs both hyperbole and *comparatio*, imitating the manner and the matter of her sister's speech and mimicking her rhetorical style to great effect. Kinney has argued that in poetry, *imitatio* "was not merely a matter of emulation; it was also a matter of comparison and even rivalry. It is not merely a matter of copying, but one of improving, combining, transforming, and hence *creating*" (87).<sup>56</sup> It is clear that both sisters, in their rivalry, employ the practice in just this way, "improving, combining, transforming, and hence *creating*" rhetorical speeches out of commonplaces and even out of each other's orations. For this facility in *imitatio* and their apt responses to Lear's question, they are rewarded with Lear's land and power.

Lear's eldest daughters are not the only characters whose advancement depends upon rhetorical skill. Perhaps the play's best student of rhetoric is Edmund, a character who is also repeatedly asked to respond to the questions of his superiors, particularly the questions of his father and brother. If their first two scenes together indicate their typical modes of speech, Gloucester's interaction with Edmund consists primarily of asking him peremptory questions or making demands, and Edmund's main conversational function consists of complying with Gloucester's interrogation or command. This pattern is established from the very beginning of the play. Gloucester addresses Edmund twice in the opening scene: the first time in the form of a

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<sup>56</sup> See "Continental Poetics" in *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Walter Jost and Wendy Olmstead, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

question—“Do you know this noble gentleman, Edmund?” (1.1.23-24)—the second time in the form of a command—“remember him hereafter, as my honorable friend” (1.1.26). Though their first exchange is brief and somewhat ordinary, it establishes a pattern that is repeated in the second scene. In their next exchange, fewer than 100 lines, Gloucester gives Edmund a handful of commands and directly asks him no fewer than thirteen questions.<sup>57</sup> The little interaction we see between Edmund and his brother Edgar reveals a similar dynamic, in which the elder brother is the questioner, the younger the questioned. But Edmund, who “studies deserving” at the court, among other things, consistently finds ways to exploit his position as the questioned. His desire to “top the legitimate” (1.2.21) is realized through two carefully executed conversations with Gloucester and Edgar, in which Edmund proves himself a master rhetorician, showing command over his two audiences and employing rhetorical methods to great advantage.

It is clear from the beginning of the play’s second scene that Edmund intends to use his rhetorical skills for his social ascendancy: he sets his plan into motion upon Gloucester’s hurried entrance, expressing a hope that his “invention” (an explicitly rhetorical term) will “thrive” (1.2.20). Gloucester begins with a flurry of questions:

Kent banished thus? and France in choler parted?  
And the King gone tonight? Prescribed his power,  
Confined to exhibition? All this done  
Upon the gad?—Edmund, how now, what news? (1.2.23-26)

Though these questions, with the exception of the last, seem directed to no one in particular, they are indicative of Gloucester’s typical patterns of speech: he will ask fully ten questions in a row,

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<sup>57</sup> It is likely that the actor playing Edmund in Shakespeare’s day would have taken careful note of this. Having received a part script on which was written, at most, three cue words for each of the actor’s lines, the actor would be likely to notice every detail of a cue, studying it carefully to extract any small bit of information that might be useful to understanding the scene or his character. The fact that so many of his cue lines were punctuated with a question mark (and that so many of his later lines end with a question mark) could not possibly have escaped the notice of an actor playing Edmund. To the actors playing these roles, and to modern actors, this speech pattern would have been particularly important in characterizing the relationships between Gloucester and Edmund and between Edmund and Edgar. For more on part-scripts and their functions, see Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

many of them rhetorical, before he finally leaves the interrogative mode. Even when he moves into command and declaration, his lines are still interspersed with questions. Edmund will exploit both Gloucester's rhetorical manner and his verbal inquisitiveness. Having learned the speech patterns of the court and his father, he knows that he need only conspicuously slip a letter into his pocket to elicit a volley of questions, which he can then manipulate to his particular advantage. In answer to these questions, as Heinrich Plett has observed, Edmund masterfully employs *negatio*, a rhetorical figure that Abraham Fraunce in *Arcadian Rhetorike* defines as "a denial or refusal to speak."<sup>58</sup> When Gloucester asks, "What news?", Edmund cleverly answers, "So please your lordship, none" (1.2.27), and upon Gloucester's insistence, "I know no news, my lord" (1.2.30) and "Nothing, my lord" (1.2.32). The repetition of "none" and "no" and "nothing", the refrain that continues to reverberate throughout the play, convinces Gloucester that he is being denied information. Gloucester shifts his tactic to command, forcing, so he thinks, his son to give up the paper.

The letter's contents, again cleverly designed by Edmund, elicit yet another round of questions from Gloucester, some directed at himself, some at his son:

My son Edgar, had he a hand to write this? A heart and brain to breed it in? When came this to you? Who brought it?...You know the character to be your brother's?...It is his?...Has he never before sounded you in this business?...Abominable villain, where is he?...Think you so? (1.2.56-58, 62, 66, 69-70, 78, 89)

Edmund, anticipating Gloucester's reactions, fuels the fire with answers that are, by turns, noncommittal and incriminating. His plan to unseat Edgar is working, as evidenced by Gloucester's change in tone in his last lines of the scene. It is not just his accusations of Edgar that constitute this change. The end of the scene is the first time Gloucester interacts

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<sup>58</sup> Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian rhetorike: or The praecepts of rhetorike made plaine by examples*, London: Thomas Orwin, 1588, *Early English Books Online*. For more on Edmund's use of *negatio*, see Heinrich Plett, "Shakespeare and the *Ars Rhetorica*," in *Rhetoric and Pedagogy*, ed. Winifred Bryan Horner and Michael Leff, Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Earlbaum, 1995, pp. 253-254.

conversationally with Edmund, addressing him with something other than question or command. Though Gloucester is, indeed, still in the authoritative mode, his tone is less demanding, as he asks Edmund to seek out Edgar and to “frame the business after your own wisdom” (1.2.98-99). Having authorized Edmund, delegating power to him, Gloucester’s questioning turns into conversing, as father speaks to son as to an equal about “these late eclipses of the sun and moon” (1.2.103). Edmund has elicited this change solely by taking advantage of his father’s habitual mode of address and conversation, rhetorically manipulating the kinds of questions he will ask and carefully controlling the answers he receives.

Edmund continues to manipulate the questioner upon Edgar’s entrance, this time in a different mode. In his conversation with Gloucester, Edmund employed rhetorical devices with great success; here, he employs imitation in order to manipulate his brother. Brian Vickers argues that Edmund imitates his father’s style of speech in his address to Edgar, and since my argument builds from his, it is worth detailing here.<sup>59</sup> Vickers first points out Gloucester’s self-conscious deployment of rhetoric, patterns, and symmetry in his musings about “[t]hese late eclipses”:

Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked ’twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under prediction—there’s son against father. The King falls from bias of nature—there’s father against child. (1.2.106-112)

This kind of patterned speech, Vickers argues, seems “over-careful, if not artificial” (356).

Edmund mocks and mimics this repetition and artificiality in his subsequent soliloquy:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behavior, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and traitors, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in by a divine thrusting on. (1.2.118-126)

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<sup>59</sup> See *The Artistry of Shakespeare’s Prose*, London: Routledge, 1968.

The mimicry in this short soliloquy previews what comes next. According to Vickers, “Edmund, having parodied his father’s style, now imitates it seriously” (358). He begins his conversation with Edgar by picking up where his father left off: “O, these eclipses do portend these divisions” (1.2.136-137). In conversation with his brother, he continues to imitate not just the matter of Gloucester’s speech, but his rhetorical manner:

I promise you, the effects he writes of succeed unhappily, as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent, death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities, divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against King and nobles, needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches and I know not what. (1.2.143-149)

Edmund answers his brother, as Lear’s daughters answered Lear, through imitative performance, mimicking the content and phrasing of his father’s speeches. As Edmund attempts to persuade his brother, his skill in rhetorical mimicry is on full display.

When Edgar is unconvinced by Edmund’s apt imitation of his father’s style and syntax (“How long have you been a secretary astronomical?” [1.2.150]), Edmund decides to take a different approach, I argue, by imitating his father in another way: in the remainder of the scene, he effectively employs Gloucester’s, and even Edgar’s, mode of questioning in conversation with his brother. This mode is established by Gloucester and continued by Edgar, who enters with a series of somewhat contemptuous questions for his younger brother: “How now, brother Edmund, what serious contemplation are you in?” (1.2.138-39). “Do you busy yourself with that?” (1.2.142). “How long have you been a secretary astronomical?” (1.2.50). With Gloucester, Edmund remained outwardly submissive, allowing his father to feel in control of their conversation, and he begins in the same way with Edgar, giving mild answers to Edgar’s first two questions. But then Edmund changes tactics, suddenly rejecting his show of deference and adopting his father’s, and brother’s, mode of question and command. He explicitly ignores

Edgar's last question, firing another question at his brother instead: "Come, come, when saw you my father last?" (1.2.151). This abrupt question marks a controlled shift in the conversation, the scene, and the play as a whole, placing Edmund in the position of the questioner, the position of authority. In the remainder of his conversation with Edgar, Edmund imitates his father, deploying a series of questions and then a series of commands: he instructs his brother to "bethink yourself wherein you may have offended him, and at my entreaty forbear his presence" and to "go armed" if he goes abroad (1.2.158-159, 168, 170). This second imitation of Gloucester is rhetorically effective: though he is hesitant at first, Edgar agrees to Edmund's temporary plan.

The success of Edmund's rhetoric lies in its invisibility, or as Plett terms it, Edmund's "oratorical naturalness" (254), and on Edmund's acute awareness of his audience. He is highly conscious of others' speech patterns and their speaking habits, particularly their habit of questioning him, which he uses as weapons to manipulate and control them. But like Castiglione's courtier, the master rhetorician succeeds only by making his art seem natural and unfeigned. Though Edmund employs a number of rhetorical strategies in his conversations with Gloucester and Edgar, his father and brother never detect the use of these strategies. The *sprezzatura* with which Edmund manipulates the court reveals not only his skill in employing rhetorical methods, but also his sense of decorum, his ability to suit his speech perfectly to his audience. Both Lear's daughters and Edmund prove themselves masters of decorum in the first two scenes. In two very different situations—one public, one private—Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are able to anticipate the requests and desires of their elders and to gauge what responses will be appropriate and effective for fulfilling their objectives in each situation. For Lear and the court, Goneril and Regan provide stylized declamations; in conversation with

Gloucester, Edmund pretends to have nothing to say at all; and having realized his rhetorical power, Edmund is able to take command of his interactions with his brother by imitating their father. In each case, these student rhetoricians illustrate their unique ability to adapt different rhetorical strategies for different situations and audiences.

But a sense of decorum is by no means the only rhetorical strength of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund. They are also, more importantly, adept at employing imitation and innovation to manipulate their elders. In a discussion of imitative translation exercises, Leonard Barkan argues that early modern schoolroom activities often “enforce complex relations between replication and originality”: when students engaged in double translation activities in grammar schools, translating from Latin to English and then again from English back to Latin without consulting the original text, they could “achieve a text that is at once their own voice and the re-creation of a pre-existing model” (35). Both the rhetorical speeches of Goneril and Regan in the play’s first scene and Edmund’s imitation of his father in the second work in this way. Imitation allows these students of rhetoric to create their own voices through the voices of others. As they borrow the language and styles of their elders, they begin to develop patterns of speech that both emulate and transform their models. Like Shakespeare’s plays themselves, the speech of *Lear*’s rhetoricians is both imitative and innovative, copied and original. Their adoption and manipulation of their fathers’ language will eventually facilitate their rise to power.

For *Lear*’s daughters, this rise begins in the play’s second act, and they seize their power by imitating and exploiting *Lear*’s language. Just as Edmund manipulates and adopts the speech patterns of his father and brother, Regan and Goneril adopt and manipulate their father’s power-question, using it, as *Lear* did, to establish their own authority. In the play’s first scene, as I have noted, *Lear* asks his daughters a question—“Which of you shall we say doth love us most”

(1.1.51)—in the form of a command—“Tell me, my daughters” (1.1.48)—to elicit expected responses from them. Goneril and Regan turn this pattern on its head in the second scene of act two, overwhelming Lear with questions that are, like Lear’s, not interrogative but imperative. The daughters make use of the rhetorical figure *pysma* here, asking multiple questions successively. Like Lear’s questions, these questions are not meant to elicit a truthful response but to establish the daughters’ control and eventually to strip Lear of both followers and identity. Regan begins the onslaught with five questions in a row:

What, fifty followers?  
 Is it not well? What should you need of more?  
 Yea, or so many, sith that both charge and danger  
 Speak ’gainst so great a number? How in one house  
 Should many people, under two commands,  
 Hold amity? ’Tis hard, almost impossible. (2.2.426-31)

Goneril, not to be outdone, continues: “Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance / From those that she calls servants or from mine?” (2.2.432-433). And then, they press the question to its limits:

GONERIL	Hear me, my lord: What need you five and twenty? Ten? Or five? To follow in a house where twice so many Have a command to tend you?
REGAN	What need one? (2.2.449-53)

Regan and Goneril do not really expect Lear to justify his retinue. In fact, when he attempts to do so, in his famous and poignant “reason not the need” speech (which, significantly, contains not one single question or command for his daughters), they reject his attempted justification. Though the audience may be moved by this speech, the daughters react by withdrawing into the house and declaring, “For his particular, I’ll receive him gladly, / But not one follower” (2.2.481-82).

The rhetorical questions with which the sisters bombard Lear in this scene are not interrogative; they are rhetorical assertions of the excessiveness of Lear's retinue. Like Lear's earlier question, they are "not truly queries, but demands" (Doran 95) designed to establish the daughters' authority by denying Lear his means of living, means he associates with his very identity, his retinue of knights. Through the use of rhetorical questions, Goneril and Regan effectively command Lear—the interrogative becomes the imperative as it did in the play's first scene. The daughters force Lear to play by the rules of his own game: just as their inheritance depended upon their obedience to the power-question, so now does Lear's shelter depend on his compliance with the power-questions of Regan and Goneril. Just as Edmund manipulates the questions of Gloucester, using his father's conversational patterns to turn the tables on him, the daughters turn Lear's own voice against him, taking control not just of his shelter but of his very patterns of speech. In the *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian identifies a similar phenomenon in students when they memorize the passages of histories or orations: "They will accustom themselves to the best compositions, and they will always have in their memories something which they may imitate, and will, even without being aware, reproduce that fashion of style which they have deeply impressed upon their minds" (II.7.4). This pattern is played out in *Lear* as Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, whether consciously or unconsciously, "reproduce the fashion of style" which has been "impressed upon their minds." They absorb the speech of Lear and Gloucester and then redeploy it to suit their own needs and purposes.

The younger characters' control of the kingdom is established with finality when Regan and Cornwall blind Gloucester and turn him out of his own home. This scene also establishes the speech patterns of the new court. When Regan and Cornwall employ the power-question in their interrogation of Gloucester, such speech patterns assume the force of law, the new law of the



Goneril's, Regan's, and Edmund's rhetorical skill allows them to gain control of the kingdom by mimicking and improving on the language that their elders use to control them. Frank Whigham points to a similar phenomenon in his discussion of Elizabethan courtesy literature. He notes that though early texts like Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* were designed to check the ambitions of would-be courtiers, they accomplished the opposite, instead "discourag[ing] social humility and arous[ing] ambition" (20). Whigham quotes Foucault on this point:

Rules are empty in themselves, violent and unfinalized; they are impersonal and can be bent to any purpose. The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules. (qtd. in Whigham 20; Foucault 151).

This is exactly what Goneril, Regan, and Edmund accomplish in *Lear*'s first acts by adopting the rules and the language that are used to control them. Though the questions of Lear and Gloucester are designed to reinforce and protect their own authority, the younger characters seize these speech patterns for their own purposes. They both imitate and enhance the interrogative techniques of their fathers, "overcom[ing] the rulers through their own rules" and efficiently gaining control of Lear's kingdom.

Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine argue that humanist education "fostered in all its initiates a properly docile attitude towards authority" (xiv). Lynn Enterline refutes this claim, arguing that early modern education produced subjects who did not necessarily "believe unreservedly in upholding England's existing social hierarchies" (10). I agree with Enterline, and would further argue that Shakespeare himself refutes Grafton and Jardine's claim through his portrayals of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund as students of rhetoric. Grafton and Jardine assert that humanist programs built on "[m]emorisation, repetition, catechism" (11) produced young

aristocrats who were passively obedient, “accustomed to taking their orders and direction from an authority whose guiding principles were never revealed, much less questioned” (24).

Goneril’s and Regan’s education, in particular, seems based on the principles that Grafton and Jardine claim guided humanist education: memorization, repetition, and catechism. So much is indicated in the first scene, when the daughters are “catechized” by their father. It is clear, however, that such an education has not produced in any of the daughters, including or perhaps especially Cordelia, a “docile attitude towards authority.” It has rather produced, at least in the cases of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, subjects who are skilled in imitating obedience to authority, able to mask their subversive tendencies with an outward show of deference when such a show is warranted. Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are all able to mimic such obedience when required, and to throw it off when it is no longer useful.

But Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are not the only students of rhetoric in *King Lear*. Lear himself becomes a student of rhetoric in the play, and his progress as a student can be traced through his use of questions. It is clear from the play’s first two acts that Lear has been accustomed to using questions primarily to establish his authority over others, rather than to obtain information, a pattern that Regan and Goneril seize upon. Lear is, for most of the play’s first half, in the declarative and imperative mode, and even his questions reflect these temperaments. Throughout the first acts his questions are often explicitly coupled with commands:

What says our second daughter,  
Our dearest Regan, wife of Cornwall? Speak. (1.1.67-68)

What can you say to draw  
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak. (1.1.85-86)

How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little. (1.1.94)

Call France. Who stirs? Call Burgundy. (1.1.127)

Where's my knave, my fool? Go you and call my fool hither. (1.4.42-43)

What says the fellow there? Call the clotpoll back. (1.4.46)

O sir, are you come? Is it your will? Speak, sir.—Prepare my horses. (1.4.249-50)

Additionally, Lear's extended interrogation of Kent as Caius (he asks Caius ten questions in their encounter in 1.4) ends fittingly in a command and a declaration: "Follow me, thou shalt serve me" (1.4.40). The majority of Lear's questions, however, are rhetorical, either incredulous or bitingly sarcastic. He makes use of the rhetorical figure *percontatio*, which Thomas Wilson quaintly calls "snappish asking": using questions to "chide and set forth grief with more vehemency" (209). Lear's questions are designed to comment on or manipulate others' behavior rather than to seriously inquire:

Are you our daughter? (1.4.209)

Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear. Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes? Either his notion weakens or his discernings are lethargied—Ha! sleeping or waking? Sure tis not so. Who is it that can tell me who I am? (1.4.217-221)

Deny to speak with me? They are sick, they are weary,  
They have travelled all the night?...  
Fiery? What quality?...  
'Informed them'? Does thou understand me, man? (2.2.277-78, 285, 288)

Ask her forgiveness?

Do you but mark how this becomes the house? (2.2.342)

Art not ashamed to look upon this beard?  
O, Regan, will you take her by the hand? (2.2.382-383)

Return to her? And fifty men dismissed? (2.2.396)

Is this well spoken now? (2.2.425)<sup>61</sup>

Lear's initial question to his daughters provides a model for the rest of his questions in the first acts of the play: he rarely uses questions simply to obtain information and rarely intends for his questions to be truthfully answered. Even when he asks questions, he is still making demands, and almost every question he asks is designed to establish his own authority.

After his daughters use his power-question against him and he is cast out into the storm, Lear's mode of questioning changes. When Lear is stripped of everything—his followers, his identity, and even his own speech—he wrestles with old and new identities and accordingly establishes new speech patterns. In the play's third act, Lear begins using questions as a means of contemplation, rather than as a means of establishing authority, and these new kinds of rhetorical questions play an important role in his development. Though Lear begins by commanding the elements, he soon moves into a kind of rhetorical questioning that allows him, for the first time, to self-reflect. Contemplation of the storm leads him to his first truthful assessment of himself as a ruler:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you  
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en  
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them  
And show the heavens more just. (3.4.28-36)

Lear's contemplation of his poor subjects' needs is phrased as a rhetorical question, which leads to a statement of Lear's own ineffectiveness as a ruler. He now commands himself: "Take physic, pomp" (3.4.33). Unlike his earlier uses of rhetorical questions, which were designed to

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<sup>61</sup> Manfred Weidhorn identifies many of these questions as merely exclamatory. But though some of Lear's questions can be classed in this way, more often, I think, these exclamations are intended to make a demand of some sort on his listener(s). See Weidhorn, "Lear's Schoolmasters," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 13.3 (1962): 305-316.

manipulate the behavior of others, Lear's later use of questions directs his focus inward. In Lear's first reflection on the larger world and on his own inner world, Shakespeare explicitly links his rhetorical questioning to his capacity for self-reflection and self-examination. Lear's comments on Poor Tom further emphasize the role of the rhetorical question in Lear's process of self-examination:

Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha? Here's three on's us are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings: come, unbutton here. (3.4.101-107)

Again, the rhetorical question leads to examination of the larger world, an examination of the self, and a command to self. Lear is able to come to this pass only because he is able to ask questions in order to find an answer rather than to manipulate or command a subject. The rhetorical question "Is man no more than this?" has led to Lear's self-discovery and first moment of true self-awareness.

When Lear uses the question as a command in the first scene, he plays the role of a schoolmaster. Beginning in act three, however, Lear becomes the student, expressing a new concern for his own education. Regan is, apparently, correct when she declares, "to willful men / The injuries that they themselves procure, / Must be their schoolmasters" (2.2.492-494). Lear's injuries, among other things, do in fact become his teachers. Lear himself seems to realize his shift from schoolmaster to student even in his madness. He mistakes Poor Tom for a philosopher, and begins questioning him about the cause of thunder and his "study" (3.4.154). He insists on keeping the company of "my philosopher" (3.4.172) when Gloucester urges him indoors, expressing a desire to study with Poor Tom, the "learned Theban" (3.4.153).<sup>62</sup> Though he begins

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<sup>62</sup> For more on Lear's education, see Manfred Weidhorn, "Lear's Schoolmasters," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 13.3 (1962): 305-316.

the play as schoolmaster, he is reduced to schoolboy by the third act, painfully learning lessons that he could not understand as king.

This move from schoolmaster to student is elicited in part by Lear's daughters and their treatment of him. But Lear's change is also brought about by the instruction of the fool, whose pedagogical function is made clear in the first acts of the play. Within 50 lines of his entrance, the fool explicitly takes on the role of a teacher twice: he says to Lear, "Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech" (1.4.113), and when the fool asks Lear whether he knows the difference between "a bitter fool and a sweet one," Lear replies, "No, lad, teach me" (1.4.134-136).<sup>63</sup> The fool also instructs Lear in the manner of a schoolmaster, speaking in the kind of aphorisms and *sententiae* that are found in grammar school textbooks<sup>64</sup> and referencing the kinds of moral stories and fables schoolboys read in the early years of their instruction.<sup>65</sup> More importantly, the fool resembles a schoolmaster by his means of teaching: he consistently instructs Lear through the use of question and answer, as is the practice of many Shakespearean fools and early modern schoolmasters.<sup>66</sup> The interaction between Lear and the fool consists, in large part, of one questioning and the other answering. They move between questioner and questioned fluidly, but the fool uses this question and answer banter primarily to instruct Lear:

FOOL	Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?
LEAR	Why no, boy; nothing can be made of nothing.
FOOL	[to Kent] Prithee tell him, so much the rent of his land comes to; he will not believe a fool.
LEAR	A bitter fool.
FOOL	Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a bitter fool and a sweet one?

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<sup>63</sup> Four of the six uses of the word "teach" in the play are associated with the fool in some way.

<sup>64</sup> As in his rhyming speeches at 1.4.116 and 3.2.27-34 especially.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, 1.4.152-155, in which the fool references a fable in the style of Aesop.

<sup>66</sup> In *Ludus Literarius*, John Brinsley places particular emphasis on the role of question and answer dialogues in grammar school instruction—it is one of his main tools for teaching grammar and religion, and he includes a number of examples to illustrate his method. See, for example, Chapter VI, in which he presents a method for teaching accident through the use of questions and Chapter XXIII, in which he presents a modified catechism for remembering "moral matters."

LEAR           No, lad, teach me.  
 FOOL          That lord that counselled thee to give away thy land,  
                   Come place him here by me; do thou for him stand.  
                   The sweet and bitter fool will presently appear,  
                   The one in motley here, the other found out there.  
 LEAR          Dost thou call me fool, boy?  
 FOOL          All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.  
                   (1.4.128-143)

Though this is not, perhaps, a performance typical of the schoolmaster, the fool nevertheless engages Lear in a form of comic Socratic questioning meant to show him the truth of his beliefs and behavior, much as schoolmasters engage their students in questioning to show them the faults of their compositions.

Additionally, the fool, like a schoolmaster to a student, serves as an example for Lear's imitation in the later acts of the play. In his later encounters with Gloucester, Lear both imitates the fool's catechistic, pedagogical questioning and replicates his topics of conversation—mimicking both the form and the content of the Fool's dialogue. In much of his dialogue in later acts, Lear is concerned with matters that the fool has already addressed. The fool's rhyme "Fortune, that arrant whore, / Ne'er turns the key to the poor" (2.2.242-243) displays two familiar aspects of his dialogue: he often comments satirically on the plight of the poor, frequently coupling that commentary with explicit references to sex. Lear's dialogue in later acts imitates the fool's in that it takes up both of these themes and in that his patterns of questioning resemble the fool's patterns of questioning. Near the end of the fourth act, when Gloucester laments the loss of his eyes, Lear instructs him through the use of rhetorical questions:

A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears. See how yon justice rails upon yon simple thief. Hark in thine ear: change places and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? (4.6.146-150)

Unlike his and his daughters' rhetorical questions that were used as a means to establish authority, Lear now uses questions, like the fool, as a means of teaching, exploring and

transmitting wisdom—“preach[ing]” to Gloucester (4.6.176). Even his commands are instructive:

Thou, rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand;  
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back,  
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind  
For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.  
Through tattered clothes great vices do appear;  
Robes and furred gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,  
And the strong lance of justice hurtles breaks;  
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.  
None does offend, none, I say none. I'll able 'em;  
Take that of me, my friend, who have the power  
To seal th'accuser's lips. Get thee glass eyes,  
And like a scurvy politician seem  
To see things thou dost not. (4.6.156-168)

Even Edgar admits that this is “reason in madness” (4.6.171). Lear echoes here the social commentary of the fool in earlier acts, particularly his prophecy in the third act, which also reflects on poverty and corruption.<sup>67</sup> Just as Lear's daughters, consciously or unconsciously, absorb and redeploy Lear's speech patterns, Lear absorbs and redeploys the speech of the fool. He imitates both the form and the content of his instructor's speech, becoming the instructor himself.

In his introduction to the Arden edition of *King Lear*, Foakes suggests that the fool disappears in the third act “because Lear himself in his madness takes on the role of Fool, at once mad and rational, riddlingly speaking ‘matter and impertinency mixed’, as Edgar puts it (4.6.170)” (137). Lear becomes the fool because the fool has provided Lear a figure for emulation, an important figure for any early modern student. Lear takes on the role of the fool by echoing his satirical social commentary and using newly-developed patterns of rhetorical

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<sup>67</sup> “When priests are more in word than matter, / When brewers mar their malt with water, / When nobles are their tailors' tutors, / No heretics burned, but wenches' suitors; / When every case in law is right / No squire in debt, nor no poor knight; / When slanders do not live in tongues, / Nor cutpurses come not to throngs, / When usurers tell their gold i' the field, / And bawds and whores do churches build, / Then shall the realm of Albion / Come to great confusion: / Then comes the time, who lives to see't, / That going shall be used with feet” (3.2.81-94).

questioning to observe the world's condition and to become better acquainted with what he himself has been as a ruler. Lear's education in self-awareness is thus reflected in and enabled by his rhetorical education. His imitation of the fool allows him to develop skills in rhetorical questioning, and like Othello, he moves away from the declarative and imperative mode in which he begins the play into the interrogative mode that students may develop as a result of rhetorical education. Rhetorical education thus becomes the means by which Lear is finally able to gain a sort of self-awareness.

Though self-awareness seems like an ultimate goal for Lear, who "hath ever but slenderly known himself" (1.1.294-295), it is this very process of self-discovery that leads to Lear's madness—madness which he never seems to overcome or, if he does, only briefly. Only after his first admission of guilt at the end of act one does he begin to express concern about his sanity. He admits, at the beginning of scene five, "I did her wrong" (1.5.24) and exclaims, "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! I would not be mad" (1.5.43-44). His madness first becomes evident immediately after his realization that he has "ta'en / Too little care" (3.4.33-34) of his subjects, and the thought of his own folly seems to be a significant cause of his first definite displays of madness. Lear's ability to question himself, the ability to self-reflect gained after he is stripped of both authority and identity, helps to bring about his madness. Thus, Lear's developing rhetorical abilities prove to be the root of both self-knowledge and self-destruction.

The same principle holds true for Edmund. Edmund's development, like Lear's, can be tracked through the progression of his rhetorical ability, and particularly his use of rhetorical questions. While Lear begins the play using rhetorical questions to establish authority and ends the play using them as a means of self-examination, Edmund is on the opposite track, using

rhetorical questions in contemplation of himself and the larger world early in the play and losing this ability as the play progresses. Whereas Lear gains the ability to question himself and the world around him through suffering and instruction, Edmund seems, uniquely, to possess this ability at the beginning of the play; he is, in fact, the only person in the play, besides, perhaps, the fool, who does not have to undergo some kind of trauma to observe the corruption of the world at large and to recognize his own villainy. Edmund is also the only character besides the fool to directly address the audience in a soliloquy more than once, and these moments mark him initially as the most self-aware character in the play.<sup>68</sup> I suggest that this kind of self-awareness is, in part, expressed through, and possibly a result of, his rhetorical ability, particularly his rhetorical facility with questions.

During the play's first two soliloquies, Edmund contemplates the world around him and his own nature, asking rhetorical questions that anticipate Lear's questions in the later acts of the play. His first soliloquy contains eight questions, and unlike the other characters in the play, he uses these questions not to establish his own authority but as a starting point to serious contemplation or discussion of himself, his circumstances, and the nature of the outside world. He begins with the use of *interrogatio*, orating for both himself and his audience on the "custom" of the world:<sup>69</sup>

Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law  
My services are bound. Wherefore should I  
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit  
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,  
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines  
Lag of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base?  
When my dimensions are as well compact,  
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,

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<sup>68</sup> Lear, as the character who displays perhaps the least amount of initial self-awareness, never once addresses the audience.

<sup>69</sup> See Peacham's entries on *interrogatio*, *erotema*, and *pysma* (105-106). See also Thomas Wilson's entries on "Reasoning a Matter with Ourselves" (231) and "Answering to Ourselves" (232).

As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us  
With base? With baseness? Bastardy? Base, base? (1.2.1-10)

Here, Edmund not only engages in a contemplation of the larger world; we also see him doing a kind of self-reflection, through the use of rhetorical techniques, of which no other character seems capable.<sup>70</sup> In his second soliloquy, he recognizes his own “rough and lecherous” (1.2.130-131) disposition frankly and without qualification or excuse, with a kind of self-honesty that will not emerge in any other character until Lear is thrown out into the storm and begins to contemplate his own circumstances. Even without this type of provocation, Edmund is able to engage in honest evaluations, using rhetorical questions to interrogate, if not his morality, at least his nature and the nature of the world around him.

But significantly, Edmund's penchant for rhetorical questioning lasts only as long as his disenfranchisement. He makes few appearances in acts three and four, but when he reappears in the fifth act, he seems like a different character. Edmund addresses the audience most during his first scenes, and when he is made Duke of Gloucester, he no longer displays the same aptness for observation and reflection that he does in earlier scenes. More importantly, he seems to lose the ability to question his surroundings and his own actions. Perhaps the most telling example of this is his exchange with the captain in the third scene of act five. He gives the captain instructions to kill Lear and Cordelia and states, “Thy great employment / *Will not bear question*: either say thou'lt do't, / Or thrive by other means” (emphasis mine; 5.3.32-34). Unlike his earlier scenes in which villainy is coupled with explicit awareness of his role as a villain and contemplation of the nature of his situation, Edmund's later employment “will not bear question” (5.3.33), either from

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<sup>70</sup> One might argue that Cordelia and Kent also engage in higher levels self-reflection, but neither of the two characters ever seem to open up to the world outside the court or the larger nature of humanity in the ways that Edmund does in his first scenes.

himself or from his officers. As he gains authority, he loses his ability to reflect on the larger world, and to pose and answer questions about his role within it.

Edmund's loss of the capacity for self-reflection is further illustrated by one of his final lines in the play, the first he speaks after being fatally wounded by Edgar. Albany, holding Goneril's incriminating letter, asks Edmund, "Knowst thou this paper?" Edmund replies, "Ask me not what I know" (5.3.158), echoing Iago's charge to "demand me nothing" at the end of *Othello* (5.2.300).<sup>71</sup> Whereas Edmund was once the master manipulator of questions and himself a questioner of his own situations, he is now unable to attend to questions at all. His loss of reflective ability is further illustrated by his willingness to forgive his attacker but only if he is "noble" (5.3.163). As G. K. Hunter points out in his edition of *Lear*, Edmund has changed his tune: instead of questioning the social order in which he is trapped, he embraces "traditional conceptions of nobility and breeding." In gaining the authority of his father, he has lost his own self-concept as a bastard and forgotten the progressive ideas that allowed him to dismiss the meaningless nobility of his father and brother. Imbued with new authority and unable to interrogate himself and the world around him, he passively accepts traditional social hierarchies. Furthermore, he passively accepts his own death, an action that seems uncharacteristic of the Edmund we see at the beginning of the play. He blames the wheel of fortune, which he notes has "come full circle," for his fatal wound (5.3.172)—a far cry from his earlier dismissal of such superstitious "foppery" (1.2.118). Immediately prior to his death, he seems to have lost not only the capacity for objective self-reflection and honesty that he once possessed but also the rhetorical facility with questions that allowed him to examine and express his ideas about social hierarchies.

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<sup>71</sup> Though the quarto gives this line to Goneril, I follow the Folio and R.A. Foakes in attributing the line to Edmund. Since Albany has already seen that Goneril knows the letter, it makes much more sense that his question is directed toward Edmund.

The relationships among rhetorical ability, questioning, and authority are thus rendered complex in *Lear*. Edmund's loss of self-awareness and changing worldview can be traced through his diminishing rhetorical abilities, particularly his diminishing use of or facility with questions. Edmund's acquisition of authority, earning his father's title as the Earl of Gloucester, contributes to this development. Likewise, Lear's developing self-awareness can be traced through his developing facility with interrogatives and rhetorical questions. Lear's loss of authority also contributes to his increasing rhetorical abilities. Edmund and Lear are on opposite tracks: as Edmund gains authority, through the use of rhetorical abilities, he begins to lose the sense of exploratory questioning that is essential to those rhetorical skills. As Lear loses authority, he begins to gain the rhetorical abilities that Edmund has lost, along with the more exploratory worldview that the study of rhetoric can create in its students.

Drawing on the legacy of Cicero and Quintilian, the straightforward scheme of the rhetorical textbook suggests that only good men can be good orators and that good orators will responsibly wield the authority afforded by their rhetorical ability, taking upon themselves the correct ordering of society. The development of Edmund, Goneril, and Regan proves otherwise. Rhetorical ability is not, in these cases, wielded by the *vir bonus* of the Ciceronian and Quintilian imagination. Their rhetorical ability does not contribute to the ordering of society but to its disorder. Furthermore, the acquisition of authority in *Lear* does not aid rhetorical ability but actually hinders it: as soon as Edmund, Goneril, and Regan gain political authority, they seem to lose the imitative and innovative abilities that their rhetorical skill afforded them. Lear's case is the reverse of his daughters' and Edmund's: whereas these characters lose rhetorical ability through their acquisition of authority, Lear acquires rhetorical ability through the loss of authority. The more skeptical view of rhetoric highlighted in the development of Edmund,

Goneril, and Regan is countered by Lear's own development, his acquisition of self-awareness in conjunction with his developing rhetorical and instructional skill. In *Lear*, and in *Lear*, Shakespeare presents rhetoric not just as a means to acquire power and authority, but as a valuable tool for education and self-reflection. Though the play is clearly skeptical of rhetorical performance and its destructive force, it has not entirely given up on rhetoric and rhetorical education as constructive forces. Shakespeare, a skilled product of such an education, argues on either side of the question, considering both the dangerous and productive effects of rhetoric's influence.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION: RHETORIC AND THE “ART OF INQUIRY”

By the time *Othello* and *Lear* were written, rhetorical education was beginning to fall out of favor—it was even regarded by some as “old-fashioned” (Rhodes 62). After the success and subsequent dissemination of Ramus’s and other work on logic and dialectic, many writers considered *inventio* and *dispositio* the province of logic and rhetoric became concerned primarily with *elocutio* and *pronuntiatio*. As a result, rhetoric gained a reputation for its emphasis on ornament, making its critics wary of rhetorical practices that seemed to privilege word over matter and persuasion over sincerity. In 1605, the midpoint between the first recorded performances of *Othello* and *Lear*, Francis Bacon wrote one of the most famous critiques of rhetoric. In his *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon notes that the “follies of the learned,” as his chapter is titled,

did bring in an affectionate study of eloquence and copie of speech, which then began to flourish. This grew speedily to an excess; for men began to hunt more after words than matter; more after the choiceness of the phrase, and the round and clean composition of the sentence, and the sweet falling of the clauses, and the varying and illustration of their works with tropes and figures, than after the weight of matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention of depth of judgement (I.VI.2).

Bacon’s concerns here are representative of the larger concerns of early 17th century writers at the beginning point of rhetoric’s decline.<sup>72</sup> As I have argued, Shakespeare was equally concerned with the difficulties of rhetoric and rhetorical education. Both *Othello* and *Lear* explore popular

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<sup>72</sup> For more on Bacon and the decline of rhetoric, see Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992, pp. 58-63 and Walter Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction and Expression of Culture*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971, pp. 101-103.

concerns about unscrupulous master rhetoricians and about rhetoric's relationship to authority. They also explore its dangerous preoccupation with ornament and the unanticipated and sometimes catastrophic consequences of rhetorical practices like arguing *in utramque partem* and *imitatio*. But, as I have also argued, Shakespeare is not perhaps as mistrustful of rhetoric as some of his contemporaries, and he is not as skeptical of the art as many critics assume. While he certainly challenges prevailing assumptions about rhetoric as a force of order, he also demonstrates its usefulness, revealing the ways in which rhetorical methods can provide a valuable means of moral instruction and study; tools for evaluation of both the self and others; and a worldview that encourages productive questioning of society and one's place in it.

Altman asserts that though Bacon was the "beneficiary of humanism and scholasticism, he sought to counteract their more baneful effects on the literary level by advocating an aphoristic style of presentation that would provoke inquiry, in place of the formal magisterial style that commanded assent" (15).<sup>73</sup> Shakespeare attempts the same project on two levels: by creating plays that are themselves questions about rhetoric<sup>74</sup> and by using questions within those plays, on a more local level, to examine contemporary views of rhetoric and its effects. It is clear from *Othello* and *King Lear*, two plays that emerge at the beginning moment of rhetoric's decline, that Shakespeare recognizes rhetoric's potential as an "art of inquiry" (3), to use Altman's phrase,<sup>75</sup> and exploits this art in his work. These plays exemplify the art of inquiry in the strictest sense, in that they not only suggest rhetoric's preoccupation with questions but also question such a preoccupation and question the extent to which rhetoric itself can be beneficial.

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<sup>73</sup> See *The Improbability of Othello: Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

<sup>74</sup> For more on this idea, and its application in early modern drama more generally, see Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

Further, Shakespeare himself makes use of the methods he explores, as both plays are in some way imitative and both argue either side of the question in their discussions about rhetoric and its effectiveness.

*Othello* and *King Lear* are, of course, not the only plays that examine the rhetoric of questions, and tragedy is certainly not the only genre in which such an examination takes place. As evidenced by the comic exchange between Desdemona and the clown in 3.4 of *Othello* and various exchanges between Lear and the fool, question and answer exchanges played a large role in comedy. Early modern clowns, in fact, often performed before audiences who shouted out questions or themes on which the clown would comically improvise—not unlike early modern students who composed extemporaneously on themes and questions put to them by their schoolmasters. Such a practice is set down in Robert Armin’s book *Quips Upon Questions* (1600), which records an imagined comedic dialogue of these question and answer exchanges.<sup>76</sup> It is perhaps significant that many moments at which Shakespeare uses a variation of the word “catechize” are comic ones: two prominent examples are Falstaff’s “catechism” upon honor in the final act of *Henry IV Part I* and Feste’s “catechizing” of Olivia in the first act of *Twelfth Night*. The connections among questioning, rhetoric, and education, then, extend beyond far beyond early modern tragedy.

Much work has been done on Shakespeare’s rhetorical understanding of the world, but much remains to be done on how Shakespeare’s characters, in every genre, conceive of their own worlds in rhetorical terms and how their rhetorical awareness helps them navigate those worlds. More work also remains to be done on question and answer schemes in Shakespeare and early modern drama more generally. Given that catechism was the means by which students were

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<sup>76</sup> For more about *Quips Upon Questions*, see David Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 138-139 and Richard Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 202-215.

instructed in both grammar and religion throughout their formative years, it makes sense that question and answer would be important to the constructions of these plays and to the dialogue and speech patterns of the characters.<sup>77</sup> The question of rhetoric and the rhetoric of the question can be useful, then, in discovering how early modern rhetorical education affects our conceptions of Shakespeare. In this, we may share with Shakespeare the art of inquiry.

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<sup>77</sup> For more on the catechism in everyday life, see Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530-1740*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Proportion of Question Marks in Shakespeare's Plays

This table records the number of question marks per line in all of Shakespeare's plays. When available, First Folio editions, published on the Internet Shakespeare Editions website, were used to calculate line numbers and number of question marks. The plays are listed from highest proportion of question marks to lowest.

Play	Number of Lines	Number of Question Marks	Lines/Question Mark	Question Marks/Line
<i>Othello</i>	3,686	552	6.6775	0.1498
<i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	2,730	392	6.9643	0.1436
<i>Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	2,298	293	7.8430	0.1275
<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	3,593	449	8.0022	0.1250
<b><i>King Lear</i></b>	3,303	412	8.0170	0.1247
<i>Henry IV, Part II</i>	3,350	409	8.1907	0.1221
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	3,186	385	8.2753	0.1208
<i>Measure for Measure</i>	2,938	347	8.4669	0.1181
<i>Hamlet</i>	3,907	459	8.5120	0.1175
<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>	1,919	209	9.1818	0.1089
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	2,731	296	9.2264	0.1084
<i>Twelfth Night</i>	2,579	279	9.2437	0.1082
<i>Timon of Athens</i>	2,608	273	9.5531	0.1047
<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	2,684	278	9.6547	0.1036
<i>Love's Labours Lost</i>	2,901	293	9.9010	0.1010
<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>	2,750	275	10.0000	0.1000
<i>As You Like It</i>	2,769	271	10.2177	0.0979
<i>Henry VI, Part III</i>	3,217	308	10.4448	0.0957
<i>Macbeth</i>	2,530	241	10.4979	0.0953
<i>Cymbeline</i>	3,820	360	10.6111	0.0942
<i>Winter's Tale</i>	3,369	317	10.6278	0.0941
<i>Henry VI, Part II</i>	3,355	309	10.8576	0.0921
<i>Richard III</i>	3,887	346	11.2341	0.0890
<i>Henry VI, Part I</i>	2,931	253	11.5850	0.0863

<i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	2,222	190	11.6947	0.0855
<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	2,709	230	11.7783	0.0849
<i>The Tempest</i>	2,341	197	11.8832	0.0842
<i>Henry VIII</i>	3,463	291	11.9003	0.0840
<i>King John</i>	2,729	228	11.9693	0.0835
<i>Coriolanus</i>	3,839	317	12.1104	0.0826
<i>Pericles</i>	2,358	193	12.2176	0.0818
<i>Richard II</i>	2,849	232	12.2802	0.0814
<i>Henry IV, Part I</i>	3,108	249	12.4819	0.0801
<i>Two Noble Kinsmen</i>	3,355	251	13.3665	0.0748
<i>Merchant of Venice</i>	2,738	193	14.1865	0.0705
<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>	3,078	205	15.0146	0.0666
<i>Henry V</i>	3,381	198	17.0758	0.0586
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	3,637	196	18.5561	0.0539

## Appendix 2: Proportion of Question Marks in Shakespeare's Plays by Date

This chart records the proportion of question marks in each of Shakespeare's plays by date. Though there is no distinct trend, the chart makes clear that the plays written between 1600 and 1605 generally contain a higher proportion of question marks. Of the eight plays written roughly between 1600 and 1605, six (*Hamlet*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, and *King Lear*) have a higher than average proportion of question marks, while only two (*All's Well That Ends Well* and *Macbeth*) have a lower than average proportion. These six also rank within the top nine of Shakespeare's plays with the highest proportion of question marks overall (see Appendix 1).

