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# On Beauty And Ethics In Shakespeare And His Contemporaries

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**ON BEAUTY AND ETHICS IN SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES**

by

**RENUKA GUSAIN**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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2013

MAJOR: ENGLISH

Approved by:

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Advisor

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Date

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## DEDICATION

To my first teachers, my mother and father, Sushila and Kedar Gusain



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## Introduction

I begin with a deliberate misreading. In a song in the *Masque of Beauty* (1608), the poet and playwright Ben Jonson wrote, “It was for Beauty that the World was made” (l.243). In his text, Jonson gave the line this gloss: “An agreeing opinion, both with *Diuines* and *Philosophers*, that the great *Artificer* in loue with his owne *Idæa*, did, therefore, frame the world” (n.p.). While Jonson’s gloss gestures toward the Neoplatonic philosophies that inform the song, I am going to interpret this statement to mean, quite simply, that for the early moderns it was because of beauty that the world came to be.

Across the Continent during the early modern period, the topic of beauty was at the heart of philosophical and theological discourses such as Renaissance Humanism and Christian Neoplatonism. As I argue in Chapter 1, beauty was an intrinsic part of ideas related to the formation and formulation of the human self and of one’s perception of whatever was beyond this self—the other. Ideas about beauty were frequently used to define and explain relationships: between subject and sovereign, between human beings and their environment, and, perhaps most significantly, between the human and the divine. Because beauty was integral to defining human subjectivity, experience and relationships, it became, perhaps inadvertently, a critical way through which early modern culture approached a perennial question that confronts human life—what is it to be? Any attempt to address this question—through formulations of selfhood and being, for instance—also invariably involves an attempt to address how the self relates to, or is different from, any notion of the other. This dissertation, then, conceives of beauty as a way to advance conversations about the experience of otherness in early modern studies.

In showing how an attention to beauty can be lead us to a better understanding of our relationship with the other, this study is positioned against the kind of resistance to beauty and

claims for its ideological perversion and oppression that saturate many critical discourses. As the contemporary philosopher Alexander Nehamas explains:

Beauty is the most discredited philosophical notion—so discredited that I could not even find an entry for it in the index of the many books in the philosophy of art I consulted in order to find it discredited. Even if I believe that beauty is more than the charm of a lovely face, the seductive grace of a Mapplethorpe photograph, the symmetry of the sonata form, the tight construction of a sonnet, even if it is, in the most general terms, aesthetic value, I am not spared. For it is the judgment of aesthetic value itself—the judgment of taste—that is embarrassing.... The aesthetic judgment collapses into an instrument of political oppression or into an implement of moral edification. In either case, beauty disappears. It is either the seductive mask of evil or the attractive face of goodness. (“An Essay on Beauty and Judgement,” n.p.)<sup>1</sup>

Elaine Scarry, whose work on beauty I discuss later, too, also addresses the peculiar position in which beauty is placed in academic discourse:

The sublime (an aesthetic of power) rejects beauty on the grounds that it is diminutive, dismissible, not powerful enough. The political rejects beauty on the grounds that it is too powerful, a power expressed both in its ability to visit harm on objects looked at and also in its capacity to so overwhelm our attention that we cannot free our eyes from it long enough to look at injustice. Berated for its power, beauty is simultaneously belittled for its powerlessness. (85)

Either way you look at it, the topic of beauty invariably faces resistance in academic discourse.

As Heather Dubrow notes about much of the criticism in the field of early modern studies, any discussion of form or “pronouncements on Truth and Beauty” clash with topics of “sex, religion, and of course, above all, politics”(59). The last book written specifically about beauty and

---

<sup>1</sup>The complete quotation:

It is embarrassing ideologically, if to be able to judge aesthetically you must be educated and learned and if, as Pierre Bourdieu claims, “it is because they are linked either to a bourgeois origin or to the quasi-bourgeois mode of existence presupposed by prolonged schooling, or (most often) to both of these combined, that educational qualifications come to be seen as a guarantee of the capacity to adopt the aesthetic disposition.” And it is embarrassing morally, if, as Martha Nussbaum asserts, the aesthetic and the moral coincide, if “the activities of imagination and emotion that the involved reader performs during the time of reading are not just instrumental to moral conduct, they are also examples of moral conduct, in the sense that they are examples of the type of emotional and imaginative activity that good ethical conduct involves” and if, when a work of art is marred by what she calls “ethical deficiencies,” “we may... decide to read [it] for historical interest or for rhetorical and grammatical interest. (n.p.)

Shakespeare was John Vyvyan's *Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty* (1961), which reads Neoplatonism, Plato, and Ficino in relation to four Shakespearean plays. Since then, the topic of beauty has been relegated to the far corners of early modern scholarship.

Part of what I want to suggest in this dissertation is that Shakespeare is a philosopher of beauty. At its most basic level, this study examines what happens when we look at beauty as seriously as early modern thinkers did. What happens when we understand beauty as opening up a liminal space for exploration of selfhood and knowledge? Considering that man is, as Hamlet says, "the beauty of the world" (2.2.308), I am hopeful that my examination of beauty and Shakespeare will contribute to contemporary scholarship by enhancing our understanding of selfhood and otherness, and will also address the issue of how the self engages with the other—an issue that is at the crux of ethics. An analysis of beauty in this context enables us to articulate clearly the relation between beauty and ethics. Perhaps it is no coincidence that both the words "beauty" and "ethics," in the specific meanings that I examine, came to be used in English during the same period.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

Ethics	Beauty
1586: As an adjective (now understood as "ethical") and defined as "relating to morals," first used in 1586 in Sidney's <i>Apology for Poetry</i> (sig. D1).	1483: "A beautiful person or thing; esp. a beautiful woman," was first used in William Caxton's 1483 translation of Jacobus de Voragine's <i>The Golden Legend</i> , also incidentally one of the first books Caxton printed in the English language.
1589: "Of an author or literary work: Treating of moral questions, and of ethics as a science," first used in Geroge Puttenham's <i>The Arte of English Poesie</i> .	1563: "A beautiful feature or trait; an embellishment, ornament, grace, charm," first used in John Shute's <i>The First and Chief Grounds of Architecture</i> .
1602: "The science of morals; the department of study concerned with the principles of human duty," first used in William Warner's in <i>Albions England</i> .	1667: "The abstract quality" personified, first used in John Milton's <i>Paradise Lost</i>

This dissertation is then an act of re-visioning: it reconstructs the place of beauty in early modern studies, Shakespeare in particular, through the lens of philosophy and contemporary theory, and redefines a scope for the topic of beauty and ethics in current critical thought. By showing why beauty matters, I hope to fill a gap in current scholarship on the topic of beauty; in arguing for beauty's relevance in topics about gender, religion, and politics in the early modern period, I wish to contribute to the discussion of our dominant cultural and ethical imperative of responsibility to the other.

As I explain in the ensuing chapters, the concept of ethics and responsibility to the other that I use for my argument is derived from the works of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, while critiquing the critical methodologies in early modern literary studies, remind us that “every effort to turn ethics into a principle of thought and action is essentially religious ... it is this Levinasian ethical/religious strain of twentieth-century phenomenology that underwrites much of early modern studies’ critical interest in alterity” (178). Jackson and Marotti show how the still dominant critical mode of New Historicism in early modern studies, while it seeks to address questions about alterity (otherness), has largely ignored the aporia between the self and the other. This aporia, as I elaborate later, emerges from the impossible demand of the other—impossible, because even as the other demands a response and engagement, the alterity of the other cannot be accessed. New Historicism has also largely hindered the critical discussion of topics such as beauty, often treating beauty (much like religion) as an ideological mist that occludes our access to material culture; this reinforces the prejudice that Scarry and Nehamas discuss in academic discourse against the topic of beauty. Given the dominant presence of Neoplatonism and the pervasive emphasis on beauty in early



modern literature, to see beauty as divorced from the central issue of ethics and otherness in the humanities is reductive and akin to a kind of violence.

In the early modern period, the humanists who disseminated Neoplatonic ideals of physical and spiritual perfection saw physical beauty as an outward sign of inner beauty. Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)—who is largely credited with having syncretized Christianity and Platonic thought through his examination of love and its goal and source, beauty—had a marked influence on the positive perception of beauty across the Continent through his writings. Another dominant influence was the Florentine Academy, a group of scholars Ficino led under the patronage of Cosimi de' Medici that discussed Neoplatonic ideas and translated the writings of Plato and Plotinus into Latin. Ficino sees beauty as a reflection of goodness and love, and actually coined the term “Platonic love” to refer to Plato’s notion of spiritual love. Beauty for Ficino is “the characteristic of the thing which makes it seem to reveal in some measure the secret of unity that binds the whole world together” (Jayne qtd. in Raffini 32). Ficino’s translation of and commentary on Plato’s writings in Latin were two of the most influential texts that helped disseminate Neoplatonic thought in Europe.<sup>3</sup> Christine Raffini contends that Ficino’s “theories on love and beauty determined attitudes throughout the Renaissance and beyond” (32) and that along with Ficino, the writings of Pietro Bembo and Baldassare Castiglione also reveal the philosophical, aesthetic, and political ramification of Renaissance Platonism.

Castiglione’s widely circulated 1528 courtesy book, *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (translated in English as *The Book of The Courtier* by Thomas Hoby in 1561), further disseminated ideas on beauty through the prism of Christianized Neoplatonism. As I later elaborate in Chapter 1, Book IV in particular discusses the soul’s ascent on the ladder of love to a divine and universal Beauty

<sup>3</sup> Ficino’s *Commentary of Plato’s Symposium* was published in 1484 and the Italian translation was published in 1544. Prior to 1544 the spread of Ficino’s notion of “Platonic love” was due to dialogues written by other authors in vernacular Italian.

that is ignited first and foremost by the contemplation of physical, earthly beauty; the love of beauty is also therefore, a love of goodness. Among several other treatises on beauty that were influenced by Neoplatonism are Agnolo Firenzuola's popular 1548 *On the Beauty of Women*—that belongs to the defense of women genre and is discussed in detail in Chapter 1—and Thomasso Buoni's *Problemes of Beautie and all humane affections*, translated from Italian to English in 1606, a work that, as I discuss in Chapter 3 in detail, while mostly in the Neoplatonic vein, added extensive elaborations and speculations about the nature of beauty and its relationship to grace and art.

Ficino's views influenced a great many artists too—Botticelli, Titian, Michelangelo, Dürer—<sup>4</sup> who created artworks that in turn inspired more writings; this interplay is reflected in my discussion of some of their works in the ensuing chapters. In addition to art, discourses on beauty, for and against, traversed a broad spectrum of topics and literary genres: social guidebooks and conduct manuals, cosmetic recipe books, defense of women, religious sermons, philosophical treatises, theological tracts, and medical and anatomical manuals. As is evident from Figure 1, these discourses were understood as being connected even in the late 17<sup>th</sup>-century.

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<sup>4</sup> Sandro Botticelli (c.1445-1510) was a Florentine painter who worked under the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici who in turn had Ficino for a tutor. Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) was one of the most important artists at Lorenzo's court. Titian or Tiziano Vecellio (c.1488-1576) was a major artist of Venetian school. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) was a German artist and theorist from Nuremberg who was regarded as the most important figure of the Northern Renaissance.



stemming from Philosophy comes the “Nature of things,” incorporeal and corporeal, and the body (animate or natural), the humane and ethics, divine and theology, painting, poetry, and so forth. And while beauty is not explicitly mentioned anywhere within this map, as I show in Chapter 1, it occupies a seminal place in all these discourses of the humanities and facilitates relationships between them. The image of Venus that appears at the bottom of this oval—with her arms outstretched upward toward a source of light—indicates how Venus came to be understood as being symbolic of beauty’s importance in the process of knowing and humanistic inquiry.

Early modern literature abounds in references to beauty; verse after verse is written in the praise of the perfection of beauty. As Ben Jonson’s Lovel sings in *The New Inn*:

It was a Beauty that I saw  
 So pure, so perfect, as the frame  
 Of all the Universe was lame,  
 To that one Figure could I draw,  
 Or give least line of it a law!

A Skein of Silk without a Knot!  
 A fair March made without a Halt!  
 A curious Form without a Fault!  
 A printed book without a blot.  
 All beauty, and without a spot.  
 (4.4. 4-13)

For Lovel, beauty is blameless, free of fault, pure, and perfect. As we see in detail in Chapter 1, however, definitions and descriptions of beauty were not always this positive. Almost a century prior to Jonson’s play, in *Everyman*, for instance, Beauty (an allegorical representation of beauty) is someone who will be of not use to Everyman:

O all thing faileth, save God alone;  
 Beauty, Strength, and Discretion;  
 For when Death bloweth his blast,

They all run from me full fast.

Beauty is superficial and fades away; unlike Good Deeds, it is not constant. The early modern period, then, was a time when beauty was celebrated, but also a time when, as Ann Korhonen reminds us, the most often repeated beauty percept in early modern literature was from the 1560 Geneva Bible (Sirach 9:8): “Turne away thine eye from a beautiful woman, and loke not vpon others beautie: for manie haue perished by the beautie of women: for thorow it loue is kindled as a fyre” (343).

According to the *OED*, in this period beauty was defined as “Such combined perfection of form and charm of colouring as affords keen pleasure to the sense of sight: a. in the human face or figure. b. of other objects.” Partly due to the revival of classical thought, writers mostly tended to view beauty in Aristotelian as well as Platonic terms: following Aristotle, beauty was defined as a kind of symmetry and proportion of form and harmony; following Plato, beauty was perceived as a material means to a spiritual end and enlightenment. In both approaches, beauty manifests itself in physical form, often the human body.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, contrary associations consistently emerge in various early modern discourses on beauty, such as: beauty is visible, especially in the physical form of women, yet beauty is manifested in grace and virtue (or conversely, only that which is virtuous is beautiful); beauty can be attained materially, through art and cosmetics, yet beauty is innate and natural (or only that which is natural is beautiful); beauty (both natural and artificial) is misleading and corrupts, yet beauty is divine (and that the divine is always beautiful); and, finally, much as human beings aspire toward beauty, in both body and mind, beauty always remains elusive and ineffable.

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<sup>5</sup> Plotinus later adds to Plato and describes beauty as more than just a formal property; in addition to beauty being symmetry, it is something that necessarily “irradiates” and moves the onlooker. As theologian Edward Farley summarizes, beauty “is the intelligibility of things played out or split over into the animating power of the world and, specifically, to the animated or ensouled human being. Beauty is not, then, mere order or pattern but is an ensouled or enlivened intelligibility whose origin is the beyond-being or One.” (20)

We need to keep in mind that these varying and sometimes contradictory associations were not viewed as being problematic or indeed, even as contradictions, by early modern thinkers. Beauty encompassed a wide variety of associations and this inclusiveness appears to define the very nature of what beauty meant in the early modern period. I read Shakespeare as one such thinker who appears to be less interested in selecting and positing a singular definition of beauty than in constantly exploring possibilities of representing and engaging with beauty in its complexity. His works then can be read as a process of thinking through these very possibilities and complexities of beauty.

My methodology is influenced by several approaches, most of which work against historicist approaches. Joel Altman's *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (1978) embodies one such approach: by applying two modes of rhetorical inquiry—the demonstrative and the explorative—Altman reads Elizabethan plays not simply as raising questions but literally as questions “or rather fictional realizations of questions”(2-3). Following Altman's lead, I tend to read the plays “as media of intellectual and emotional exploration for minds that were accustomed to examine the many sides of a given theme,” all the while keeping in mind his assertion that “the *experience* of the play was the thing” (author's italics 6). The necessary overlap between rhetoric and the “experience” of the aesthetic in this kind of a rhetorical formalistic reading allows for a space to explore a concept such as beauty. *Philosophical Shakespeares* (2000), a collection that argues for a *rapprochement* between philosophy and Shakespeare criticism from various perspectives, and Richard Halpern's trans-historical approach in *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (1997), which uses the method of “historical allegory” to read topographies of contemporary issues in Shakespearean plays, are also works and approaches that influence my argument here. Finally, it is Julia Lupton's

approach of thinking with Shakespeare that has influenced the way I read and think about Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Lupton's approach is especially evident in her latest work, *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life*, where she reads Shakespeare through the political theories of Hannah Ardent and other theorists and philosophers to examine the relation between politics and life. For Lupton, Shakespeare's plays are trans-historical, open-ended texts that can shape contemporary thinking about ethics, life, and our humanity.

In Chapter 1, "Beauty, Becoming and the Want to Be in the Early Modern Period," I analyze a range of genres—conduct manuals, emblem books, cosmetic recipe books, religious treatises, defenses of women, poetry, philosophical writings—to address the various connotations of beauty and its contradictions in the early modern period. I examine these definitions and interpretations of beauty to argue that an in-depth engagement with beauty was essential to developing ideas about selfhood and subjectivity. In addition to delineating the socio-cultural and theoretical context for my discussion of beauty in the early modern period, this chapter establishes how beauty became a critical way through which early moderns understood their culture understood itself and attempted its self-definition.

In Chapter 2, "O Beauty, till now I never knew thee!": The Call of Beauty and Other Ethical Experiences in *All is True*," I turn to the crucial relationship between beauty and other linked ethical experiences and the way this relationship is played out in one of the last plays by Shakespeare,<sup>6</sup> *Henry VIII* or *All is True*. Drawing from contemporary philosophers, I contend that an ethical demand is placed not only on the characters within the play but also on the audience through the aesthetic. Consequently, I proceed to read this late history play as an aesthetic exploration of an ethical demand. I start by considering the moment when Henry first

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<sup>6</sup> John Fletcher, who succeeded Shakespeare as chief playwright for the king's Men, collaborated with Shakespeare on this play. *Henry VIII* is included in the First Folio.



meets Anne and declares her beauty as an ethical moment. Stemming from this, I reinterpret other quasi-religious or supernatural moments—such as Henry’s “prick of conscience” at Blackfriars, Katharine’s vision, and Cranmer’s prophecy—as corroborating the call of beauty. By juxtaposing and tracing similarities between the experience of beauty, the religious, and the supernatural, I argue that all of these experiences are, in their spatio-temporal form, experiences with otherness and thus, as I later explain, ethical moments. This discussion sheds light on the similarities underlying the phenomenological aspect of beauty and ethics, seeing and knowing, and the complex experience of otherness.

In Chapter 3, “With what’s unreal thou coactive art”: The Problem and Possibilities of Beauty in *The Winter’s Tale*,” I examine what a response to beauty entails. I juxtapose specific moments of engagement with beauty in the play with Robert Greene’s 1588 prose romance *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (one of the sources for Shakespeare’s play), Book VI of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1596), and David Garrick’s 1756 adaptation *The winter’s tale, or Florizel and Perdita. A dramatic pastoral, altered from Shakspeare*. I analyze these texts primarily because they contain instances that parallel and diverge from the Shakespearean moments in interesting and illuminating ways. Along with these texts, Thommaso Buoni’s *Problemes of Beautie and all humane affections* helps establish a literary and philosophical context for my discussion of beauty, grace, and art. In this chapter, I consider Florizel’s wish to see Perdita’s beauty “move still, still so”—his impulse to make the experience of beauty infinitely present and available—as a critical moment that reveals the paradoxes of responding to beauty. Contrary to what critics have said about Florizel redeeming the destructive effects of Leontes’ enraged mind, his infamous “affection” speech in particular, I argue that far from remedying Leontes’ mistakes, Florizel is inadvertently repeating them. Working through similar



moments of complex engagements with beauty leads me to conclude that the play does not end with the resolution of a romance but in a suspended repetitive movement of violence, a movement that displays the complexity not just of Shakespeare's art, but of this thought.

Chapter 4, "The Other of Beauty Manifested: Beauty, Identity, and Otherness in *Othello* and *Omkaara*," explores the nature of what I refer to as *the other of beauty* or the possible converse of beauty to see what that reveals about beauty itself. I discuss *Othello* in relation to Vishal Bhardwaj's Hindi cinematic adaptation *Omkaara* to examine the intimate relationship of the other of beauty with color, race, and particularly in the case of the film, caste and deformity. The film adaptation helps us reassess some of the critical issues at stake in the play and we observe that the other of beauty (variously perceived as blackness, unattractiveness and cultural otherness, which are often synonymous) gets manifested as a distinct marker of the marginalized other which is invariably juxtaposed against various paragons of beauty and goodness in the respective works. While the marginalized other of beauty is set in sharp contrast with beauty, it is nonetheless contingent upon beauty itself and vice-versa. For instance, in *Othello*, beauty is life affirming and divine, represented through Desdemona as the Virgin Mary and also as Venus Anadyomene when she arrives at the shores of Cyprus—Venus rising from the waves and representing cosmic order. But it also exists in an intersubjective relationship with ugliness: Iago's statement that "there is a daily beauty in Cassio's life that makes me ugly" (5.1.19-12) reflects not only his negation of vitality but also suggests a relationship of correspondence between beauty, identity, and selfhood. The idea that beauty and its other are interchangeable and often mutually reinforcing raises interesting questions about the relation that lies at the heart of ethics—between the marginalized and dominant other.

By opening up the discussion of beauty and ethics in a non-European contemporary context in the last chapter, I emphasize the significance of this theme and its relevance of Shakespeare's thinking—both of which enable a better understanding our present human condition and draw attention to our dominant ethical imperative of respect to the other.

## Chapter 1

### Beauty, Becoming and the Want to Be in the Early Modern Period

In this chapter, I examine various definitions of beauty in early modern writings to argue that beauty was intrinsic to ideas about the formation and formulation of the human self. I begin with an examination of early modern ideals of beauty or the “what” of beauty, and the participants in that discourse, that is, the “who” of beauty. This is followed by an analysis of the difference between artificially created beauty through cosmetics and—its ostensible opposite—the natural beauty of the body. After discussing how both natural and artificial beauty were disparaged and feared, I look at those philosophical discourses that upheld beauty, especially female beauty, as being integrally linked to notions of the divine, love, and knowledge. In addition to delineating the cultural and theoretical context for my discussion of beauty in the early modern period, this chapter establishes how beauty became a critical way through which early modern culture approached the perennial question that confronts human life—what is it to be?

#### Physical Beauty and Looking Beautiful: Ideal(s) of Beauty in the Early Modern Period

Early modern literature abounds in references to the beauty of the human body, women in particular, and as we will see, beauty becomes a way of defining female identity. As Ann Krohonen contends, “All early modern beauty texts affirmed that human beauty resided overwhelmingly in women” (342). The literary conventions and imagery used to depict female beauty are deployed even when the beauty of male figures is described. In Shakespeare’s *Venus*

and *Adonis* for instance, *Adonis* is described as having features that surpass those of *Venus* herself: he is “Thrice-fairer” than *Venus*, “the field’s chief flower, sweet above compare, / Stain to all nymphs, more lovely than a man” (7-9). It seems only reasonable therefore to begin my discussion of beauty with an attempt to address a single question: what was the beautiful woman?

The 1536 guidebook *El Costume delle Donne* (owned by 19<sup>th</sup>-century Italian librarian, Salomone Morpurgo) is often cited for its list of thirty-three “beauties that women ought to have...eleven are the part, but each extend into three” (24-26, my translation):

- 3- long; the hair, the hands and the legs
- 3- tiny; the teeth, the ears and the breasts
- 3- large; the forehead, the torso and the hips
- 3- narrow; the waist, the knees and that which nature has placed where it is all soft.
- 3- big, but in good proportion; the buttocks, the arms and the thighs
- 3- fine; the eyebrows, the fingers and the lips
- 3- round; the neck, the arms, and the rump
- 3- small; the mouth, the chin and the feet
- 3- white; the teeth, the chest and the hands
- 3- red; the cheeks, the lips and the nipples
- 3- black; eyelashes, the eyes and that which you know.<sup>1</sup>

This description occurs in a pastoral eclogue; a shepherd named *Philibbo* lists these “beauties” during an extended and detailed dialogue he has with his fellow shepherd, *Dinarco*. These “beauties” are qualities that women “ought” to have and are thus necessary conditions that inform a notion of ideal womanhood. These thirty-three attributes follow a certain hierarchical order: for instance, of the three attributes listed under the “part” or category “long,” *Philibbo* says that firstly, the hair should be long; secondly, the hands; and finally, the legs. The other ten categories follow the same pattern. It is worth noting that apart from the last three categories that

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for the full dialogue in original Italian.

talk about color—white, red, and black—the rest, in line with Aristotle, are concerned with shape and proportion.

In most other descriptions of beauty, however, color is given equal, if not more importance, especially in reference to the skin and hair. The classical Renaissance ideal of beauty, that of the Petrarchan mistress—with ivory skin, golden hair, among other features—tends to be the one most widely circulated through and between various early modern literary genres and other visual arts across the Continent. According to Sylvia Ferino-Pagden:

[...]Venetian painters created idealized portraits in accord with the canon of female beauty formulated in poetic and literary tracts: blond locks, broad, smooth forehead; wonderfully balanced, arched eyebrows; starlike eyes; well-formed cheeks; and so forth. These painting in turn stimulated new poems and treatises on female beauty and love. (196)

Sixteenth-century Italian painter, Titian, who was known for idealized portraits of women, comes close to some of the literary ideals of beauty in the painting *Flora* (c.1515).





Figure 2: Titian's *Flora* (c.1515)  
Source: Wikimedia Commons. <<http://commons.wikimedia.org>>.



Similar ideals are reflected in the literature of the period across the Continent, particularly through the blazon (*blason* in French) which is a prime example of a literary device deployed to describe beauty through its use of fragmentation and hyperbole. Clément Marot's famous blazons— compiled and produced with other blazons in the 1543 *Sensuient les blazons anatomiques du corps femenin* by Charles L'Angelier—offer extensive and detailed descriptions of beauty and ugliness through blazons and counter blazons. This, for instance, is what a beautiful throat looks like:



Figure 3: Depiction of Clement Marot's blazon

The collection contains other blazons, some from the blazon competition organized by Marot that Maurice Scève won; Scève's description of "Le Sourcil," the eyebrow that, according to Neoplatonists was the noblest of all body parts, came in first place. The book contains several such images and descriptions of various parts of the female body.

While the image in *Flora* is an approximation of the beauty of a woman's face, it is Titian's *Venus Anadyomene* (Venus rising from the waves) (c.1520)—also an idealized portrait of beauty—that conforms almost precisely to the conventional standards of the ideal body proportion. Venus was the perfect model for beauty; among several others, Italian Renaissance humanist Mario Equicola (c.1470-1525) in *Libro di natura d'amore* agrees that the image of the goddess Venus embodies beauty and perfect proportion.



Figure 4: Titian's *Venus Anadyomene* (c.1520)  
Source: Wikimedia Commons. <<http://commons.wikimedia.org>>.



In England, too, writers used the blazon: Philip Sidney's blazon in *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* is representative of the more widely circulated ideas about physical beauty and related color scheme of the body (and consequently also race) associated with that notion of beauty. In Sidney's romance, Pyrocles disguised as Zelmane sings about Philoclea after seeing her bathe in the river as if he were describing the very image of Titian's Venus rising from the waves:

*What toong can her perfections tell  
 In whose each part all pens may dwell?  
 Her haire fine threeds of finest gould  
 In curled knots mans thought to hold:  
 But that her fore-head sayes in me  
 A whiter beautie you may see.  
 Whiter indeed ; more white then snow,  
 Which on cold winters face doth grow.  
 That doth present those euen browes,  
 ...  
 Her nose, her chinne pure iuorie weares:  
 No purer then the pretie eares.  
 So that therein appeares some blood,  
 Like wine and milke that mingled stood  
 ...  
 So good a say inuites the eye,  
 A little downward to espie,  
 The liuelie clusters of her brests,  
 Of Venus babe the wanton nests: Like  
 pomels round of Marble cleere:  
 ...  
 Her bellie then gladde sight doth fill,  
 Iustly entitled Cupids hill.  
 A hill most fitte for such a master,  
 A spotlesse mine of Alablaster.  
 Like Alablaster faire and sleeke,  
 But soft and supple satten like.*

(150<sup>v</sup>-52<sup>v</sup>)<sup>2</sup>

The repetitive emphasis on white skin here, and in most love poetry, serves to establish whiteness as a dominant literary and cultural norm for beauty. While discussing how feminine

<sup>2</sup> Transcribed from William Ponsonbie's 1590 edition.

beauty was codified and followed a formula to which women aspired to conform, Sara F. Matthews Grieco contends, “The color of the eyes might vary (the French were fond of green; the Italians preferred black or brown), and occasional concessions might be made to dark hair; but the canon of feminine appearance remained essentially the same for some three hundred years” (58).

This perception of beauty, nonetheless, does not remain constant. Baker reminds us that the deformed mistress theme—evident, for instance, in Suckling’s “The Deformed Mistress,” Shakespeare’s Sonnet 130 “My mistresses’ eyes are nothing like the sun,” and the trend of the counter blazon— reflects how the concept of beauty broadened in the seventeenth century owing to the influence of mannerist and baroque aesthetics: “authors rejected classical Renaissance ideals of the blonde, fair woman, and ostensibly explored the possibilities of ‘black’ beauty” (96). This perspective of an ‘other’ beauty is possibly also a result of colonial expansion and discovery of varied races and cultures (even though ironically, one of the results of the colonial enterprise was an introduction to substances such as ivory that were used to evoke figures of whiteness). The dominant definition of female beauty as one with ivory white skin did have a few challengers. Thomas Browne, who attempted to clarify some of the common fallacies of the age in his 1646 *Pseudodoxica Epidemica* or *Enquiries into very many received tenets and commonly presumed truth*, supports Aristotelian views to reject the idea of beauty as being associated with one race or skin color over another:

[i]f we seriously consult the definition of beauty, and exactly perpend what wise men determine thereof, we shall not apprehend a curse, or any deformity therein. For first, some place, the essence thereof in the proportion of parts, conceiving it to consist in a comely commensurability of the whole unto the parts, and the parts between themselves, which is the determination of the best and learned Writers. Now hereby the Moores are not excluded from beauty; there being no consideration of colours, but an apt connexion and frame of parts and whole.

...Aristotle in two definitions of pulchritude, and Galen in one, have made no mention of colour. (521)

Browne's description is much closer to the one presented by the shepherd Philobbo in *El Costume Della Donne* a century earlier. Form is more important than color, and a person of any race can be deemed beautiful if her body is of a certain proportion.

While this alternative perspective had its place in the discourse of beauty, the dominant ideal of beauty was still a white woman, often one belonging to a specific social order. Who then, was this beautiful white woman? Grieco points out how cookbooks of the sixteenth and seventeenth century show a marked preference for sugars, fats, creams, and butter over the earlier (fourteenth and fifteenth century) preference for acidic and sour sauces. This suggests that for people who could afford such ingredients, plumpness was beautiful and thinness was considered ugly (55). This is indicative of how class is a strong determinant in the discourse of beauty and its definition; it naturally followed that these classes had easier access to beauty because they had plentiful food and could afford using expensive cosmetics. Additionally, since they were wealthy enough to avoid working in under the sun, they also had fairer skin. Also, since literary practices themselves were the prerogative (and profession) of the upper and middle class, by default the discourse of beauty and the decision of what defines beauty was almost entirely in their hands, especially in the hands of men.

Indeed, the literary and pictorial ideals of beauty (and ugliness) reveal much more about the poets and artists who create them and are active participants in the discourse of beauty. Representing beauty becomes a means of self-definition for the artist. As Baker argues, and as Elizabeth Cropper has shown in her extensive study on female beauty in renaissance portraiture, these dwellings and ruminations on beauty were a way for the (mostly male) artist to wield his creativity. The focus on the beauty of a woman (or ugliness) is an exercise in self-conscious

artistry—to explore the depths and extent of one’s own creative power. The beauty of a woman newly (re)created through art is the ideal because, of course, the natural beauty of a woman leaves a lot to be desired and she can become a model of perfect form only through male art. Cropper’s conclusion to her influential essay “The Beauty of Woman” from the collection *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* is worth quoting in full:

In the Renaissance *paragone* of painting and poetry, the portrayal of a beautiful woman is not merely an example. It is the test the poet sets the painter, and the primary figure for the truthfulness of the representation of beauty itself. Not all portraits of beautiful women were painted in direct response to the changing arguments of this debate, but, given the inextricability of the image of the beloved from the problem of the *paragone*, so firmly established by Petrarch, few paintings of women stand completely outside it. Sometimes the metaphors of poetry prevail, sometimes the natural colors of painting dominate.... But the portrait of a beautiful woman belongs to a distinct discourse from which the woman herself is necessarily absent. In portraying his mistress, it is the art of painting that the painter desires to possess, even as the poet embraces his own laurels. (190)

As I later discuss, even as it was predominantly the male gaze and authority that constructed various ideals of beauty, women themselves were not merely passive objects. The interest in male beauty too appears to be an exercise in artistry. The young beautiful man in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* or in *A Lover’s Complaint* is subject to similar artistry as women.<sup>3</sup>

Just as for the artist, “[b]eaauty was also a useful tool [for women], and women without others means of influencing society, deliberately made use of it. Like the sun, the throne, and the altar, beauty fascinated, and it was thus the center of complex strategic maneuvers” (Nahoum-Grappe 100). Beauty made women visible and thus offered them a liminal space to be “heard.” Krohonen, for instance, has argued that “early modern beauty was a question of gendered power” (360) and was a threat to gender dynamics partly because it was irresistible, visually and

<sup>3</sup> It is on stage in particular, that things start getting complicated: when young boys play female roles and are being sung paeans about their beauty, issues of homoeroticism, cross-dressing, and gendering are involved.

sexually, and disrupted the notion of the self-contained man who was in control of his emotions and morals. She raises important question about gender politics, beauty, and visibility:

Women were not mere objects. They had minds of their own, and even writing men knew that. In fact, it seemed to men that women deliberately put themselves in men's ways, forcing men to look at, admire and desire them. So women were not innocent, but what did that mean for the women? When appearing to the gaze, what kind of agents were they? It is a paradox of the early modern rationale of beauty that the object was deemed to possess all power, while the looking subject was reduced to a passive receiver of the emotions and desires that the object provoked. (337)

A lot of this interpretation of the power of beauty over the onlooker has to do with the preoccupation with visual experience in England during and after the Reformation that brought about a distrust of visual images and forceful antvisual rhetoric that I discuss later in the dissertation. Beauty was then an active process of communication and interpretation, and “inscribed both the seer and the seen with cultural meaning” (336). In analyzing the cultural history of typical early modern London streets (as well as Hyde Park and around Westminster) in relation to physical beauty, Krohonen successfully shows how women too, participated in the discourse of beauty.

In addition to bodies, both male and female, places and spaces participated in the discourse of beauty as well. Cropper reminds us that the cultivation of beauty was a part of Renaissance statecraft (9); it was an attribute of collectives of people and cities too. Thomas Frangenberg analyzes Francesco Bocchi's 1591 encomium (and guidebook) to the city of Florence, *Le Bellezze della citta fi fiorenza*, to show how beauty was encouraged to be a “civic asset” (Cropper 9): “Bocchi aims to make the notion of beauty a useful intellectual tool in the context of the visual exploration of the city, and in art criticism (Frangenberg 195). Robert Williams explains how for Bocchi beauty was not just ornamental but essential; the collective beautiful aspects of Florence are signs of “the city's *virtu*--its power, but also its worth or

integrity in a spiritual or moral sense” (199). The beauty of the city implied excellence not just in a geographical, architectural sense, but also as a characteristic of the state of mind of its inhabitants and their daily conduct toward each other.

Nowhere is the use of beauty for statecraft and power play more evident than in the image of Elizabeth I. While the topic of Elizabeth and beauty can itself be a full-length study, in this paragraph I will only briefly gesture toward some of the examples. And even though these examples can seem to contribute to the criticism of beauty as ideological mist, both perverse and powerful, they should not be sidelined the way beauty has been in academic discourse; even though my dissertation argues for a different approach, these critical notions still need to be accounted for since they do occupy a place in the discourse of beauty in the period. For instance, the discursive practices, both literary and visual, deployed by and surrounding the “cult of Elizabeth” clearly indicate the importance of beauty in Elizabeth’s (re)presentation. Roy Strong’s work on the cult of Elizabeth reveals how deliberately and skillfully images of Elizabeth were deployed in Tudor pageantry and portraiture to further political interests. Among several iconological references, the image of Elizabeth as beautiful *Astraea* symbolized constancy and changelessness; it also reflected Elizabeth’s personal motto *Semper eadem*. John Davies’ acrostic poem, “Hymnes of *Astraea*,” though it does not contain the word beauty and was written in 1599 when Elizabeth was an aging sixty-three year old monarch, describes such constancy and timelessness. Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen in white-face makeup—Venetian ceruse made from poisonous white lead and vinegar!—was visually fashioned to evoke veneration and admiration. In the tradition of courtly poetry that circulated in the Elizabethan court, the Queen was also Venus, the goddess of beauty and later Cynthia/ Diana, the chaste moon goddess. Walter Raleigh and Edmund Spenser, whose poetry I discuss in Chapter 3, celebrated the Queen’s beauty.

Beauty was indeed ideological and political power, and a perceived lack of beauty signified a lack of power. It was therefore crucial that Elizabeth appeared to be beautiful at all times, in all her (re)presentations, even if it meant wearing poisonous cosmetics.

### **Becoming Beautiful: Cosmetics or the Pursuit of Physical Beauty the Sinful Way**

The process of acquiring beauty (or beautification) or artificially created beauty occupies a dubious place in early modern England. Where, on the one hand, there are moral treatises and anti-cosmetic tracts that condemn artificial beauty as false and even sacrilegious, there are also plenty of manuals and handbooks that contain cosmetic recipes and methods to acquire beauty, all with an aim to improve oneself. Talking about the “sociological effects of beauty and the economic process by which this pure, ephemeral spectacle was produced,” Veronique Nahoum-Grappe, who has worked on the history and phenomenology of bodily identity, reminds us of how

[t]here was a whole technology of beauty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mirrors (which in urban interiors grew larger and more numerous), cosmetics, and hairpieces were complemented by a variety of scientific and medical techniques, a wealth of objects and practices, and a major investment of time and effort. (96)

These technologies were deployed in the construction and preservation of the human body and identity and coincided with the advancements in medicine, pharmacology, and anatomy.

A good representative of this “technology of beauty” and the popularity of cosmetics is Thomas Jeamson’s 1665 *Artificiall embellishments or arts best directions: How to Preserve Beauty or Procure it*, an extensive manual that promotes the idea that beauty is something that needs to be attained for optimal functioning of the body. Jeamson details how beauty can be attained through elaborate recipes that cover every part of the body and every skin condition imaginable. In its discussion of certain maladies this work appears to be a medical manual,

which comes as no surprise since Jeamson had a doctor of medicine degree and was later on the roll of the Royal College of Physicians of London. This also points to the overlap between the domains of cosmetics and early modern medicine: as Edith Snook has shown, cosmetics or what she identifies as “beautifying physics,”<sup>4</sup> was a part of the “medical culture of diagnosis and treatment shared by lay and licensed practitioners” (13). Examining the overlap between women’s cosmetics recipe manuscripts and men’s medical receipt collections, among other evidence, Snook convincingly argues that this category of knowledge shows how medicine was a part of a woman’s household activities and offered a domain where women could participate in caring for their health and experiment with medicines-cosmetics. Indeed, cosmetics were a part of (and also allowed women participation in) the rapid advancement of science and the understanding of human body and anatomy.

Cosmetics, therefore, helped attain not just beauty but also good health and physical well-being. Jeamson, in fact, describes the lack of beauty as a deformity, “a complicated misery” (sig. A3<sup>r</sup>), an infectious disease and a hag:

Now to quit you Ladies from the loathsome embraces of this hideous Hagge, (which might there be so many Furies in Hell, would make a fourth) [deformity] I have published these Xosmeticks; so Beautifying, that those who use them shall Diana it in company. And with a radiant luster outshine their thick skind companions, as so many browner Nymphs. (sig. A4<sup>r</sup>)

Jeamson’s solutions and recipes appear to accommodate differences in economic class, suggesting the use of inexpensive replacements for more costly ingredients. Along with recipes for beautification, Jeamson offers tips on basic hygiene as well: “Beauty is a nice and cleanly Dame, that loves to have the nose (though but the sink to convey filth from the braine) kept neat and handsome, as well as the other parts which are designed for more honorable uses” (140).

<sup>4</sup> Snook identifies “beautifying physics” as a category of knowledge and she adopts this term from the subtitle of Johann Wecker’s 1660 collections of cosmetic receipts, variously entitled *Arts Masterpiece: Or the beautifying Part of Physick* and *Cosmeticks, or, The Beautifying Part of Physick*.



Beauty aids social mobility, since bodies that “have not the stamp of Beauty” (sig. A4<sup>v</sup>) are not fit for human society. Women need beauty to become a part of human society. In addition to being a social guide for women, Jeamson offers women the possibility of becoming not only more than who they are (socially), but also a way of becoming more than what they are, i.e., more than merely human. For Jeamson the use of his cosmetic recipes and methods leads to this reward: “Ye have heard Ladies how to furnish your selves with a Beauty, so transcendent, that shall puzzle Rhetorick to studie Hyperbolies to express it by; so captivating, that none shall dare stile himself a Platonik; or at most, he onely whom your divine features shall make believe that ye are more than mortal” (175). Beauty can be created and these women could become someone else or at the least, a better version of themselves.

This, in fact, is the very argument used by detractors of cosmetics and artificial beauty to condemn “beautification”—it is false and sacrilegious.<sup>5</sup> Since humanity was created in the likeness of God, it followed that cosmetics and face painting alter the face of God (Grieco 561) and tempt men into unchristian, vulgar, and immoral behavior. These arguments against artificially created beauty clearly echo the puritanical argument against drama and play-acting. The title of Thomas Tuke’s 1616 *A discourse against painting and tincturing of women Wherein the abominable sinnes of murther and poysoning, pride and ambition, adultery and witchcraft are set forth & discovered* reveals the various sinful connotations that cosmetic use could have (See Figure 5).

<sup>5</sup> See also, Phillip Stubbes’ often-reprinted *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583, 1584, 1585, 1595).



cosmetic users, “painted woman” or promiscuous women. In the text, Tuke widens his censure and uses the full force of scripture to warn against the dangers of cosmetic uses for both women and men. In particular, Tuke associates the use of cosmetics with the duplicity of Catholicism and Jesuits. Citing the Bible extensively, as well as theologians such as Saint Augustine, Tuke equates cosmetic use with deceit and blasphemy; this ungodly exercise” defiles God’s “handy-worke”:

And dost thou thinke it lawfull for thee to make shewes of fauour and beauty, or of another complexion and temper, then thou art of, by they dawbing, painiting and borrowing, God and Nature, which is his Handmaid, hauing withheld beautie, or a louely complexion from thee? Vertue is one gift of God, and beautie is another: now as a man may not counterfeit vertue, being vicious so he maybe not counterfeit beautie, being destitute of it. ... For were we thankfull to God, as indeed wee should be, would we loth and despise this worke vpon vs, and loue our owne? Would we not care how wee corrupt and mangle his with ours? If we were thankful to his for our complexions and fauour, how meane so euer, we would humble our selves before him, and not goe about to cozen the world with our borrowed feathers.... (13)

The implication here is that any kind of fashioning of the physical body is an attempt at improving God’s work and is a symptom of a sacrilegious and ungrateful attitude toward God. Being (physical and otherwise) is predestined. In other words, whether or not one is gifted with beauty (or even virtue) is determined from birth; one should not attempt to change that and try to acquire beauty by other man-made methods.

Tuke’s citation of the classical scholar, Thomas Farnaby (c. 1575 – 1647), underscores his arguments and also, perhaps unwittingly, reveals one of the reasons for the widespread circulation of cosmetics recipes:

Of face and haire-deceits.  
They that leaue truth, do leaue the Lord  
For God is truth, and all accord.  
But th’ natiue colour of face and haire,  
Is true and right, although not faire.  
But’s false and wrong, that’ died by art,

Worke of a lying, wanton hart.  
 Then 'tis a bad conclusion,  
 That followed this illusion.  
 (B<sup>v</sup>)

The idea that the “native colour,” or the natural color of the face and hair is “not faire,” or that women and men in their natural state are not beautiful is one reason why people gravitated toward cosmetics for self improvement and betterment. It also suggests how ‘natural’ beauty itself evoked ambiguous responses. See for instance, Henry Peacham’s emblem Pulchritudo Faeminea (female beauty) from his emblem book *Minerva Britannia*:

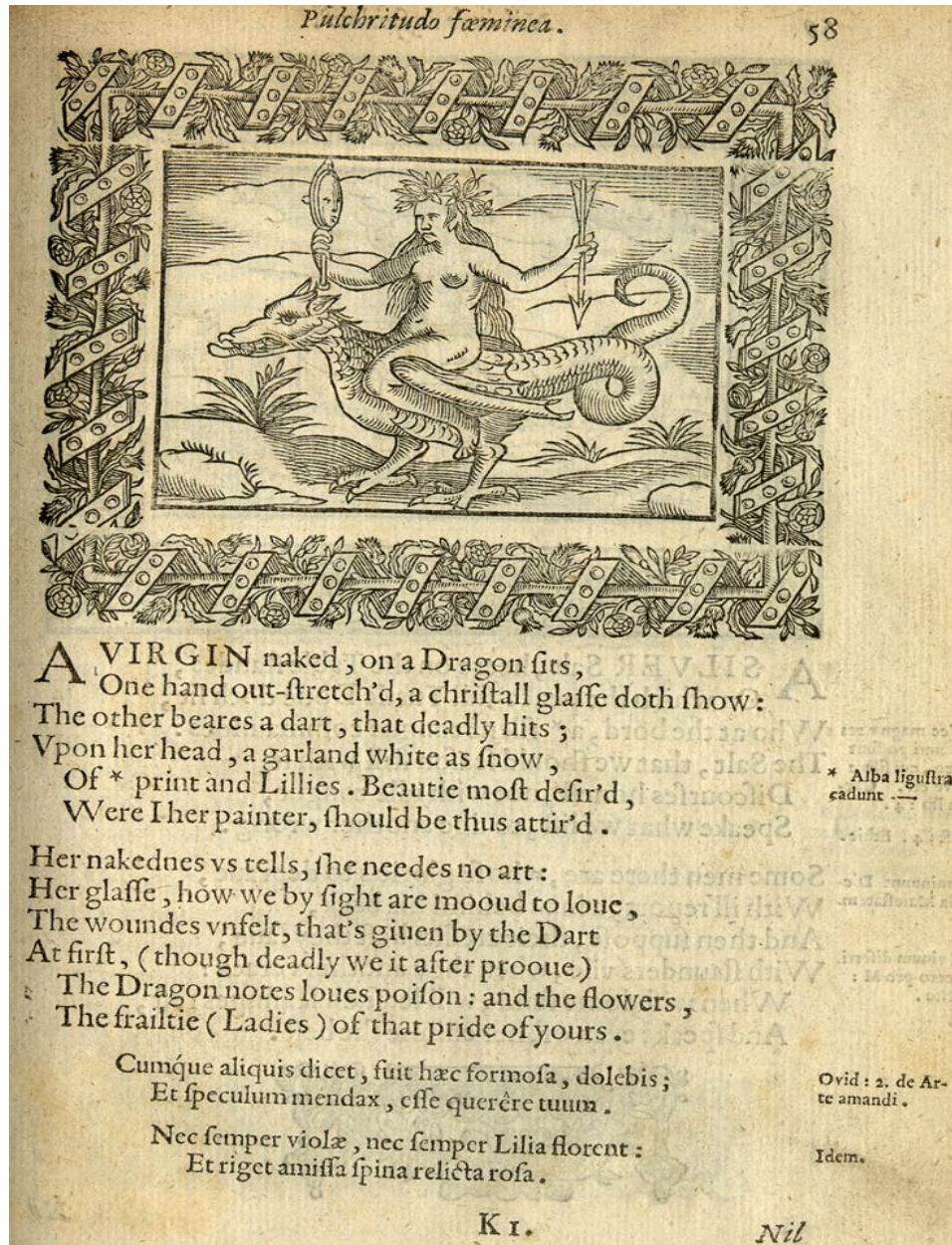


Figure 6: Peacham's *Pulchritudo Faeminea*

Even as Peacham tells us that the kind of “beautie most desir’d” is the beauty of the naked virgin woman that needs no art (i.e. natural beauty), the deadly effects of this kind of beauty are repeatedly highlighted: the dart in the emblem represents the wounds caused to the lovers who are moved by this beauty, the mirror warns against vanity and pride caused by this beauty, and the garland of lilies represents (in addition to chastity) the impermanence of this beauty and



transience, and the inevitable decay of the body. Peacham tells us that the dragon represents “loves poison”; in addition to being a symbol of all the dangers of natural beauty, such as vanity and pride, the dragon also represents sin, pride, vanity, and Satan.<sup>6</sup> Natural beauty, just like artificially created beauty, has negative connotations. Artificial beauty is ungodly because it reflects discontent with and an attempt to improve upon what God gave us. But it would appear that what God gave us—natural beauty—is not godly or even entirely good because, it can lead to the worst kind of sin, and it is not perfect because it is transient.

This idea of the transience of natural (God-given) beauty is echoed even a century later in Richard Allestree’s 1678 *A discourse concerning the beauty of holiness*. Allestree, a churchman, talks of the “beauty of holiness” which is a Laudian catchphrase defending church decoration and ceremony. But as Peter Lake has argued, “there was a distinctive Laudian concern for ‘the beauty of holiness’ with concomitant and equally distinctive notions of sacrilege and of the holy” (304). According to Allestree: “So long as man remained obedient to the Laws of his Maker, his holiness was untainted, and his Beauty and primitive congenitie comeliness continued; but by his woeful apostasy he lost that noble embellishment of his nature to all his other accomplishments, and is now become ugly and deformed” (sig. B4<sup>r</sup>). God-given beauty, what Allestree interestingly calls “noble embellishment,” is not perfect; it can alter into ugliness and is contingent on an individual’s devotion to religious (Christian) dictates such charity, compassion, and humility. Both, ceremonial liturgy and a kind of intangible and spiritual beauty are essential to

<sup>6</sup> For representations of the dragon as evil and Satanic, see Spenser deploy the image of the dragon in *The Faerie Queene*, Bk. I, Canto XI:8-10. Also see Milton’s description of Lucifer being transformed into a serpent in *Paradise Lost*:

His visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,  
His Arms clung to his Ribs, his Legs entwining  
Each other, till supplanted down he fell  
A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone,  
Reluctant, but in vain, a greater power  
Now rul’d him, punisht in the shape he sinn’d.  
(Book X: 511-516)

the relationship between man and God, the human and the divine. This beauty gets tainted if man disregards religion. But if he follows the guidelines of religion dutifully, he can regain his lost spiritual beauty and thus establish a connection with the divine. This kind of beauty then defines the human-divine relationship and is something that can bring the human closer to the divine. A similar perspective on beauty as a condition for access to the divine is shared by John Collinges in his 1650 *A lesson of self-deniall, or, the true way to desirable beauty*, where he makes a strong case for the coterminous nature of beauty and grace; Collinges, an English Presbyterian theologian, advocates an entirely spiritual notion of the soul's beauty that is a necessary condition for grace. Both Collinges and Allestree also use this idea of beauty as a kind of incentive or leverage alternately to encourage or to scare people to follow religious dictates. For both, beauty—whether visible or not—is nonetheless aspired toward because it is a promise for a futurity, a way to establish a connection with the divine, and it indicates an access to something more than and beyond the physical self.

### **Being Beautiful and Neoplatonic beauty: Sensory Perception, Knowing, and Subjectivity**

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the idea of beauty as more than just the physical body is intrinsic to Neoplatonic thought, and one of its clearest articulations occurs in Castiglione's courtesy book *Il Libro del Cortegiano* that further disseminated ideas on beauty through the prism of Christianized Neoplatonism. Book IV in particular discusses the soul's ascent on the ladder of love to a divine and universal Beauty that is ignited first and foremost by the contemplation of physical, earthly beauty.

Castiglione's discussion of beauty is a part of his articulation of the ideal Courtier and comes at the point when Pietro Bembo (the author's mouthpiece) is asked about whether the

Courtier ought to be in love. Bembo replies that the human soul is divided into three parts: the senses, rational thought, and intellect; human beings have the power of choosing between the sensual appetite and the rational appetite and thus, they can desire beauty in either of these ways. The choice is between descending down to the sense or by ascending to the intellect. Bembo warns about sensual love saying that it is a debasement into senses and “if the soul allows itself to be guided by the judgment of sense, it falls into very grave errors, and judges that the body in which this beauty is seen is the chief cause thereof” (52). It is not so much that the senses are distrusted but that they are somewhat primitive and innocent, in need of guidance. Young men who do not have the advantage of seasoned reason let their judgments be guided by their senses. On the other hand, Bembo argues, older men can “come into perfect possession of beauty” because they are guided by rational choice (53). And because beauty is good, these men also come into the possession of good.

Despite the use of the word “possession” this kind of beauty is not to be understood as sensual gratification or something that can physically be possessed. It is viewed thus only by a younger man who, upon its gratification, is left with no knowledge.<sup>7</sup> It is the older man instigated by his senses first and foremost, who comes into a realization or knowledge of the mind’s potential when he experiences beauty: in his soul “the bridle of reason restrains the iniquity of the sense” (53). This man realizes that beauty cannot be contained in the corporeal and he bypasses emotions of anger, despair and “wrathful furors” and “by the force of his own imagination, makes her beauty much more beautiful than in reality it is” (66). Castiglione is asserting the importance of an aesthetic response—as sensory perception—to being the first step in the process of judgment. He emphasizes that the man “must reflect that...beauty can in no

<sup>7</sup> Castiglione has an interesting description of a bodily system that is similar to affective responses generated by a body—pores drying, bodily spirits being scattered but having no way out of the body and thus causing the souls to suffer painfully, “as children do when the teeth begin to come through tender gums”(66).



way be enjoyed, nor can the desire it arouses in our souls be satisfied through the sense of touch but solely through what has beauty for its true object, namely, the faculty of sight” (62). The ability to see and perceive is primary to the experience of beauty because the soul has to first receive this image of beauty and then this sensory perception is to be bypassed.

For Castiglione, the mind progresses from considering a particular beauty to reasoning about the source of this beauty, and onward to universal beauty, “universal intellect,” and Goodness. The experience of beauty, then, becomes a moment of realizing how the mind can contemplate the highest beauty and highest good (and is thus self-reflexive). This moment of self-reflexivity where the mind can perceive itself thinking of Goodness is also a moment where the mind perceives itself as an aesthetic. Gradually, when the mind becomes one with the angelic nature, it “not only completely abandons the senses, but has no longer any need of reason’s discourse” (68). By turning “within himself, in order to contemplate that beauty which is seen by the eyes of the mind...[the soul] beholds divine beauty” but “it still does not yet enjoy that beauty perfectly, because it contemplates it in its own particular intellect merely, which is unable to comprehend vast universal beauty” (68). God then also appears to be the name given to that which the mind cannot fully access. For Castiglione, the contemplation of true, intelligible beauty leads beyond the senses to the contemplation of God but also to the realization that beauty’s source is immutable and inaccessible. Beauty, then, paves the way for observing ourselves engaged in the process of thought and aspiring toward knowledge, especially knowledge of what cannot be fully be thought of and accessed.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Here, I see Castiglione’s conception of love and beauty intersect with Immanuel Kant’s discussion of “the ideal of beauty” and his ideas on sensory and contemplative pleasure as laid out in his theorization of beauty in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790). See Appendix B for a discussion of this work.

Like Castiglione, several other early modern writers were deeply influenced by Neoplatonic ideas of beauty, even if they had different ways of articulating the centrality of beauty in the process of becoming an idealized self. To understand how beauty is intrinsic to a notion of ‘something’ beyond the physical self that cannot fully be accessed but nonetheless defines us as human beings, we need to turn to one of the most thorough examinations of beauty in the early modern period—Agnolo Firenzuola’s 1548 *On the Beauty of Women*, a work that belongs to the defense of women genre. It is a treatise that Elizabeth Cropper rightly contends “is probably the most complete exposition of the beauty of the ideal woman among the multitude of sixteenth-century treatments of the theme” (374). The First Dialogue takes place in a garden where Firenzuola’s mouthpiece, Celso, draws on Neoplatonic theory to define beauty in women and talks mostly about universal and divinely created beauty:

[B]eauty and beautiful women, and beautiful women and beauty are worthy of praise and of everyone’s esteem. For a beautiful woman is the most beautiful object one can admire, and beauty is the greatest gift God bestowed in His human creatures. And so, through her virtue we direct our souls to contemplation, and through contemplation to the desire for heavenly things. (10-11)

In defining beauty as having a formative impact on the human-divine relationship, the Neoplatonist Firenzuola is one of many who appear to be a precursor to seventeenth century theologians and churchmen such as Allestree and Collinges. Like them, Firenzuola begins by discussing more intangible aspects of beauty, more specifically, of a beautiful woman: “we will see what elegance (*leggiadria*) consists of, what is charm (*vaghezza*), what we mean by grace

(*grazia*) or by loveliness (*venusta*), what it is to have an air about you (*aria*) or not to have it, what is that quality which people call majesty (*maesta*) in you women” (13).<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, Firenzuola advocates that the concept of beauty in different things is relative. We cannot say that certain physical attributes would be universally beautiful in everything. For instance, while a hairy woman would be deemed ugly, a horse without hair would appear to be deformed, and while a hump in a camel is “a thing of grace, for a woman, [it would be] a misfortune” (14). Thus, beauty above all, according to Firenzuola, is “a concord and union of diverse things” (14).

A harmonious union of diverse things—such as the parts of a human body that come together and function perfectly and thus contribute to being—is also an aspect of beauty. While describing the “beauty of individual parts and their perfection,” Firenzuola suggests that “it is in these parts, as I mentioned before, that God has placed, with wonderful order, the preservation of the entire composition, for each part helps the other parts, and each part uses the strengths of the other parts” (21). Firenzuola proceeds to describe through diagrams why proportional parts of the body are beautiful. Upright carriage, “that is the shape of the entire person” is a thing of beauty because it separates us from animals and enables us to turn our gaze to the heavens and think about God. In terms of proportion, a beautiful carriage is something that can be contained in a square with arms and legs outstretched (22):<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This idea of the interconnectedness of beauty (*bellezza*) and grace (*grazia*) also appears in other works such as in Benedetto Varchi’s *Lezione sull’ Amore* (1540) and Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d’amore* (1535).

<sup>10</sup> This is no doubt an echo of Leonardo da Vinci’s idea of proportion set forth in his *Vitruvian Man* (c. 1487) which in turn was inspired by the geometrical proportion of the human body set forth in *De Architectura* by Roman architect and writer Vitruvius (c.70 BC-15 BC).



**Figure 7: Firenzuola's diagram of the proportional body contained in a square**

Source: Internet Archive. < <http://archive.org/>>

The reason why this upright, proportional carriage is beautiful is not only because it identifies human beings as different from animals—and consequently helps define our selfhood—but also because it enables an aspiration toward God and goodness. In a sense, the upright carriage is a way that human beings establish a relationship with the divine other who cannot be seen and reached, but can be aspired toward. In other words, a beautiful carriage serves a purpose: it helps define being and facilitates an aspiration toward becoming something more. Firenzuola is also concerned with the utility of other physical features: for instance, the mouth is used to speak and to send nourishment to the body and that is why it is beautiful. It enables communication and therefore relation, and enables sustenance. In addition to describing how a nose should appear, Firenzuola also highlights the functions of the nose that make it a part of a beautiful body: “breathing, smelling, and purging the brain through its little cavities” (28). Like the mouth, the nose serves a function that enables being

and living. The overarching idea here is that beauty *is* the proper functioning of the human body. Beauty enables physical being and also intimates us into an awareness of the divine other.

### **Beauty, Being, and Otherness in Philosophy**

One of the most important issues that emerges from Firenzuola's discussion of various parts of beauty is that the ideal beautiful woman does not exist: "rarely, in fact hardly ever, do all parts that compose perfect and balanced beauty reside in one single woman"(13). Nonetheless in the Second Dialogue, which takes place at the house of Mona Lampiada (one of the ladies participating in the dialogue), Firenzuola and the ladies attempt to put together a description of their imaginary woman. They talk about the various parts of the body and colors that accompany a beautiful body, and they all pick and select features from women they know to form a composite, one that does not and cannot exist. As Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray contend:

From an intellectual consideration of conventional standards of beauty and proportion, the dialogue thus moves to the practical sphere of artistic creation. That is, it moves from a conceptualization of ideal beauty to the actualization of such beauty in a specific beautiful woman. Ironically, as the participants in the discussion move from the theoretical to the practical, they realize that the product of their creative process, the beautiful woman *par excellence*, is a *chimera*, a reality that exists only in the creative imagination, an Idea. (Introduction xx)

While beauty can exist in parts of different men and women, animals and objects, ideal beauty that is perfect and whole—and thus also, pace Peacham's "Pulchritudo Faeminea" emblem, not transient or prone to corruption—can exist only in the imagination of the artist. Ideal beauty, toward which one perpetually aspires and which defines the self (physical and otherwise), is that which cannot be.

Even if beauty in a human body is not a perfect combination of all of Firenzuola's listed features and intangible attributes, it is nonetheless has positive connotations because it leads people to experience a kind of otherness outside themselves--what Firenzuola calls "a foretaste of heavenly things" (11). Firenzuola describes the response to beauty thus:

One sees man forget himself for her [beautiful woman], and, looking at a face adorned with this heavenly grace, his limbs shudder, his hair curls, he sweats and shivers at the same time, not unlike one who, unexpectedly seeing something divine, is possessed by divine frenzy, and when he is finally himself again, adores it with his thoughts and reveres it with his mind, and recognizing it as something like a god, gives himself to it as a sacrificial victim on the altar of the beautiful woman's heart. (11)

This idea that an encounter with beauty somehow corresponds to "unexpectedly seeing something divine" is crucial and I further elaborate on the correspondence between the responses to beauty and the religious or quasi-religious later in Chapters 2 and 3. The bottom line for Firenzuola is that an encounter with beauty demands a submitting of or giving over of the self to this experience. Despite the attacks on beauty in the early modern period, most philosophers, artists and writers, viewed an encounter with beauty in similar terms—it led to a forgetting of oneself, no matter how fleetingly. This momentary decentering of the self in the presence of beauty—when man is not himself, Firenzuola tells us—is likened to the experience of "something like a god," something that is beyond the self, something other. Even a brief encounter with this otherness results in a ceding of the self.

The theologian Edward Farley writes about how beauty "draws the human being out of its immanence into self-transcendence" (51), and he rightly points out that ancient texts did not have an explicit term for human self-transcendence.<sup>11</sup> The response that Firenzuola describes where man "gives himself to" beauty comes close to the meaning of the term self-transcendence

<sup>11</sup> According to the OED the earliest recorded use of the term "self-transcendence" is in 1885.

and it alludes to the way of an ethical engagement with a kind of otherness. To frame these issues of otherness, I later look at Emmanuel Levinas for whom self-transcendence and the ethical are intimately linked. The question at the crux of even the more basic idea of ethics and human relationships is how the self relates to the other. In an early modern context, an encounter with beauty necessarily brings forth the issues at stake in the ethical relationship between the self and the other because an encounter with beauty, following Firenzuola and others, leads to a kind of an experience of self-transcendence. Additionally, beauty is so intertwined with notions of the divine other—both as something that can enable access to God and also as something that can possibly lead away from godliness—that any examination of beauty in the early modern period becomes perforce an examination of the theological nature of otherness.

As we have seen thus far, beauty, regardless of how differently it is perceived—as a prerequisite for being a part of human society (Jeamson) and social mobility, as something that renders us human (upright carriage), as something we lack and therefore have to acquire, as something we are born with but is contingent on religious confirmation (Allestree), as something that defines and is found in our relationship with God (Collinges), as something that we should not acquire because that would be sacrilegious (Tuke)—informs notions of identity and also the self. Beauty, then, is a way early modern culture engaged in its own process of being. To clarify, here I use the word “being” and not self-fashioning or identity deliberately because beauty is not just about looking beautiful through cosmetic use or becoming beautiful by upward social mobility, or by conforming to religious practices or performing virtuous deeds; for early modern culture, beauty is also about *being*, or the question of what is.

However vaguely defined, beauty is a condition of being that informs the very nature of human relationships and, to use Farley’s words, “nothing can ‘be’ without being, in some sense

and to some degree, beautiful” (17). Farley contends, “Beauty comes with being itself” and cogently explains the resistance to concepts of being and beauty:

Like beauty, being is also out of favor. I use the term ‘being’ as a kind of code word for any referent of thinking that is not a specific object, accidental trait, or statistical generalization. To discern human beings not just as amalgams of objective features (such as hair color, weight and food preferences) but in their distinctive temporality is to address their very ‘being’. Again, I must acknowledge that some twentieth-century philosophies eschew ‘being’ as a usable or meaningful term because they identify it with ancient, or at least premodern (and therefore discredited), cosmologies and metaphysics. (16)

Following philosopher and ethicist Władysław Tatarkiewicz’s influential 1972 article, “The Great Theory of Beauty and its Decline” published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Farley examines Olympian cosmogonies, Pythagoras, Platonic tradition and the Christian Middle Ages (St. Augustine, Duns Scotus Erigena, Thomas Aquinas, to name a few), to show how it is impossible to isolate beauty from the ‘thinking of being.’ He also explores philosophical traditions on beauty and being extensively all the way up to Alfred Whitehead (1861-1947) to delineate beauty’s relationship with knowledge and experience—a theme I discuss in Chapter 2. Farley’s research indicates that beauty traverses both the material (and physical) and the non-material or *other* aspects of being and culture. My focus in the rest of the dissertation is predominantly on the relationship between beauty and these *other* aspects of being.

To conclude this chapter, while beauty is defined and described in different and opposing ways in the early modern period, its importance to the cultural and literary imagination of the people cannot be denied. Beauty—as being, as a process of becoming, and as a relation to otherness—was a crucial idea for the early moderns. Engagements with beauty, however fleeting and often overlooked, are critical moments that offer intimations of otherness. As Veronique Nahoum-Grappe contends:



Beauty was defined in circular fashion: beauty is that which pleases, that which pleases is beauty. Dictionaries old and new repeated this empty definition. At the center of the circle was the exclamation of amazement, the breathless “Oh!” of immediate and overwhelming perception. ... Beauty is a unique social spectacle. Aesthetic perception, which occurs in an instant, is its natural terrain. During the moment of perception everything remains in suspense. The more perfect the beauty, the more unreal it is. It can exist fully only in a caesura in time, in memory or retrospective narrative. The context in which beauty manifests itself is precarious and unreal. (96-7)

Nahoum-Grappe underscores the elusiveness of, and the complexity of an engagement with, beauty. The visuality of beauty, as “spectacle” and “perception,” leads to a momentary suspension of time for the onlooker, a theme I develop more fully in my next chapter. As elusive as beauty might be, it is the “breathless “Oh!” of immediate and overwhelming perception” of beauty and the ensuing reflection that, I hope to show, is the moment and space of an engagement with an otherness beyond the self.

## Chapter 2

### “O, beauty, till now I never knew thee!”: The Call of Beauty and Other Ethical Experiences in *All is True*

In this chapter I discuss the call of beauty and explore what it is about the nature and experience of beauty that necessarily demands a response from the perceiver in Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* or *All is True*.<sup>1</sup> The first moment I analyze occurs at Wolsey’s banquet at the end of act 1 when Henry sees the striking Anne for the first time;<sup>2</sup> the second, a later moment in dramaturgical time, is at the end of act 2 when Henry declares the “tenderness, scruple, and prick” of conscience that has led him to divorce Katharine. The immediate reaction of characters in the play and by most audiences is to perceive these two scenes as opposed to each other in what they present. When Henry sees Anne for the first time and declares her beauty, the common critical reaction is to perceive this moment at Wolsey’s banquet as one of pure lust. Anne, after all, was known to be a very attractive woman who just a few lines earlier had caught the amorous attentions of Lord Sandys (1.4.24-30). It only seems obvious to read this moment as, according to Wolsey’s description of Henry, “a little heated” (1.4.103). This moment, then, seems to stand at odds with the critical moment at Blackfriars later in the play where Henry is trying to legitimize his divorce after Katharine’s trial. In light of Henry’s seemingly lust-driven attraction for Anne in the first moment, his revelation of the great agonies of conscience in the second moment appears to be a sheer political ruse staged for his entire council at Blackfriars.<sup>3</sup> Ali

<sup>1</sup> John Fletcher, who succeeded Shakespeare as chief playwright for the king’s Men, collaborated with Shakespeare on this play. *Henry VIII* is included in the First Folio.

<sup>2</sup> On the visual impact of Anne, see David Bevington’s Introduction to the play: “All the characters in the play, whether they stand to profit or lose by Anne’s marriage, speak admiringly of her beauty and honor. Although her speeches are few, her appearances are sumptuously staged, with Anne at the center of a meaningful pageant” (921).

<sup>3</sup> Even as Henry appears to be battling his conscience, his choice of this location is strategic:

The most convenient place that I can think of

Shehzad Zaidi points out, “Coming immediately after Henry’s meeting with Anne, Henry appears prompted less by conscience than by a need to change bedfellows.... We cannot but feel that Henry’s pleasure contradicts the will of heaven” (334, 340).<sup>4</sup> Simply put, Henry’s attempt to justify his divorce is often read as a public masquerade to cover his lust for Anne. Consequently, the audience’s belief in one moment appears to falsify the claims of the other.

However, Elaine Scarry and Alexander Nehamas’ philosophical work on beauty helps us understand that Henry’s response to Anne’s beauty—despite all our intuitive and impressionistic responses—is not pure lust, but “ethical” in a Levinasian sense; somewhat counterintuitively, I will argue it is not all that different from his response at Blackfriars to his “conscience.” Rather than seeing these two moments as opposed, I argue that they are meant to comment on one another in that the “call” of Anne’s beauty corroborates the notion that Henry’s prick of conscience is legitimate and not just a cover for his lust. These moments then can be understood as placing an ethical call on Henry and on the audience to respond to the ethical demand of—to use it with the implication given to the term by Levinas—the Other.<sup>5</sup>

My formulation of the call of beauty is derived from Scarry’s *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) and Nehamas’ *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (2008). Nehamas describes beauty as “a call to look attentively at the world and see how little we

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For such receipt of learning [the divorce] is Blackfriars.  
There ye shall meet about this weighty business.  
My Wolsey, see it furnished. O my lord,  
Would it not grieve an able man to leave  
So sweet a bedfellow? But conscience, conscience!  
Oh, ‘tis a tender place, and I must leave her. (2.2.137-43)

The Blackfriars were Dominican monasteries that had been taken over by Henry. This space is thus a reminder of the schism between the Church of England and the Roman Church.

<sup>4</sup> Zaidi examines the self-contradiction in characters in *Henry VIII* and reads the frustrated searches for meaning and knowledge in the play as resulting in a “spiritual void” that nonetheless affirms the power of kingship. Interestingly, he points out that the word “conscience” is used more frequently here than in any other Shakespearean play and also that this play contains the most number of false oaths.

<sup>5</sup> In Levinasian thought the other is distinct from the capitalized Other. In the original French, Levinas uses two terms: *autre* (the common usage of the word *other*) and *autrui* (which is the capitalized *Other*). Hereafter, I follow Levinas’ usage and capitalize when I refer to the specific philosophical notion of the Other.

see” (131). For Nehamas, beauty is a promise for a future unknown and uncertain: “Beauty always remains a bit of a mystery, forever a step beyond anything I can say about it, more like something calling me without showing exactly what it is calling me to” (78). For Scarry, too, beauty is a “call,” “directing our attention toward, what is absent” (109), but she goes a step further in arguing that beauty makes us pause and actually causes a radical “decentering” of the self: “we willingly cede our ground to the thing that stands before us” (111). While analyzing how beauty figures in perception and ethics, Scarry suggests that this “experience of Beauty” inspires in people “the aspiration to political, social, and economic equality” partly because beauty is a “compact” or “contract” (90). I am not suggesting a direct parity between beauty—in this case, Anne’s beauty—and goodness or justice. I contend that this moment, when Henry experiences beauty, directs out attention to several other possibilities of reinterpreting the play, and provokes us to reconsider the notion of ethics as it broadly understood; this moment then becomes, to rephrase Nehamas’ description of beauty, a call to see how little we really *can* see.

When Henry meets Anne, his disguise as a masquer is that of a shepherd. The moment that he sees Anne and approaches her, he declares, “The fairest hand I ever touched! O beauty, / Till now I never knew thee!” (1.4.76-7). Henry comes to know of Anne’s beauty simultaneously as he touches her: this is the coming into the knowledge of the aesthetic experience of beauty. This encounter with beauty is a striking moment that does not paralyze Henry; rather, it activates a realization of something beyond Anne’s singular beauty. As Scarry points out:

Something beautiful fills the mind yet invites the search for something beyond itself, something larger or something of the same scale with which it needs to be brought into relation. Beauty, according its critics, causes us to gape and suspend all thought ... But simultaneously what is beautiful prompts the mind to move chronologically back in the search for precedents and parallels, to move forward into new acts of creation, to move conceptually over, to bring things into relation, and does all this with a kind of urgency as though one’s life depended on it. (29-30)

For Henry, Anne's beauty is unparalleled and he has never seen and 'known' such fairness and beauty. The unprecedented nature of Anne's beauty calls on Henry's attention not just for itself but to something beyond its particularity and beyond his self. As I explain later, this experience of beauty instigates the response that sets the foundation of an entire history in motion leading up to the ascension of James I.

This instant is fleeting. This sudden revelation of beauty, much like the later "prick" of conscience, comes accompanied with a moment of tactile experience, an embodied response. Henry sees, touches, realizes, and declares almost all at the same time; it is an instant synesthetic response in the presence of beauty. It is as Scarry describes, "A visual event may reproduce itself in the realm of touch...This crisscrossing of the senses may happen in any direction ... So, too, an act of touch may reproduce itself as an acoustical event or even an abstract idea, the way whenever Augustine touches something smooth, he begins to think of music and of God" (4). Music plays, Henry and Anne dance, and Henry is then unmasked by Wolsey and revealed to be king. It is then that Henry gives into desire for her and kisses her.

Within the scheme of the play, this meeting of Henry and Anne is crucial. Whatever sexual provocation Shakespeare uses to engage his audience, the union of Henry and Anne must be more than sexual. Their newborn daughter's reign is going to herald a new order for the nation and the world. To use Scarry's words about an encounter with beauty, "[it] move[s] forward into new acts of creation" (30). Everything in the play leads up to the birth of Elizabeth at the end and Henry's encounter with Anne's beauty is crucial for the future of England. As Scarry contends, "The beautiful thing seems—is—incomparable, unprecedented; and that sense of being without precedent conveys a sense of the "newness" or "newborness" of the entire world" (22). It is this possibility of the "entire world"—yet unknown to Henry—that he opens

himself up to in responding to the call of beauty. In doing so, as I elaborate next, Henry is also opening himself to what Levinas would understand as the ethical call of the Other.

### **The Prick of Conscience and the Other**

I read Nehamas' description of beauty "as the emblem of what we lack" (76) and Scarry's call for a philosophical attention to beauty as an engagement with Levinas' conception of the ethical. Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity: A Essay on Exteriority* (1969), explains the ethical as the "calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics" (43).<sup>6</sup> When Levinas talks about "ethics," he is not talking about what we would normally understand as ethics, the study of right and wrong. Levinas is primarily interested in ontology, the study of Being or what is. He is particularly fascinated by the thought of an "Other" that cannot be known or identified, but that nonetheless "grounds" Being. Levinas describes ethics as the "first philosophy," one that precedes ontology or epistemology because it is the (non)ground on which any notion of the self, the subject or the Same is constructed ("Ethics" 76). There must be a "totality" of Being and something "Other" than Being. Levinas seeks to address that Otherness by reference to our responsiveness to others, our ethics. But, again, this responsiveness is not a predetermined sense that we must do right by other people; that understanding presupposes a self that could choose to do the right thing or not. Rather, for Levinas, the ethical encounter with the Other, with alterity, is what constitutes the subject or the self.<sup>7</sup> "The ethical," then, for Levinas, is

<sup>6</sup> For a concise explanation of the ethical and the Other, and for the interest in Levinas and Derrida in early modern studies, see Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti's "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies" (especially 176-79).

<sup>7</sup> The terms alterity, exteriority, separateness, strangeness, irreducibility and transcendence of the Other are more or less synonymous in this philosophical framework. It is worth repeating that in Levinasian thought the other is

the responsibility of the self to this Other; it is the desire for a nonviolent engagement between the self and the Other.

This philosophical paradigm of Levinasian ethics, and the corresponding call of beauty and Henry's response of openness to beauty's otherness in the play, help us better understand the second moment when an ethical demand from the Levinasian Other is placed on Henry—the “prick” of conscience that Henry experiences and his attempt to “rectify” his conscience.<sup>8</sup> In act 2, at Blackfriars, Henry reveals why and how he came about to believe that his union with Katharine, his deceased brother's widow, is unlawful. Henry says that the first time he ever doubted this marriage—the moment his “conscience first received a tenderness, / scruple, and prick” (2.4.168-69)—was when the Bishop asked him if his daughter was legitimate. Through faulty reasoning Henry comes to the conclusion that since Katharine gave birth to children who either died or were female then surely this was a sign that their union was not legitimate. Henry responds to the realization of his illegitimate marriage as if it shook the very center of his being:

This respite shook  
The bosom of my conscience, entered me,  
Yea, with a spitting power, and made to tremble  
The region of my breast, which forced such way  
That many mazed considerings did throng  
And pressed in with this caution. (2.4.179-84)

His reaction is in the form of an affective, embodied response first and foremost, just as it was when he encountered the call of beauty. It is as if he is physically moved. The word “spitting” means “piercing” and the suggestion seems to be that this “respite,” this act of looking back,

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distinct from the Other—*l'Autre* or its personalized form *Autrui*. The Other, and this is important, can never be incorporated into the Same. It is singular and unique.

<sup>8</sup> On the significance of conscience, see Walter Cohen who contends:

The notion of conscience, which is far more prominent here than in Holinshed's *Chronicles* and which Protestants used against the papacy to repudiate blind adherence to any human doctrinal authority, is deployed by the playwrights to judge Catholics and Protestants alike. This impartiality may be more the work of Shakespeare than of Fletcher; in any case, the overall result is the characteristic national reconciliation of Shakespeare's history plays. (1389)

entered his heart by cutting it open. This respite lodged itself in his heart and gave rise to conflicting and confusing thoughts, and this is how he was alerted to the situation. In his annotations, R.A. Foakes suggests that the meaning of the word “spitting” is also “transfixed” (86). Taking this into account, this moment of cutting open can also be understood as a moment that gripped or struck Henry with awe. This prick of conscience made a cut in his heart that caused him to physically tremble with the awareness of something—an Otherness—beyond him.

But in order to consider this interpretation we need to suspend our critical knowingness, our sense that we have access to the most base sexual motives of the King. We must consider that all the motives presented by Shakespeare are legitimate. We must consider, in short, that all may be true. Or, to look at this another way, we must also consider that Henry’s response to Anne—while hurtful to Katharine and our sense of marital fidelity or companionate marriage—might be what is necessary.

Tellingly, this Levinasian call of Otherness embodied in Henry’s response to Anne’s beauty puts Henry at odds with normal everyday ethics. His response to Anne, of course, results in marital infidelity. In short, in responding to the “Otherness” of beauty he is compromising the more tangible other, Katharine. Levinas, following Søren Kierkegaard, frequently turns to the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 to explicate this tension, the way in which the call of the absolute “Other” might contradict the demands of the immediate other.

In Genesis 22 Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah. Abraham sets out to perform this deed without questioning God’s command and without telling anyone else about it. Kierkegaard has famously used this Biblical narrative to expound his notion of faithfulness and absolute duty to God, in *Fear and Trembling*. In setting out to kill his own son, Abraham is in clear violation of all moral codes and everyday ethics. But in doing so,



he is also responding to the otherness of God with absolute faith and submission. His actions are thus religious even though they are a violation of communal ethics and morality. Abraham's breaking with normal, everyday ethics, for Kirkegaard, actually marks his encounter with the absolute Other.

This is not to say that Abraham is unethical. An unethical act is circumscribed within our normal, everyday understanding of ethics, if only by negation. Abraham's break with ethics is total, complete, and points to something even beyond ethics. This, again, is what Levinas often refers to as "the ethical". The unseen presence of the Other calls on Henry to respond not to the particularities of Katharine's situation but to this even greater responsibility. This responsibility is to affirm openness to the possibility of the unknown, which in the play, as I mentioned earlier, is the event of Elizabeth's birth that is yet unknown to Henry. We already know that this moment has to occur if Elizabeth I is to be born and if history is to be validated.

This moment, then, is similar to the earlier moment in the play when Henry is playing the role of the shepherd when he meets Anne. Here too, Henry is performing himself at this moment in theatrical time (in act 2, scene 4) as he reveals and describes the moment when he first doubted that his marriage to Katharine was illegitimate. He addresses his audience (his court and the audience of the play) thus: "I will be bold with time and your attention; / Then mark th' inducement" (2.4.166-67). His performance is itself already placing a call on the attention of the audience. This moment that he is performing has already occurred, but not within the space of dramaturgical time. It then also inhabits an impossible instant, much like, as I explain, the revelation of beauty Henry has experienced. The temporal placement or rather the atemporal placement of this moment is important. I suggest that the playwrights deliberately complicate the audience's understanding of time at this moment, asking them to reconsider which came first—

the call of beauty or the call of conscience—and what the relationship between the two moments is. Is Henry merely putting on a performance where he appears to be fraught by the agonies of his conscience while in fact he made his decision the moment he came into Anne’s presence? Or does the call of beauty lead to the call of conscience or does the call of the conscience open him up to the Otherness facilitated by beauty? When Chamberlain is asked about the cause of the King’s “sad thoughts and troubles,” he replies, “It seems the marriage with his brother’s wife / Has crept too near his conscience” (2.2.16-7). To this Suffolk adds, “No, his conscience / Has crept too near another lady” (2.2.18-9). Even though audiences take Henry’s lust to be the more probable cause, such conjecturing is implicitly annulled because when Henry says that he will be “bold with time,” he is demanding that the rules and constraints of time be rendered void. In other words, he is placing this performance of the call on his conscience in the realm of the timeless. His audience cannot argue about the timing of this moment—whether it occurred before or after the call of beauty— because it is located in temporal groundlessness, an impossible instant.

Henry even challenges the court and the audience, “Prove but our marriage lawful” and he will live with Katharine as his queen forever (2.4.222). Coming at the end of his speech that has placed a call on his listeners to believe in what he is saying, this very statement carries within it an injunction. Even though Henry appears to be violating his lawful marriage, the audience is called on to believe that “all is true,” that it is in fact to a paradoxical demand to which Henry is submitting. He may be violating the marital contract; that is true. But it is also true that he is called to do so by something other than pure lust. This is in a sense the law of the Other, like God in Abraham’s story the “law” as other makes little sense—it is Other. It is important to

remember here that the “Other is not another self, but is constituted by alterity” (Davis 31).<sup>9</sup>

Paradoxically, in opening himself up to the possibility created by the demand of the Other, Henry is really foreclosing the possibility of any negation of his divorce. Any attempt to interrogate, rationalize or even understand Henry’s performance will be futile. The only response to this is can be openness to the Other: as Henry says, “The sharp thorny points / Of my alleged reasons, drives this forward” (222-23). This throws light on the paradoxical nature of the Levinasian Other. How can that which is incapable of being seen or heard or touched, be articulated? It has no form, cannot be rendered visible and is outside our understanding of time and space. The moment an attempt is made to render this visible even if to negate it, it ceases to be the Other and becomes a version of the Same. How, then, is it possible to talk about and approach the Other? Here, I am following Jacques Derrida’s critique of Levinas where he contends that this formulation of the Other is inescapably in the language of the Same.<sup>10</sup> In other words, speaking of the Other or even calling it transcendent is doing violence to it because we are thinking of it in terms of the Same, or what we already know. The aporia between the self and the other emerges from this impossible demand of the other—impossible, because even as the Other demands a response and engagement, the alterity of the other cannot be realized. We can only respect this aporia and respond with openness to the impossibility of ever knowing the Other.

### **All is True: Veracity and Vision**

<sup>9</sup> In Levinasian thought the “other” is distinct from the “Other”—*l’Autre* or its personalized form *Autrui*. The Other, and this is important, can never be incorporated into the Same.

<sup>10</sup> For a critique and deconstructive reading of Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity*, see Jacques Derrida’s 1967 “Violence and Metaphysics.” Levinas’ subsequent *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* responds to Derrida and uses different terminology to explicate the meaning of the subject and his notion of transcendence. Nonetheless, the issues raised by Derrida persist. For a concise overview of Derrida’s and Levinas’ responses to each other on the topic of ethics and Otherness, see Colin Davis’ *Levinas: An Introduction*.

The Prologue gives instructions to the audience: “think ye see / The very persons of our noble story / As they were living.” The playing out of this history is to be experienced as if in the present tense. Indeed, this is Shakespeare’s only history play that is actually set in early modern England, so close to Shakespeare’s own time. Douglas Bruster and Robert Weinmann describe the Prologue in the play as “an index of representational meaning, a breviary of ‘things now / That wear a weighty and serious brow’ (1-2) [...] it is appropriately consigned the task of (re)presenting what in ‘truth’ is rendered in the play” (115). The Prologue posits the possibility of access to “truth”:

Such as give  
Their money out of hope they may believe,  
May here find *truth* too....  
.....  
For, gentle hearers, know  
To rank our *chosen truth* which such a show [merry, bawdy plays]  
As fool and fight is, beside forfeiting  
Our own brains and the opinions that we bring  
*To make that only true* we now intend,  
Will leave us never an understanding friend.  
(7-22 italics mine)

The use of “our chosen truth” seems to legitimize the ensuing performance and attests to the veracity of this version of history.<sup>11</sup>

Here, it is relevant to consider that the alternate and original title of *Henry VIII* proclaims *All is True*. I suggest, quite simply, that this is to be taken literally and that everything presented in the play is to be believed as true. The title carries in itself an injunction to its audience to believe the veracity of what they witness.<sup>12</sup> In particular, the claim that “All is True” reminds an

<sup>11</sup> The phrase “chosen truth” is laden and has almost Biblical overtones. It is reminder perhaps that the chosen, authorized edition of the Bible—the Bible of the Church of England (King James Bible)—has been published, and also possibly harks back to the fact that the play is about a king under whose reign the first authorized edition of the Bible was published (the Great Bible based on Tyndale’s translation, also called Cromwell’s Bible).

<sup>12</sup> In addition to claims of truth, the Prologue, reinforcing the original title, also contains repeated emphasis on seeing and sight (“noble scenes as draw the eye to flow”) in relation to access to this chosen truth, whatever it might be. And indeed, the play has spectacular “masquelike stage effects in the opulent manner of court entertainment”

audience to accept contradictions *as such*. That is, the seeming contradiction of Henry's conscience versus his lust is not a matter to be adjudicated by an audience but one that should be accepted as "true." Here I am responding in part to Anston Bosman's prediction that the restoration of the alternative title of the play by the editors of Oxford Shakespeare in 1986, promises to "inspire anew the play's critical tradition" (459). Critical scholarship on the play had previously argued mostly over the authorship and genre question. While I am not arguing over the authorship question,<sup>13</sup> I want to address the issue of genre in suggesting that we perceive the play differently: as belonging to a type that can be seen as contiguous if not an entirely different genre—the religious play.<sup>14</sup> In this I would like to distance myself from Howard Felperin who has discussed the play as "a Christian history play" (231) since his characterization conflates the religious with doctrinal associations and consequently elides other possibilities of the religious. Of course, matters of religion and history are important in the play. This is the only play of Shakespeare that deals with the reign of a monarch who changed Christendom by installing the Anglican Church and incorporates, most agree, a distinctly Christian vision. I am arguing, however, for the presence of the religious *sans* doctrine, as a philosophical aporia—an aesthetic experience that is both within and beyond phenomenal world—that the playwright confronts

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from the masque at Wolsey's banquet to Katharine's elaborate vision and her "pageantlike trial" (Bevington 920) to the coronation of Anne and the baptism of Elizabeth. This play has more stage directions than any other Shakespearean play. These are reminders of Tudor pageantry and stage/statecraft. The scenes move like tableaux even at the risk of seeming episodic. Even the characters themselves are actively engaged in their own performance, from Henry who plays the role of a shepherd at the banquet and performs the agonies of his conscience at Blackfriars, to Buckingham who performs Christ-like forgiveness before his demise or even Wolsey who performs several roles, the aggressive consul and the blameless teacher to Cromwell as he bids farewell. For an in depth examination of performativity of characters, see Robert Weimann's ideas on "double voiced" performances, the practice of personation, and actor-characters in "The Actor-Character in "Secretly Open" Action: Doubly Encoded Personation on Shakespeare's Stage"

<sup>13</sup> John Margeson astutely points out that the disregard or pushing back of the authorship question "has strengthened the very sensible view that *Henry VIII* has a dramatic integrity of its own, a unified conception behind its apparent diversity of action which can be revealed effectively in stage performances" (25).

<sup>14</sup> For the use of the term "religious play," see Ken Jackson who, using a different theoretical framework, has suggested that *The Winter's Tale* be read as a religious play (192). (" 'Grace to boot': St. Paul, Messianic time, and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*" 192-210.)

with his craft in *All is True*. Instead of seeing the play, as Felperin suggests, as a “metaphysical drama being enacted before men’s eyes” (233), I propose we see the play as an ethical drama in which audience participates, a drama that carries in itself a demand that all that is presented on stage is indeed, true.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, this discussion is aimed at addressing Bosman’s insightful question: “What becomes possible when we take ‘a new play, called *All is true*’ as seriously as the Globe audience evidently did?” (459). Bosman accepts the combination of generic elements in the play and offers an in depth discussion on the truth claims of history and romance to examine how the play dramatizes “the essential limitations of knowledge of ‘truth’” (462). Importantly, Bosman draws our attention to the correlation between truth and vision, seeing and believing, and explores the centrality of “modes of vision” (470) and the sensory apprehension of truth. The next part of this chapter seeks to expand Bosman’s arguments by exploring the possibility of access to truth and beauty by examining a correlation between vision and ethics, and arguing for the affinity between the power of the aesthetic and the ethical demand. This chapter is then positioned against critics such as J.C Maxwell and Clifford Leech who view the play as directionless and inconclusive.<sup>16</sup> A continuous engagement and struggle with ethics give the play direction and structure, leading up to the momentous event of the birth of Elizabeth and the ensuing prophecy.<sup>17</sup> For the characters and audience this truth of the play goes against historical realities and rationality. Henry’s speech at Blackfrais for instance, presents specious arguments

<sup>15</sup> Felperin describes the play as a metaphysical drama to argue that it “most resembles the romances” (233). He goes on to argue, “whatever claim to truth *Henry VIII* may have resides...in the eternal relevance of the great Christian myth upon which it rests” (246).

<sup>16</sup> Two of the significant things they points out in their criticism is that Maxwell “finds a lack of ‘momentousness’ in the way the events are presented” and Leech believes that Cranmer’s prophesy at the end is “a mere dream when set against the realities of the life presented in the play and the well known history of subsequent years” (25).

<sup>17</sup> Here I partly with Leggatt’s view that Cranmer’s prophesy is “not a mere appendage; it has a structural function drawing together images and ideas from earlier scenes and providing a culminations for the argument” (qdt. in Margeston 29). But not so much as it reveals, according to Leggatt, a providential order in the disorderly world of history.

and appears contrary to what is known. The audience is well aware that this is a king who freed himself from the dictates of the Church of Rome; the audience knows that nothing will bind him. Yet this rationality has to be put aside and the performance to be believed in. It is this possibility of belief in the impossible that *All is True* presents and demands. As I explain, all these instances and prophecy at the end of the play are an aesthetic demand placed on the audience, not too dissimilar from the demand that Henry has faced, and not far from the statue scene in *The Winter's Tale* that I discuss in the next chapter.

### **Katharine's Vision as Beauty and Alterity**

This aesthetic demand that is placed on the audience is best understood in relation to the Catholic Katharine's vision that occurs in act 4 scene 2. Vision works on two levels in this scene: as the dream sequence or revelation that Katharine experiences or sees while asleep, and as a commentary on sight itself and that it is that what can be seen. Juxtaposing the vision and sight, and its relationship to knowing (and knowledge) enables us to examine closely the aesthetic demand placed on the audience. Furthermore, I will uncover how reading seemingly morally ambiguous moments in the play (the call of beauty and the call of conscience) as ethical, that is, again, ethical in the Levinasian framework of being open to the other yet to come, reveals similar religious or "Christian" moments in the play as fraught with ambiguity. The other religious moment in question is the Protestant Cranmer's prophesy at the end of the play, discussed later. To be more specific, these Levinasian ethical moments—the call of beauty and the call of conscience—enable us to look beyond doctrinal (and supernatural categories) and attest to the ethical nature of Katharine's vision. Again, these two are elaborately staged events: Katharine's vision, though very intimate and personal to her, is splendid and lavishly orchestrated, and Cranmer's prophesy is part of an opulent state event, Elizabeth's regal baptism.



To begin with Katharine's vision then, it is often been read as a specifically "Christian" vision. G. Wilson Knight has called it Katharine's "vision of Paradise" (270); Arthur F. Marotti refers to it as "the Catholic modality of the mystical dream or vision" (225); Walter Cohen calls it a "spiritual coronation" (1390). Frances Yates summarizes it thus: "The good dying Catholic [Katharine] sees the heavenly vision. And the good Protestant, Cranmer, is seized with the spirit of prophecy. It would seem that, beyond all earthly jars Shakespeare envisaged a union of the good.... The theophanies in *Henry VIII* reveal a mystical experience in which the religious discords of the past are reconciled" (78). Indeed, in a play that deals with the schism in Christendom, this "Christian" vision does seem to be reinforcing both: Henry's gesture to universalize this new Anglican religion, and Jacobean irenicism. I propose—counter this tradition and in light of the two ethical moments discussed earlier—that the vision is not wholly Christian; that is, rather than solve Christian contradictions or universalize the 'new' religion, the vision exposes them as linked to the Levinasian ethical, thereby traversing traditional categories. This does not make the vision either less Catholic or more supernatural (for that is not even the point); rather it makes the general category of the supernatural appear to exist in a quasi-religious space—a space that equally defies the term "supernatural" and any attachment to the superstitious *or* the doctrinal.<sup>18</sup> Even with Katharine's vision, the supernatural cannot be fully separated from the religious; this suggests that the categories themselves need rethinking.

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<sup>18</sup> Phantasms or visions can be understood to be a placeholder for all things in the realm of the "transnatural" or the supernatural, just as "phantasmic apparatus" can be understood to be the means or manifestations of the supernatural. See Ioan P. Couliano's *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* where he contends: "the Reformation leads to a total censorship of the imaginary, since phantasms are none other than idols conceived by the inner sense...Renaissance culture was a culture of the phantasmic. It lent tremendous weight to the phantasms evoked by inner sense and had developed to the utmost the human faculty of working actively upon and with phantasms. It had created a whole dialectic of Eros in which phantasms, which at first foisted themselves upon inner sense, ended by being manipulated at will. It had a firm belief in the power of phantasms, which were transmitted by the phantasmic apparatus of the transmittor [sic!] to that of the receiver. It also believed that inner sense was preeminently the locale for manifestations of transnatural forces-demons and the gods" (193-94).

It is important to note that Katharine's vision occurs after she has forgiven Wolsey. As she says during her conversation with Griffith, "Whom [Wolsey] I most hated living, thou [Griffith] hast made me, / With they religious truth and modesty, / Now in his ashes honor. Peace be with him! (4.2.73-5). She then falls asleep to "sad music" and the vision occurs. The stage directions are detailed and worth quoting in full:

*The vision. Enter, solemnly tripping one after another, six personages, clad in white robes, wearing on their heads garlands of bays, and golden vizards on their faces; branches of bays or palm in their hands. They first congee unto her, then dance; and, at certain changes, the first two hold a spare garland over her head; at which the other four make reverent curtsies; then the two that held the garland deliver the same to the other next two, who observe the same order in their changes, and holding the garland over her head: which done, they deliver the same garland to the last two, who likewise observe the same order: at which, as it were by inspiration, she makes in her sleep signs of rejoicing, and holdeth up her hands to heaven: and so in their dancing vanish, carrying the garland with them. The music continues. [82.1-82.17 editor's numbering]*

It is a beautiful, detailed vision. Henry Fuseli's *Queen Katharine's Dream* (exhibited 1781), which was based on the vision in the play, captures these details and is an interesting representation that helps us understand some key issues at stake in interpreting the vision.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In Fuseli's depiction, Katharine is lying in a manner that is reminiscent of the reclining nudes of the Renaissance, her posture and the setting recalls Titian's *Venus Urbino* (c.1538) in particular. See Appendix C for details.



Figure 8: Henry Fuseli *Queen Katharine's Dream*

Source: Tate Britain. <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/gothic-nightmares-fuseli-blake-and-romantic-imagination/gothic-4>>.

Much like Henry's affective and embodied response to the call of beauty and the call of conscience, Katharine's response to this beautiful vision, to this experience of otherness, is physical: as the stage directions tell us, she raises both her hands up and appears to make signs of rejoicing.<sup>20</sup> She is an aesthetic spectacle, much like the vision that she is witnessing along with the audience. Her raised hand is a symbol of acceptance (of her fate), aspiration (toward heavenliness and beauty) and also ascent (to sainthood) and openness to otherness (the strangeness of the vision). For that brief moment, she is partaking in her own beatific vision.

<sup>20</sup> Another instance of an embodied response within the play is represented as a narrated miracle through the collective body of the women at Anne's coronation. See Appendix D.

Owing to her charity and forgiveness toward her wrongdoers, the old, dying Katharine is a symbol of grace. In early modern thought, as I have explained in Chapter 1, grace was closely linked with beauty.<sup>21</sup> Through her grace and beatific vision, Katharine is also a symbol of beauty. In this, she is much like Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, who, as I discuss in detail in the following chapter, is identified with grace and also beauty throughout the play.

More importantly, perhaps, what is interesting about this vision is that the lines between the dream and the dreamer, or the vision and the person experiencing the vision (Katharine), become blurred. As Katharine becomes her own vision, there is a crisscrossing of subjectivity. What, then, does this aesthetic spectacle mean for the audience? Perhaps the audience sees Katharine dreaming up a vision. Or perhaps the audience is participatory and experiencing a vision themselves, thereby making themselves a part of its otherness or making this otherness much like them. Either way this raises the important issue of the impossibility of seeing and experiencing this vision of otherness and any alterity for that matter.

The personages themselves represent an irreducibility or an otherness that cannot be encountered directly: they are not alive, they not dead, they are not human, they are not things. Though the image is not Botticelli's *Primavera*, the three pairs of celestial figures that dance around with garlands do evoke the image of the Three Graces. Perhaps the three pairs are to remind us of the Greek Charities or the Roman Graces, and aptly so since Katharine is repeatedly linked to grace. Fuseli depicts the personages much like the ways the Graces were depicted during the early modern period. Juxtaposing Fuseli's work with the play, particularly his depiction of the faces of these personages, draws immediate attention to the vizard-wearing,

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<sup>21</sup> For instance, Thommaso Buoni in *Problemes of Beautie and all humane affections* describes "grace" as a "celestial beam" that is essential to "perfect" beauty. Buoni suggests "if to bodily Beauty, there be added that grace, which manifesteth it selfe in all the motions both of the bodie and of the minde, it presently worketh in every man an opinion, of perfect Beauty" (sigs. D3<sup>r</sup>-D4<sup>v</sup>).

hidden faces of the dramaturgical vision. Perhaps the masks suggest that Katharine (and the audience) still has a while to go before she can have a face to face encounter with such divinity. Even in her this vision of heavenliness, where she is seemingly conferred a kind of sainthood, Katharine cannot entirely see this otherness. The vision then signals to the impossibility of reducing to visual form or rendering effable this kind of alterity.

### **Impossible Economy of Giving**

Katharine is, indeed, much like these inaccessible personages. She is symbolically and politically dead. After her divorce, the title of the Queen is taken away from her and she becomes Dowager Princess of Wales; as she says to Wolsey, “Ye turn me into nothing” (3.1.114). Yet it is this status of *nothingness* that makes her paradoxically very powerful because it puts her in the realm of the inaccessible and the irreducible. Her nothingness threatens to remain an irresolvable paradoxical presence or phantom that can become a potential threat to the course of this history; it can challenge the righteousness of the reign of Henry VIII, the proclamation of the Anglican Church, the future reign of Elizabeth I and thus also that of James I. Within the play the apparent solution to overcome her nothingness and curious inaccessibility is to make her perform gestures of Christian charity and forgiveness, and to reward her *Christianness* with the gift of this vision.<sup>22</sup> By giving a promise of sainthood—and thus taking away her nothingness—the vision seems to resolve the injustice faced by her (and others) in the play. While linking the root of beauty to fairness and justice, Scarry points out in her essay, “Injury is the opposite of beauty” (n.p.). This beatific vision then can be understood as a way in which Katharine’s injuries are addressed and her predicament is justified. The audience, too, is expected to overlook the

<sup>22</sup> In attempting charity she is attempting to forgive all that was done unto her. By making her perform this gesture she can be laid to rest completely. Knight suggests, “She has to conquer even righteous anger...so she learns to transcend her own, personal, cause; and, from a wider view her casting off, so apparently unjust, is, as the drama unfolds, necessary. Christian charity is thus found to be no more than is dictated by widest reason. So Katharine wins the vision of Paradise” (293-94).

iniquities and accept this vision as recompense for Katharine (and perhaps themselves) and as reinforcing Henry's decisions.

In this moment, then, Katharine's gestures of Christian charity are similar to the attempts at charity and forgiveness performed by others in the play, namely Buckingham and Wolsey. As Bevington points out, "All these characters stoically exemplify the art of holy dying. One after another, they forgive their enemies and regret such sins as they have committed, and yet they also prophesy that God's retribution will light on offenders' heads" (921). In other words, even though they try to forgive, this forgiving is not complete. Buckingham, for instance, "heartily" (2.1.65) forgives. While forgiving Lovell, he says, paraphrasing *The Lord's Prayer*, "I as free forgive you, / As I would be forgiven. I forgive all" (2.1.82-3). Nonetheless, it does not appear that he has truly forgiven everyone. He recounts how those who served and loved him caused his downfall, what he describes as "a most unnatural and faithless service!" (2.1.23). His parting words reveal his inability to fully perform this gesture of charity:

All good people,  
Pray for me! I must now forsake ye. The last hour  
Of my long weary life is come upon me.  
Farewell! And when you would say something that is sad,  
Speak how I fell. I have done; and God forgive me! (2.1. 131-35)

It is as if in return for his forgiveness, he is asking people pray for him and recount his fall. This compromises his gesture of charity and his gesture remains merely an attempted forgiveness. Wolsey, too, is incapable of performing forgiveness. He claims, "I know myself now, and I feel within me / A peace above all earthly dignities, / A still and quiet conscience" (3.2.379-81). But he still talks about retribution on his enemies and holds on to resentment against the king to the very end: he says, "Had I but served my God with half of the zeal / I served my king, he would not in mine age / Have left me naked to mine enemies" (3.2.456-58). These repeated attempts at

charity underscore that no one can forgive (or give) as perfectly as Christ. Each attempts, to use Bevington's words, "the art of holy dying," but fails in performing gestures of complete forgiveness. True forgiving, an act of complete giving, is then, impossible, and the inequities still remain unresolved.

Just like these failed attempts at Christian charity and giving remind us of the impossibility of some kind of pure giving, Katharine's vision too, rather than smoothing out contradictions, occasions a calling into question of its own paradoxical position. To this end, it is only peripheral that in a play that is concerned with the foundations of a future Protestant nation, this vision is dreamt by a Catholic (and a Spanish one!) and that it deploys Catholic modalities like sainthood, idolatry, and perhaps even martyrdom. More importantly, it is a vision, a phantasm that is witnessed only by her when she is dreaming. She wakes up and asks, "No? Saw you not, even now, a blessed troop / Invite me to a banquet; whose bright faces / Cast thousand beams upon me, like the sun" (86-88)? She has just witnessed that which cannot be seen. The vision's rhetorical power thus stems not from its being "Christian" but from the dramaturgical and philosophical paradox on which it rests—the space and time or more appropriately the absence of space and time in which it occurs, its invisible presence and thus, also, the curious sphere of the being and nothingness that it traverses as is suggested by the personages.

Katharine's inaccessible nothingness is replaced with this vision that itself alludes to an irreducible gap. Neither Katharine nor the audience can see the personages face to face. It is a curiously aneconomic exchange—nothing for nothing, phantasm for phantasm. The sheer impossibility of such a moment can be understood as placing a call on Katharine and on the audience to respond—not only to the paradoxical nature of the vision and the aesthetic but, more importantly, to the ethical demand of otherness. Much like the corresponding moments in the



play that have been discussed earlier, this dream vision becomes the moment of a cut or, as Henry might say, a “prick”—a rupture that calls on the audience to open to unquestionable belief—suggesting once again, openness to the something that cannot be defined or articulated and is yet unknown. Not only does the vision become a space for articulating the supernatural as an approximate religion without religion, it also (re)defines belief as neither wholly religious nor wholly supernatural but as being open to the possibility of the experience of alterity.<sup>23</sup> It is as if Levinas wrote for Katharine’s vision:

The face in which the other—the absolutely other—presents himself does not negate the Same, does not do violence to it as do *opinion or authority or the thaumaturgic supernatural*. It remains commensurate with him who welcomes; it remains terrestrial. This *presentation* is preeminently nonviolence, for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and founds it. As nonviolence it nonetheless maintains the plurality of the Same and the Other. It is peace.” (*TI*, 203, italics mine).

Katharine confirms her peace when she speaks to Griffith about the six personages she sees: They promised me eternal happiness; / And brought me garlands, Griffith, which I feel / I am not worthy yet to wear: I shall, assuredly” (4.2.89-91). It is a promise for an almost Messianic moment yet to come. That moment in future will be when Katharine can see the personages face to face rather than seeing them in a dream as they appear at this moment, with their faces covered with golden vizards. But within the play, the event that is yet to come is the birth of Elizabeth I and the event yet to come for the audience is the ascension of Elizabeth. It is for this moment that all will have to be perceived as ethical and true.

### **Truth Event and its Declaration**

<sup>23</sup> Katharine’s vision suggests the complex relationship between seeing and knowing, and religious revelation and knowledge. See Appendix E for an extended discussion on the nature of religious experience in relation to Saint Paul’s conversion of the road to Damascus.

This idea of a Messianic future when all will be just is finally also reinforced at the end of the play at Elizabeth's baptism ceremony. It is here that Cranmer, believing himself to be the mouthpiece of God, unravels his prophecy:<sup>24</sup>

For heaven now bids me; and the words I utter  
Let none think flattery, for they'll find 'em truth.  
This royal infant-heaven still move about her!—  
Though in her cradle, yet now promises  
Upon this land a thousand blessings,  
Which time shall bring to ripeness: she shall be—  
But few now living can behold that goodness—  
A pattern for all princes living with her,  
And all that shall succeed. (5.5.16-24)

This prophecy is “truth” just as Elizabeth is “goodness” itself. It is also a suggestion to James I that Elizabeth's reign is a pattern to be emulated. He then goes on to say that “Truth shall nurse her, / Holy and heavenly thought still counsel her” (29-30). The veracity of this prophecy is highlighted again. The historical figure of Henry does not concern Cranmer; he ignores the specificities of Henry's reign. In the play there is no discussion of why and how everything has come to this moment. There is no justification of Henry's rulings about Buckingham and Katharine or even his break from the Roman church.

And then comes the declaration of this event's “ultimate goal”—“God shall be truly known” (37).<sup>25</sup> This is the profound truth of the event. Nothing else matters. The birth of Elizabeth is a historical fact; that is unquestionable. But the play's treatment of this event lends it a fabulous texture, or what Alain Badiou calls in reference to the Resurrection of Christ, “a fabulous element [*point fabuleux*]” (4). It appears to be miraculous and sudden. Elizabeth's birth occurs in 1533, the same year that Henry was excommunicated by the Pope. That and the very fact that she is a female causes a rupture in the established order of things. One of the reasons

<sup>24</sup> Louis Montrose concludes *The Subject of Elizabeth* by describing this speech as “the most rhetorically opulent version” of Henry Hooke's sermon shortly after James I's accession (252).

<sup>25</sup> Bevington glosses the line “God shall be truly known” to mean “True religion shall prevail” (963).

Henry gives for divorcing Katharine is that she gave birth to children that either died or were female. Going by that paradigm, Elizabeth as a female should be comparable to a dead child who cannot possibly be a real heir to the throne. At this time there is no assignable cause as to why she should be proclaimed as the future monarch at that moment.

The birth of Elizabeth is caught between time and non-time in a sense since it has already taken place and yet in dramaturgical time it is happening in the present. In fact, even within the dramaturgical time, it is positioned between two moments of what can be called irregular time—between Katharine’s prophetic vision and Cranmer’s prophesy for the future. This accentuates the enigma of the event. Additionally, we need to remember that not only were the playwrights writing a history of the king who was responsible for the break from the Church of Rome, they were writing during a time that, under the regime of the Stuart king, was becoming one of intense religious factionalism and politics. It makes good sense to have a prophecy incorporated as a part of the defining moment of Elizabeth’s birth. Sharon L. Jansen Jaech sheds light on political prophecies:

Political prophecies flourished in England from early in the twelfth century until quite late in the seventeenth, but Henry VIII’s disputes with Rome in the 1530s let loose a torrent of prophecies aimed at washing away both the king and the Reformation [...] Given the uneasy state of Henry’s realm in the 1532, any piece that predicted the arrival of a young conqueror who would once again unite all England was bound to have been quite popular among various disaffected and rebellious parties. (296, 298)

Nonetheless, the playwrights are still faced with the problem of an authentic translation of Elizabeth’s birth and the prophecy. One way of being faithful to the event, so much as it is possible to be faithful to it in its retelling, is the construction of this play as a space that is at once past, present and future. It is at once a space and a non-space, and outside time even as it is deeply set in its temporalities.

Knowledge of truth and the ethical is located in a prophecy in the past, in an atemporal space that cannot be known. The play effectively stages and performs this philosophical conundrum beginning with the call of beauty and the call of the conscience, as well as Katharine's vision and Cranmer's prophesy, all of which occur in complex atemporal spaces and point to something Other. And while the Other cannot be known, the philosophical aporia itself can be staged and represented.

### **Unrepresentable and Inaccessible Beauty and Truth**

There is one powerful image that lingers as a symbol for this multivalent representation and also embodies the philosophical aporia in the play. As we recall, Cranmer's declaration is a call to faith, a call to an openness of the truth event that has paradoxically emerged out of nothing. This aporia is conveyed in the paradoxical image of the phoenix in Cranmer's prophecy:

as when  
The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix,  
Her ashes new create another heir,  
As great in admiration as herself;  
So shall she leave her blessedness to one,  
When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness,  
Who from the sacred ashes of her honour  
Shall star-like rise, as great in fame as she was,  
And so stand fix'd.

(5.4.39-47)

Paul Dean accurately suggests that the "phoenix inhabits both time and eternity and is both an individual creature and a part of an endless cycle of regenerations" (188). The phoenix ceases to exist and begins to exist in an impossible instant. It is reduced to nothingness in the same moment that it comes to life. For Dean this is "Shakespeare's last word on a problem with which he had been grappling throughout his career: the problem of the accommodation of the open, expansive

moment of history within the closed, concentrated, and intensified movement of drama” (188).<sup>26</sup> He sees Shakespeare as fascinated with technical experimentation and as an artist “ever in search of self-renewal.” Indeed, it also seems that the reason that Shakespeare is fascinated with these issues is because of a larger philosophical awareness that it is impossible to ever write or even think about something that is obviously in the realm of the inaccessible. It is shocking that Dean claims, “‘*Henry VIII*, unlike its precursors, refuses to be drawn into extensive discussions of ethical, political, and religious controversies” (178). These issues are addressed in a dramatic way. Evidently, Shakespeare is thinking about and grappling with that which cannot be thought of or that which cannot be grasped—be it history, ethics, or a notion of the religious.

This final image of the phoenix that is presented to us in the play may be understood in light of a poem composed by Shakespeare that also sheds light on the nature of beauty and ethics that I elaborate later in the next chapter. Though this poem is popularly called “The Phoenix and the Turtle,” Colin Burrow corrects that assumption refers to it by its first line “Let the bird of loudest lay.”<sup>27</sup> The poem is about the last rites of the phoenix and the turtledove. The phoenix was a symbol of Christ’s Resurrection and of eternal life. The phoenix also stood for chastity and was an appropriate symbol for Elizabeth I; as is visually evident in the Phoenix Portrait painted by Nicholas Hilliard, she was routinely associated with the phoenix. While there have been several interpretations of the poem, varying from it being an allegory of succession, to an allegorical depiction of Elizabeth as phoenix and the turtledove to be the Earl of Essex, following Burrows, I read it specifically as a mediation on an abstract idea.

<sup>26</sup> Cranmer’s prophecy echoes Henry Hooke’s sermon at Whitehall in 1604. Louis Montrose reads the preacher’s description of the phoenix as an (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt “to appropriate the Elizabethan political imaginary for a new Jacobean mythopoeia: the half-century long quest to provide for a masculine succession to an unmarried queen is resolved when King James arises from Queen Elizabeth’s ashes” (252).

<sup>27</sup> The poem first appeared in Robert Chester’s quarto collection of poems, *Love’s Martyr: Or, Rosalins Complaint* (1601). Burrow tells us that the incorrect title has been in use since 1807 and has no connection with Shakespeare. (82)

Here the anthem doth commence.  
 Love and constancy is dead;  
 Phoenix and the turtle fled  
 In a mutual flame from hence.  
 So they loved, as love in twain  
 Had *the essence but in one*,  
 Two distincts, division none;  
 Number there in love was slain.  
 Hearts remote, yet not asunder;  
 Distance, and no space was seen  
 'Twixt the turtle and his queen:  
 But in them it were a wonder.  
 So between them love did shine,  
 That the turtle saw his right  
 Flaming in the phoenix' sight;  
*Either was the other's mine.*  
 Property was thus appalled,  
*That the self was not the same;*  
*Single nature's double name*  
*Neither two nor one was called.*

(21-40, my italics)

Bevington explains the relationship between the phoenix and the turtle thus: “Their spiritual union becomes a mystical oneness in whose presence Reason stands virtually speechless. Baffled human discourse must resort to paradox in order to explain how two beings become one essence” (1698). While there is nothing in *Henry VIII* about two beings becoming one essence, I mention this is in part because it points to the complexity of delineating the relationship between the self and the Other, a relationship that lies at the heart of ethics that I will analyze in the following chapter on *The Winter's Tale*.

With regards to *Henry VIII*, it is important to note that the phoenix in the poem stands for love and Beauty, and the turtledove for constancy and Truth. The Threnos contains the following lines, “Truth may seem, but cannot be; / Beauty brag, but 'tis not she: / Truth and Beauty buried be” (62-64). Burrows glosses the lines thus: “Beauty may boast of being beautiful, but she does not represent the reality of beauty” (377). Truth, similarly, may appear to be so, but sight or

vision cannot adequately capture the idea. Both Beauty and Truth that were previously manifested in the presence of the phoenix and the turtledove, are always only an approximation of “real” beauty and truth. Every representation falls short. Just as for Nehamas, “Beauty is forever a step beyond what we can say about it,” similarly for Shakespeare, truth and beauty by their very nature are Other and forever inaccessible. Finally with the image of the dying Phoenix, the play might possibly be suggesting that for a vanishing moment, in an image that is not and in a dying that is a living, it is here that liminal access to truth lies for “God shall be truly known.” Its ephemeral yet eternal beauty makes us aware of how little we can actually see.

The play at least comes to an approximation of this notion of the Other. Eventually, the audience is not faced with the issue of responding to (rejecting or accepting) what is represented. More appropriately, the audience is faced with the issue of responding to what Shakespeare is not presenting. The play suggests that the only way this can be approached is by getting pricked, much like Henry has been, by “sharp thorny points”; in Levinasian terms, the approach is one of complete openness and giving over to the Other.



## Chapter 3

### “With what’s unreal thou coactive art”: The Problem and Possibilities of Beauty in *The Winter’s Tale*

In this chapter, I focus on a specific aspect—the response to beauty—primarily in relation to Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*.<sup>1</sup> In continuation of the themes from Chapters 1 and 2, I also examine beauty in the play to explore further the relationships among a range of discourses: Neoplatonism, Protestant grace, and the Levinasian “ethical.” Furthermore, I read specific moments of engagement with beauty in the play in tandem with Robert Greene’s 1588 prose romance *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, Book VI of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1596), and David Garrick’s 1756 adaptation *The winter’s tale, or Florizel and Perdita. A dramatic pastoral, altered from Shakspeare*. Along with these texts, I use Thommaso Buoni’s *Problemes of Beautie and all humane affections*, translated from Italian to English in 1606, to establish a literary and philosophical context for my discussion of beauty, grace and art.

I begin by juxtaposing two seemingly different responses to beauty in one of the longest scenes in all of Shakespeare: the sheep-shearing scene, act 4 scene 4 of *The Winter’s Tale*. I consider Florizel’s wish to see Perdita’s beauty “move still, still so”—his impulse to make the experience of beauty infinitely present and available—and Polixenes’ desire to see her “beauty scratched” as critical moments that reveal the paradoxes of responding to beauty. On the face of it, Florizel’s praise for Perdita seems to be much preferable to Polixenes’ vengeful desire to have her beauty disfigured. I argue, however, that these two responses are far more similar than they appear in that both are violent engagements with beauty. Furthermore, contrary to what critics

<sup>1</sup> This chapter has been revised from my article in *Shakespeare* ““With what’s unreal thou coactive art”: The Problem and Possibilities of Beauty in *The Winter’s Tale*” 9.1 (2013): 52-75.

have said about Florizel redeeming the destructive effects of Leontes' enraged mind, I contend that Florizel is inadvertently repeating Leontes' mistakes. Working through similar moments of complex engagements with beauty leads me to suggest that the play does not end with the resolution of a romance but in a suspended repetitive movement of violence, a movement that displays not only the complexity of Shakespeare's art, but of this thought.

### **Repetition of Violent Response to Beauty: Polixenes, Florizel, Mamillius**

Act 4 scene 4 is set in the pastoral world of Bohemia. Perdita, the lost daughter of a king, is dressed up as the queen of the sheep-shearing festival, and Florizel, disguised as Doricles, is engaged in various declarations of love and praise for her. Initially, she appears a little hesitant with her adornments, with being, in her words, "Most goddesslike pranked up" (4.4.10). But Florizel, with the hyperbole of a young lover, compares himself to Jove, Neptune and Apollo, and insists that "Their transformations / were never for a piece of beauty rarer" (4.4.31-32). Perdita's beauty prompts Florizel to search for precedents and parallels and he finds them. The classical allusions he employs, however, are to rape, bestiality and deception. They are, in a word, violent: "Jupiter / became a bull and bellowed; the green Neptune / a ram, and bleated; and the fire-robed god, / golden Apollo, a poor humble swain, / As I [Florizel disguised as Doricles] seem now" (4.4.27-31). In other words, Florizel's passionate response to Perdita's beauty comes packaged with cruel and deceptive desire.

Polixenes, the royal father who does not want his son to wed a commoner, is far more overt in his violence toward Perdita's beauty when he cannot dissuade Florizel from being betrothed to her. But first, while still in disguise, Polixenes addresses her as "a fair one" (4.4.78) and then comments to Camillo:

This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever

Ran on the greensward. Nothing she does or seems  
 But smacks of something greater than herself,  
 Too noble for this place. (4.4.156-59)

This high praise, where Polixenes perceives Perdita's beauty and grace to be more fitting for a woman of a higher social station is replaced by a different response where he wants to destroy her beauty and see her reduced to a lower social station. The similarity between these two responses, however, is that in both, Polixenes perceives the presence or absence of beauty to be commensurate with higher or lower social status respectively. Polixenes then proceeds to objectify Perdita as a "fresh piece of excellent witchcraft," an "enchantment," a "knack" that cannot be married to his son: "I'll have thy beauty scratched with briars and made more homely than thy state," he threatens (4.4.424-25). For him, Perdita's beauty at that moment in the play is not consonant with her status. She is, after all, only a shepherd's daughter; the only way she can appear to be beautiful is through witchcraft. And once he has violently erased this beauty she will be reduced to her appropriate humble state as a shepherdess. In the absence of beauty, she will finally be fit for her social station. According to Polixenes, this kind of artificially created beauty can only function as a deception that beguiles Florizel. Ernest Schanzer points out in his gloss to these lines that "the imaginative impact of Polixenes' cruel threats is very similar to that of Leontes' raving. We need only to compare Leontes' words to Antigonus, ... with Polixenes' threat to the old Shepherd and Perdita"<sup>2</sup> (91-92).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Polixenes'

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<sup>2</sup> Leontes rages

Thou, traitor, hast set on thy wife to do this.  
 My child? Away with't! Even thou, that hast  
 A heart so tender o'er it, take it hence  
 And see it instantly consumed with fire.  
 Even thou, none but thou. Take it up straight.  
 Within this hour bring me word 'tis done,  
 And by good testimony, or I'll seize thy life,  
 With what thou else call'st then. If thou refuse

responses to Perdita's beauty are invariably violent and it is no surprise that these appear to be repeating Leontes' response to Antigonus, and also, as I later argue, his violent response to Hermione, his rage and accusations of adultery, that occur earlier in the play.

It is perhaps the overt violence of both Polixenes and Leontes' response that has led critics to elide the *ethical* violence in Florizel's response.<sup>4</sup> As Perdita is handing out flowers, Florizel responds to her beauty by breaking out into this paean:

What you do  
Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,  
I'd have you do it ever; when you sing,  
I'd had have you buy and sell so, so give alms,  
Pray so; and for the ord'ring your affairs,  
To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you  
A wave o'th' sea, that you might ever do  
*Nothing* but that—*move still, still so,*  
And *own no other function.* (4.4.135-43, emphasis added)

Maurice Hunt calls Florizel's praise of Perdita one of the most moving passages in all of Shakespeare (358) and comments, "Perdita's graceful, ballet-like movements form a composite image of genuine welcome, a physical poem bewitching its admirers"(346). Hunt reads Florizel's response to this beauty as a "love lyric" that is contrary to Leontes' rapture (also referred to as

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And wilt encounter with my wrath, say so.  
The bastard brains with these my proper hands  
Shall I dash out. (2.3.130-41)

Polixenes:

Thou, old traitor,  
I am sorry that by hanging thee I can  
But shorten thy life one week. And thou, fresh piece  
Of excellent witchcraft, who of force must know  
The royal fool thou cop'st with...  
I'll have thy beauty scratch's with briers and made  
More homely than thy state. (4.4.420-33)

<sup>3</sup> Schanzer reads the play as composed of two halves that contrast but also include a series of parallels. He further adds that this view is supported by Derek Traversi, who declares that Polixenes' "brutality in separating the lovers, and more especially his ferocious attack upon Perdita's beauty ... form an exact complement to Leontes' earlier behaviour" (qtd. in Schanzer 92).

<sup>4</sup> I use the term "ethical violence" here for the sake of clarity and to identify Florizel's violent response with the Levinasian philosophical idea of violence that I discuss in the next section. As I explain, this kind of violence that Florizel partakes in is very different from inflicting physical pain or using aggressive force on a person. While it is different from the threats of physical abuse that Polixenes and Leontes utter, it is, nonetheless, violence.

Leontes' "affection" speech)<sup>5</sup> about Hermione's adultery:<sup>6</sup> "the parallel versification ... encourages readers to think of Florizel's lyric as rectifying, even redeeming, the destructive effects of Leontes' rapture. In both cases, love and imagination join to create an intangible, which is illusory in Leontes' case but transcendently real in Florizel's" (348).<sup>7</sup> I argue, however, that the potential effect of Florizel's love lyric in praise of Perdita's beauty is, somewhat paradoxically, much closer to the effect of Leontes' rant against Hermione.

Leontes' rage eventually leads to Hermione's becoming a living statue or "her death, her image frozen as a statue" (Knapp 278);<sup>8</sup> "Her blank, stony, painted state is an ironic relic of [Leontes'] violent misconstrual of her subjectivity, the poisoned knowing that is his doubt, the empty, faithless "certainty" about her infidelity that places her life 'at the level of [his]

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<sup>5</sup> Leontes' rapture:

Sweet villain!  
Most dear'st! My Collop! Can thy dam?-may't be?-  
Affection, thy intention stabs the centre.  
Thou dost make possible things not so held,  
Communicat'st with dreams-how can this be?-  
With what's unreal thou coactive art,  
And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent  
Thou mayst co-join with something: and thou dost,  
And that beyond commission, and I find it,  
And that to the infection of my brains  
And hard'ning of my brows. (1.2.138-48)

This infamous speech has been variously called deliberately incoherent, mysterious, difficult, to name a few. See Hallett Smith's comprehensive "Leontes' *Affectio*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14 (1963): 163-66.

<sup>6</sup> Conversely, G. Wilson Knight makes a comparison with Florizel and Polixenes at this point: Florizel "would have her every action perpetuated, the thought recalling Polixenes' recollection of himself and Leontes as 'boy eternal' (1.1.65)" (144).

<sup>7</sup> Hunt compares the identical numbering of *The Riverside Shakespeare* text, where Leontes' "rapture" (1.2. 135-46) parallels Florizel's lyric (4.4.135-46). Additionally, Hunt argues that Florizel's request that Perdita be a wave of the sea that would "move still, still so, / And own no other function" is "the redemptive counterpart to Paulina's barren utterance" (Paulina's phrase "still winter/In storm perpetual" spoken during her malediction against Leontes) (346).

<sup>8</sup> For Leontes' rapture/affection speech and its relation to the statue scene, see James A. Knapp's "Visual and Ethical Truth in *The Winter's Tale*." Knapp agrees that Leontes' jealous response is wrong but adds that in making this choice, Leontes is asserting his responsibility and that is what enables his future redemption in the statue scene. Using Levinas, Knapp reads these two moments—Leontes' affection speech and his response to Hermione's statue—as ethical moments that are more similar than is generally acknowledged. The article was later revised as a chapter in Knapp's recent *Image Ethics in Shakespeare and Spenser*.

dreams””(Gross 100).<sup>9</sup> Even though Florizel intends no such violence, he does want Perdita to *play statue* on the pedestal he has created: Perdita’s beauty allegedly makes Florizel want to freeze her in a continuous, yet fixed, aesthetic motion. And while it can be argued that Florizel wants to submit to whatever action Perdita might perform—dance, sing, give alms—in demanding that she might “ever” do nothing and “own no other function” but “move still, still so,” he is placing her in what is paradoxically a continuous, yet fixed present—an oxymoronic dynamic stasis. To better understand how Perdita can be perceived as an animate statue and how Florizel desires to see Perdita “move still, still so,” it is worthwhile to briefly note Kenneth Gross’ compelling study of the moving statue in his analysis on ekphrasis in literature:

These things cannot happen: a statue cannot move or speak; it cannot open its eyes, nod, or call out, cannot tell a story, dance, or do work; it cannot turn on the viewer, or run away, banishing its solidity and repose, shedding its silence. A statue is almost by definition a thing that stands still, and what we call its movement is at best a resonant figure of speech. Yet these things happen; we imagine them happening. Our language requires that they happen. The fantasy of a statue that comes to life is as central a fable as we have. The idea of motion or speech in an inanimate stone is an inescapable possibility, a concept of a sort so basic that we can hardly call it a metaphor .... The idea of the animate statue appears everywhere. (xi)

Even though it is innocent, in effect, Florizel’s love lyric places Perdita in a strange temporal loop—an *ad infinitum* yet impossible moment. This temporal placement renders Perdita inaccessible and she becomes, in Hunt’s words, “an intangible” (358). Florizel’s desire to make the experience of beauty an infinite present tense does not take into account the inaccessible nature of Perdita’s beauty: the beauty of Perdita’s movement is not an object to be grasped and paused. Florizel, then, does not rectify the destructive results of Leontes’ rage; he instead inadvertently repeats them.

<sup>9</sup> Gross acknowledges that “any such ironic reading is complicated by the fact that the statue, even in its first emergence, reflects Hermione’s beauty and steadfastness, becoming an image of her survival and of the playworld’s wish for her restitution” (100).

This violent response to beauty is foreshadowed by another comparable moment in the play. If we consider Howard Felperin's suggestion that this is a play "in which nearly every line is a comment on every other line" (240), that Mamillius is "Florizel's alter ego" (235) and that the loss of Mamillius is somewhat restored in the figure of Florizel, then Mamillius' innocent banter with the Ladies in Sicilia can be seen as foreshadowing Florizel's response to Perdita's beauty. Mamillius decides that he loves the Second Lady "better" than the First Lady and displays his knowledge of cosmetics and their use in defining conventions of beauty. He claims to have "learned it out of women's faces" (2.1.14). Humphrey Tonkin comments, "We see him among the Ladies at the opening of Act 2, his naive but perhaps accurate comments about feminine beauty striking amused consternation into the hearts of those around him, in a benign and ironically comic enactment of the arbitrariness of Leontes' jealousy that is about to engulf this little community" (36). Mamillius' response resonates with Florizel's not only because his character is dramatically linked to Florizel's but also because both of their responses to beauty also parallel Leontes' response. In staging these comparable,<sup>10</sup> if not repetitive, violent responses to beauty Shakespeare is, I suggest, thinking through some rather complicated philosophical problems: namely, "beauty" elicits a powerful response from viewers but that response is fraught with violence.

## Beauty and the Ethical

<sup>10</sup> Strangely, in relation to these moments, Autolycus' overt vulgar peddling is less troubling. The Servant observes about Autolycus' trinkets: "Why, he sings 'em over as they were gods or goddesses; you would think a smock were a she-angel, he so chants to the sleeve-hand and the work about the square on't." (4.4.208-11). Autolycus deifies inanimate objects, specifically objects that are used to enhance female beauty. At the same time, he also describes his trinkets as prosthesis, "Masks for faces, and for noses / ... Pins and poking-sticks of steel, / What maids lack from head to heel" (4.4.222-28). Masks, gloves, coifs, pins and sticks of steel, all contribute to—enhance, complete and define—female beauty. Allegedly this beauty is something maids lack from head to heel!



One way to understand these early modern moments of violent responses to beauty is by examining beauty's relationship to *Otherness* and "the ethical" in the Levinasian sense as we discussed in Chapter 2. To be clear, in this philosophical framework, violence does not mean physically hurting another person and ethics is not tied to what we generally understand as ethics or morality. To briefly remind ourselves, "the ethical" for Levinas is the responsibility of the subject/self/Same to this Other; it is the desire for a nonviolent engagement between the self and the Other. The crucial questions that emerge from this conception of the ethical are: How is an engagement with the Other possible without first grounding it in any notion of the self or the body? How is respect for or response to the Other possible without making it some version of the self/Same? These questions pose a dilemma because the self/Same invariably does violence to alterity. In other words, the self alters and compromises the Other's exteriority or strangeness whenever it tries to engage with the Other; responding to the Other without violence is impossible. The Other places a demand or a call that the self cannot evade and cannot paradoxically fully meet because the Other is utterly beyond the self's comprehension.

Questions about Otherness are particularly pressing in the presence of beauty in the early modern period because as I have discussed in previous chapters, the subject of beauty was integral to ideas of being, selfhood and the divine: beauty was crucial to order, harmony, proportion and perfection in the human body and the world. The ethical is relevant here because beauty is—to use a word Leontes uses to describe the parity between "affection" (1.2.140) and the "unreal" (143)—"coactive" with the ethical. Leontes' mad ravings in lines 130-48—occurring moments after his "*tremor cordis*"—are notoriously difficult to interpret. The syntax and sudden breaks mimic the state of his mind. He seems to be talking about "affection" or strong passion but breaks off and begins again: "With what's unreal thou coactive art, / And

fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent / Thou mayst co-join with something" (143-45). For this particular instance, the *OED* defines "coactive" as "taking place together." My suggestion that beauty is "coactive" with the ethical underscores that moments of encounter with beauty are *necessarily* ethical in the Levinasian sense. And, while issues of ethical comportment arise in any interaction between the self and the Other, they are heightened in an encounter with beauty. Beauty, too, calls for a response; like the ethical, it initiates us into an awareness of the Other and identifies a desire for a nonviolent relationship with the Other, and can thus illuminate critical conversations on alterity. As I elaborate later, beauty and the ethical are, in turn, linked to a religious term that is very important in the play: *grace*. Like beauty and the ethical, grace too, identifies something absolutely Other that cannot be accessed voluntarily.

### **Early Modern Perspectives on Beauty and Alterity**

An early modern reader would be familiar with similar notions of otherness and alterity through an understanding of the topical religious concept of grace, its transcendence and beauty. To be clear, even though I read Nehamas' description of beauty "as the emblem of what we lack" (76), and Scarry's call for a philosophical attention to beauty as an engagement with Levinas' conception of the ethical, the Neoplatonic conception of beauty, the religious concept of grace and Levinas' ethical are not synonymous; nonetheless, they are all linked because they all point to some notion of transcendence and Otherness. The complex reactions to beauty in *The Winter's Tale* make it clear that Shakespeare is thinking through the nature of the response that beauty calls for, and this interest is reflected in another early modern text that also sheds light on this correspondence between beauty, grace and Otherness—Thomasso Buoni's extensive discourse on beauty, *Problemes of Beautie and all humane affections*, which was first translated and published in English in 1606. The publication of a second edition more than a decade later in

1618 suggests the possibility of a continuing interest in the topic of beauty. This book offers an early modern perspective on the importance of beauty and the complex responses it generates.

Buoni, a Luccan cleric, presents a largely Neoplatonic concept that initially echoes Castiglione's more famous discussion of beauty in Book Four of *The Book of the Courtier*. According to Castiglione, it is physical beauty that first initiates the ascent on the ladder of love; sublimated passion then leads to the contemplative process that eventually leads to knowledge of the divine. Buoni similarly suggests that beauty can "direct the minde of man to the knowledge of the magnificence of our great God" (sig. B7<sup>r</sup>); "by a sweete kind of invitation [it] pricke[s] us forwarde to the knowledge of the originall fountaine of all good"(sig. B8<sup>f</sup>).<sup>11</sup> For Buoni, however, beauty is not just physical attractiveness, although it is "especially apprehended by the sight" (sig. C4<sup>f</sup>); it exists entwined in a complex relationship with love, passion and grace. Buoni suggests that while beauty is the most visible and clear footprint of goodness that the mortal eye can discover, it is paradoxically inexpressible: "the beauties of Gods creatures cannot be considered of without wonder, without astonishment," much as the beauty of visible natural phenomenon (like snowfall) "can never be expressed" (sig. B9<sup>v</sup>). Regardless of our attempts to articulate the nature of beauty, "we are but as it were stammering children in expressing the beauties of corporall things" (sig. B10<sup>f</sup>).

In addition to the complexity of articulating the experience of beauty, Buoni suggests a fraught relationship—relevant to our reading of *The Winter's Tale*—between beauty and art, what he calls "naturall Beauty" and "artificial Beauty" respectively:

It was only Beauty that did first minister the occasion unto arte, to find out the knowledge of Carving, painting, building, to finde out the models, prospectives, and rich furniture of so many proud, and wonderful edifices: and from hence have our Poets taken occasion to celebrate not only naturall

<sup>11</sup> Buoni writes somewhat more in the vein of Montaigne: he proposes a problem and raises a question and then tries to answer it in various permutations and combinations, giving a series of options, each beginning with "perhaps."

Beauty, but artificial: not only Beauty of the body, but of the minde too: into much that many times with the sweetness of their verse they leave the reader full of wonder & astonishment. (sig. B10<sup>v</sup>)

Beauty provides the grounds or opportunity for art. While nature can be an example of the beauty of the body (“naturall beauty”), the existence of art (“artificial beauty”) is attributed to the beauty of the mind. The beauty of the mind is linked to the ability of creating art. Even though artificial beauty may be prompted by nature, and be contingent on it, Buoni seems to challenge the hierarchy between body and mind where mind is at a higher plane, and between natural and artificial where artificial is lower.

However, while discussing Problem 6 “Wherefore doth Beauty always delight?” (sig. C5<sup>r</sup>), Buoni moves away from this position as he describes the possibility of the beauty of the mind as “incorporall Beauty”(sig. C6<sup>r</sup>). In keeping with the style of the entire book, Buoni’s aim here seems to be less to provide definitive solutions and more to offer suggestions and possibilities on issues related to beauty. In this Problem, the beauty of the mind or incorporeal beauty is a beauty that invites us to contemplation. The nature of incorporeal beauty is not explained, and all we know is that it is something that is “apprehended by the inward senses” (sig. C6<sup>r</sup>) and that it has to be in a combination with corporeal beauty to always delight. Later, when Buoni is discussing Problem 15, he provides a clue to the nature of this incorporeal beauty:

[...] Beauty being in itselfe altogether earthly is little esteemed: but the grace thereof being a certaine celestiaall beame, issuing from the bright Spheare of the Beauty of the minde, is dispersed through all the members of the body, and accompanieth them in all their motions, and therefore is deemed the first qualitie, necessarie to the framing of a compleat Beauty. (sig. D3<sup>r</sup>)

Grace, which is described as a “celestial beam,” is essential to complete beauty. Buoni suggests “if to bodily Beauty, there be added that grace, which manifesteth it selfe in all the motions both of the bodie and of the minde, it presently worketh in every man an opinion, of perfect Beauty”

(sigs. D3<sup>r</sup>-D4<sup>v</sup>). Clearly then the incorporeal beauty that can be apprehended only by “inward senses” is grace; it is what invites contemplation and is necessary for “perfect Beauty.” Grace, which cannot be perceived by “outward senses” at first, unless it is dispersed through motions of the body, is the “first qualitie” of a complete beauty. This creates a subtle hierarchy that gives primacy to the beauty of the mind over the beauty of the body.

But at the same time, we recall that the beauty of the mind is also manifest through art (“artificial Beauty”). Thus, according to Buoni, both art that is corporeal and grace that is incorporeal are attributed to the beauty of the mind. As we read *The Winter's Tale*, it will be important to remember that while both art and grace are ascribed to the mind, art is “artificial Beauty” and grace is the “first qualitie” of “compleat Beauty.” The question arises, if this seminal aspect of beauty, grace, cannot be perceived through outward senses, how are we to experience it and respond to this notion of incorporeal beauty? We can begin to work our way back from perceiving grace as it is dispersed through the motions of the body to grace as incorporeal beauty, but we will still only be engaging with or encountering something that remains immaterial, inexpressible and unknown. Furthermore, Buoni’s conception of incorporeal beauty as something that cannot be adequately either perceived or expressed resonates with Scarry’s idea that beauty directs our attention to “what is absent” (109) as well as with Nehamas’ idea that beauty is “more like something calling me without showing exactly what it is calling me to” (78). To put this in other words, for Buoni, an encounter with “compleat Beauty” and grace is an encounter with a certain Otherness. Clearly then, early modern issues about engagements with beauty and its irreducibility have obvious resonances with contemporary conversations about ethics and alterity.

To return, then, to Shakespeare: the playwright, I am arguing, is thinking through many of the issues later considered by Levinas, Scarry and Nehamas. To better see this “dramatic thought” at work it is useful to look at Leontes’ response to beauty in the beginning of the play. I argue that in his irrational rage against Hermione and his rejection of the Oracle, Leontes is dramatized as reacting against the very idea of beauty that is manifest in the person of Hermione, and later the Oracle. Patricia S. Gourlay has already made a convincing argument that “in her initial appearance Hermione is already identified for the first time with the highest of Neoplatonic qualities, grace” (378). Indeed, Hermione is constantly associated with grace and its derivatives: Polixenes addresses her as “Oh, my most scared lady” (1.2.76) and “gracious Queen” (1.2.458); Paulina calls her “gracious dam” (3.2.198); and Hermione herself playfully utters “Grace to boot!” (1.2.80) and “’Tis grace indeed” (105). In response to Leontes’ accusations, Hermione nobly replies, “This action I now go on/ is for my better grace” (2.1.122-23), implying that her punishment will make her appear more gracious when she is proven to be blameless.

To Gourlay’s identification of Hermione with Neoplatonic grace, I would add corresponding beauty. I base this argument in part on the early modern philosophical and theological correspondence between grace and beauty. In addition to that, reading Leontes’ initial violent reaction to Hermione as also being directed against beauty makes him more consistent with his predecessor, Greene’s Pandosto, who similarly responds violently to his wife’s beauty. When Pandosto (Leontes) is struck with jealousy, his very first response is directed toward Bellaria’s (Hermione’s) beauty: “... a certain melancholy passion entering the mind of Pandosto drove him into sundry and doubtful thoughts. *First*, he called to mind the

beauty of his wife Bellaria” (5, emphasis added). Similarly, Leontes’ response to Hermione is also a reaction against beauty.

Another parallel to Leontes’ reaction against Hermione’s beauty can be found his response to the Oracle. I read this moment not only as a rejection of beauty but also a rejection of wonder and futurity. We get a glimpse into the nature of the Oracle in a brief exchange between Cleomenes and Dion. For Cleomenes, who is struck by the beauty of Delphi, “The climate’s delicate, the air most sweet, / Fertile the isle, the temple much surpassing / The common praise it bears” (3.1.1-3). Humphrey Tonkin correctly suggests that the Oracle has “a narrative of the future – a narrative that Hermione remains faithful to even as Leontes repudiates it. It is a narrative that comes from a distant country, a place of beauty and wonder and natural fertility as Cleomenes and Dion describe it” (35). Dion is “caught” (i.e. charmed) by “celestial habits” and the actions performed at Apollo’s temple: “O, the sacrifice! / How ceremonious, solemn, and unearthly / It was i’th’ off’ring!” (3.1.6-8). Dion describes the sacrifice as unearthly, as something he cannot quite articulate or understand. He can only remark at its strangeness and irreducibility.

Cleomenes comes to a close approximation of a nonviolent response to Otherness in his reaction to the voice of the Oracle; he says that it “so surprised my sense / That I was nothing” (3.1.10-11). In other words, this moment of encounter with Otherness leads to a ceding of his self. He is not trying to reduce this experience of alterity by defining it in relation to his self. His response is by way of a sacrifice of his self. Dion echoes both their hopes when he says, “gracious be the issue” (3.1.22). This also foreshadows Perdita’s eventual reunion with Hermione in its echo of Hermione’s declaration that on knowing “that the oracle / Gave hope” she had preserved herself “to see the issue” (5.3.128-29). Leontes of course, repudiates the



Oracle: “There is no truth at all i’t’h’ oracle. ... This is mere falsehood” (3.2.139-40). In rejecting the Oracle, Leontes is simultaneously rejecting Hermione and Perdita (the baby) and all they that they stand for—beauty, grace and Otherness.<sup>12</sup>

While Leontes’ responses are deliberately violent, both of Florizel’s responses have been inadvertently violent. He can only respond to Perdita’s beauty by taking control of it—first more overtly, through violent allusions and later, more subtly, by desiring her to become an animated statue, a work of art. This violent engagement, a violation of an ethical relationship, precludes the possibility of redemption. Considering all this, the play does not really allow for a nonviolent response to beauty, a response, following Scarry and Levinas, that does not disrupt the Otherness of the beautiful object, one that causes a radical decentring of the subject and initiates us into an awareness of something Other. It raises the question of how a response to beauty is possible without turning the beautiful person into art or an aesthetic object.

### **Responses to Beauty in *Pandosto* and Garrick’s 1785 Adaptation of *The Winter’s Tale***

Shakespeare is thinking through the nature of the response to beauty in a way that is markedly different from his predecessors and successors who have worked on similar subject material. Significantly, the struggle to respond to beauty is absent from Greene’s prose romance *Pandosto*, one of the sources for Shakespeare’s play: Dorastus (the Florizel figure) does not face the ekphrastic complexity that Florizel faces when he encounters Fawnia (the Perdita figure), and more importantly, the encounter with art and nature (in the form of the statue) that Leontes faces in Shakespeare is absent in Greene. And yet surprisingly, *Pandosto* has a much greater emphasis on Fawnia’s beauty than we have seen in Shakespeare and it is mostly articulated through

<sup>12</sup> See Walter S. H. Lim’s “Knowledge and Belief in *The Winter’s Tale*” where he reads Leontes’ rejection of the Oracle as a rejection of faith that is eventually corrected by his acceptance of the unknowable in the statue scene.

Dorastus: she “seemed to be the goddess Flora herself for beauty” (38); “Dorastus thought her outward beauty was but a counterfeit to darken her inward qualities, wondering how so courtly behaviour could be found in so simple a cottage” (43); Dorastus “stood gazing with piercing looks on her surpassing beauty” (49). In one of the longer passages where Dorastus is dwelling on Fawnia’s beauty, he comes to a conclusion that resonates closely with the idea that beauty is a demand for a response: “Yea, but beauty must be obeyed because it is beauty, yet framed of the Gods to feed the eye, not to fetter the heart ... I will, therefore, obey, because I must obey” (43). The reason that beauty must be “obeyed” or responded to simply because beauty is beauty is difficult to gloss. What is it that is so intrinsic to the concept of beauty that it defies explanation? The only thing that can be said for certain about beauty is that while it does not bind by way of emotion (“fetter the heart”), it has such a strong albeit curious hold on Dorastus that he “must” respond. The nature of this hold, of this compulsion, appears similar to the demand of the Levinasian Other for response. Perhaps then it is the Otherness of beauty that makes this demand; the Otherness of beauty and our inability ever to articulate it is what defines it.

To move from a precursor to a successor, David Garrick revived Shakespeare’s play with *The winter's tale, or Florizel and Perdita. A dramatic pastoral, altered from Shakspeare in 1785*. Interestingly, Garrick altered Florizel’s speech in this version. In its entirety it reads:

What you do,  
 Still betters what is done—when you speak, sweet,  
 I’d have you do it ever; when you sing,  
 I’d have you buy and sell so; so give alms;  
 Pray, so; and for the ordering your affairs,  
 To sing them too, and when you dance  
 Like a smooth wave by gentlest winds heav’d up,  
 So move you to the music’s dulcet breath,  
 That I cou’d wish the motion were perpetual. (20)

The last four lines are different from Shakespeare's play. Additionally, Shakespeare's version includes four more lines, but these have been omitted in Garrick's version. Garrick's differs here: "[...] when you dance / Like a smooth wave by gentlest winds heav'd up, / So move you to the music's dulcet breath, / That I cou'd with the motion were perpetual." This altered speech praises Perdita's beauty and her dance but the desire to transform her into an infinitely available experience that "owns no other function" is notably absent. Additionally, Florizel's response is modified by "*cou'd*," which implies more a possibility or a request than an absolute desire. Florizel's response here is not problematic in the way it is in Shakespeare: there is no desire to make Perdita art or to witness her as an animated statue.

While talking about revivals of the play in the 1750s, Maurice Hunt discusses the liberties that writers took "with Shakespeare's script in order to erase many of the 'improbabilities'" (6). Garrick reduced the play to the last three acts and made several changes, including this one, to make the play more "probable". In addition, a few songs were added to the sheep-shearing scene; two notable songs, sung by Perdita in response to the Old Shepherd's request, are produced here to show how other "improbabilities"; in this case the complexity of art and nature, is erased by Garrick. Perdita sings:

## II

We harbour no passions, by luxury taught;  
*We practise no arts, with hypocrisy fraught;*  
 What we think in our hearts, you may read in our eyes;  
*For knowing no falsehood, we need no disguise.*

## III

By mode and caprice are the city dames led,  
 But *we, as the children of nature*, are bred;  
*By her hand alone, we are painted and dress'd;*  
 For the roses will bloom, when there is peace in the breast.  
 (21, emphasis added)

Coming soon after Florizel's praise, Perdita is singing specifically about not practicing art, needing "no disguise," even as she is emphasizing that it is by nature's "hand alone" that she is "painted and dressed." In essence, Garrick's Perdita is making the same argument Shakespeare's Polixenes makes to counter Perdita's take on the famous exchange about gillyvors: "This is an art / Which does mend nature-change it rather; but / The art itself is nature" (4.4.95-97). Garrick's Perdita rejects the practising of art by equating it to hypocrisy, falsehood and disguise, but like Shakespeare's Polixenes she is also admitting to the goodness of nature's art. For Shakespeare's Perdita the gillyvors are "nature's bastards" but in this song Perdita is legitimizing herself and other shepherdesses as "children of nature." Garrick's Perdita makes her stance more encompassing and effortlessly combines nature and (nature's) art. Shakespeare's Perdita however, even after Polixenes' convincing argument, still rejects the gillyvors and refuses to plant them in her garden, thus denying any straightforward resolution or integration between art and nature. In Shakespeare's play then, the categories of art and nature can be seen to persist as exclusive from each other, much as they do for Buoni. It can also be argued that even though the gap between these categories may appear to be bridged in the last scene, art and nature are not bound in easy reconciliation: Shakespeare's plays take on this issue is much more nuanced and less definitive than Garrick's adaptation, suggesting once again that Shakespeare is trying to work through this problem of a nonviolent response to beauty.

### **Beauty, Dance, and Grace: Comparing *The Winter's Tale* to *The Faerie Queene***

Florizel's encounter with beauty finds a much closer and interesting predecessor in Book VI of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the book of Courtesy. When Calidore,<sup>13</sup> being

<sup>13</sup> A.C. Hamilton, while glossing Calidore's name as a composite of "beautiful+gift," points out, "'Beauty' and 'gift' are key terms throughout Bk VI, culminating in a gift to Calidore: a vision of the graces who 'to men all gifts of grace do graunt' (x 15.4)" (603).

hosted by the shepherds, first sees Pastorella—who is like Perdita, also a king’s lost daughter, raised by shepherds—he is struck by her beauty and stands “gazing still” at her dance with the other lasses (Canto ix.11.9). Pastorella is described as “a fair damzell, which did weare a crowne / Of sundry flowers, with silken ribbands tyde, / Yclad in home-made greene that her owne hands had dyed” (Canto ix.7.7-9). The visual image that these lines create must have not been too far off from how Perdita is introduced in the sheep-shearing scene. Like Perdita, Pastorella’s grace exceeds her station:

And smoothly sue she was full fayre of face,  
And perfectly well shapt in euery lim,  
Which she did more augment with modest grace,  
And comely carriage of her count’nance trim.  
(Canto ix.9.1-4)

Calidore responds to Pastorella’s grace and beauty thus:

So stood he still long gazing thereupon,  
Ne any will had thence to moue away,  
Although his quest were farre afore him gon;  
But after he had fed, yet did he stay,  
And sate there still, vntill the flying day  
Was farre forth spent ....  
(Canto ix.12)

In his admiration of beauty, Calidore is caught at once in time past, present and future—all occurring at once in a moment of stillness—and he allows himself to move with the beauty he is witnessing. While Florizel seeks to impose his desire on Perdita and puts her in a temporal loop, Calidore responds to Pastorella’s beauty differently. He specifically does not pass judgment on this experience of beauty and he certainly does not try to interpret it; unlike Florizel, he is simply opening himself up to the experience of beauty in this paradoxical still present, not aspiring to know what it might bring. In other words, he gives himself over to this moment of beauty, to this experience of alterity.

A much more detailed and complex encounter with beauty occurs when Calidore witnesses the vision at Mount Acidale in Canto X; his response here suggests he is more of a counterpart to Florizel. He sees a hundred naked maidens “All raunged in a ring, and dauncing in delight” (11.9):

All they without were raunged in a ring,  
And daunced round; but in the midst of them  
Three other Ladies did both daunce and sing,  
The whilest the rest them round about did hemme,  
And like a girlond did in compasse stemme:  
And in the middest of those same three, was placed  
Another Damzell, as a precious gemme,  
Amidst a ring most richly well enchaced,  
That with her goodly presence all the rest much graced.

(Canto x.12)

The Damzell, occupying Venus’ traditional place at the centre of the dancing Graces, reminds us of Pastorella surrounded by her shepherdesses. The Damzell is caught in a concentric circular movement “in compasse” and along with the Graces, appears like a flower, to the “stemme” that the naked maidens form. Lila Geller suggests, “She is like a gem set in a ring; the comparison is significantly one of artifice, of created beauty of setting” (269). However, Hamilton suggests that this is a moment when “nature becomes art, for she is **enchaced**, i.e. set as a jewel in a ring, adorned by the graces” (669, emphasis in the original). Much like Perdita who is partaking in both nature and art when she is dancing, the Damzell too is both in sync with nature and art at once. Surrounded by movements of dance, she seems to be a fixed, still point around which others revolve.

Initially, Calidore responds to this “gift” of beauty with amazement: “Much wondred *Calidore* at this straunge sight, / ... And standing long astonished in spright, / And rapt with pleasaunce” (17.1-4). But this is immediately replaced with a desire to know and interpret— “Whether it were the traine of beuties Queene,/ Or Nymphes, or Faeries, or enchanted show, /

With which his eyes mote haue deluded beene”—that leads to the destruction of the experience of beauty. He responds by “resolving, what it was, to know, / Out of the wood he rose, and toward them did go” (8-9). Hamilton points out that Calidore is “not content with enjoying the vision, [and] is determined to know—its carnal sense in present” (670). He wants to grasp the knowledge of this experience of alterity. In other words, he wants to make meaning out of what he does not understand and is propelled by a desire to make this vision tangible. This a need to grasp physically knowledge of what he is seeing and to make meaning out of it, is similar to Florizel’s desire to interpret Perdita. In fact, in desiring to know whether what he saw was an “enchanted show,” Calidore also seems to be echoing Polixenes’ view of Perdita as an “enchantment.” Like Florizel and although less deliberately than Polixenes, Calidore’s response to the beautiful vision destroys it: “But soone as he appeared to their vew, / They vanisht all away out of his sight” (18.1-2).

Calidore’s self-description of his violent response to the vision—“rashly sought that, which I mote not see” (20.2)—can be applied to Florizel’s response to Perdita and Leontes’s response to the image of alterity of Polixenes and Hermione together (Act 1) as well. The *OED* defines “mote” as “Expressing permission or possibility: was (or were) permitted to, might, could.” Calidore rashly sought that which he could not see (know), that which was not possible to see. Geller notes, “The disappearance of the Graces upon the approach of Calidore suggests that the vision of the graces is also such a sacred mystery” (272). The word “see” does not just imply sight, for Calidore has seen the vision. The vision itself is not impossible to see; what is impossible to see is the grace that produces the vision and the alterity and Otherness that informs it. Calidore has responded with a desire to control and define what he has encountered. In effect, this violent response erases the vision.



A rather angry Colin Clout instructs him on the impropriety of his response. Colin Clout asks rhetorically about the Damzell, the fourth Mayd: “Who can aread, what creature mote she bee, / Whether a creature, or a goddesse graced / With heauenly gifts from heuen first enraced?” (25.3-5). “Aread” means “declare” and Colin Clout seems to be suggesting that the Damzell’s beauty cannot be defined or articulated. Like Pastorella, and also Perdita, the Damzell outshines the other shepherdesses and “exceed the rest of all her race” (26.6). The Graces “graced her so much to be another Grace” (26.9). She is a fourth Grace. Gerald Snare notes that the fourth Grace is a “summation of all the other three” and is used as an encyclopaedic symbol” (353). In other words, the fourth Grace or Damzell has all the attributes of the other Graces in her, and she also symbolizes what Snare calls, “the infolded image of the dance of the Graces” (352).<sup>14</sup>

It is important to recall here that like Hermione, Perdita, who as Time puts it, has “grown in grace,” is emphatically associated with grace in the play. As I mentioned earlier, the religious term “grace” is linked to beauty and the Levinasian ethical because it too identifies an exteriority, an Otherness that cannot be grasped or reduced to the self. Furthermore, the concept of grace is crucial in *The Winters Tale*. Charles R. Forker notes:

The word *grace* together with its derivatives appears at least a dozen times in the play. Therefore, in addition to the central concern of how divine grace may manifest itself through nature, while, in another sense, being opposed to nature in its baser or fallen aspect, the word also connects to other themes. Among these are nature versus nurture, or true gentleness in relation to genetic origin, class, and rearing, and physical beauty in relation to moral and spiritual radiance. (120)

The concept of grace in its multiple meanings is linked to Perdita’s beauty, with several critics positing the first half of the play as a tragic vision brought about by the world of law that is

<sup>14</sup> Snare explains that the image is “infolded” due to the concentric circles created by the maidens, then the Graces, with the fourth Grace (possibly a Venus figure) at the center.

redeemed in the latter half by the world of grace—grace that is brought about through the figure of Perdita.<sup>15</sup>

Hermione asserts that her desire to see her daughter allowed her to preserve herself for sixteen years. After her unveiling, she entreats the “gods” to “pour [their] graces” on Perdita’s head and says to her, “thou shalt hear that I, / Knowing by Paulina that the oracle / Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved / Myself to see the issue” (5.3.126-29). Hermione has preserved herself to see this issue—both Perdita and the outcome of the play—both of which imply the presence of grace. M.M. Mahood however, notes: “Perdita is really unnecessary if we read *The Winter’s Tale* as a kind of *Grace Abounding*, and we are forced to ask why Shakespeare could not have symbolized the spiritual health of the lapsed and forgiven soul by a single figure like Dante’s Beatrice or Blake’s Jerusalem” (221), adding that “Perdita plays the role of Nature complementary to Hermione’s role of Grace” (222). While it is complicated to characterize Perdita as a Beatrice, the overlap between her and Hermione makes it equally difficult to demarcate her as only “Nature” or only “Grace.” To use Mahood’s formulation, Perdita plays both roles. Perhaps then Perdita’s beauty is the play’s answer to the question Forker poses about “how divine grace may manifest itself through nature” (120).

Florizel’s response however, does not take into account this aspect of Perdita’s beauty. In response to Problem 15, Buoni suggests:

Beauty without that grace, which is discovered, either in the tongue or in the motion of the body, seemeth the Beauty of an Image, drawn in dead coulours, or rather a figure which either in marble, or brass, layeth open the worthy actes of Hercules, or Achilles, without any motion of the members, so that it seemeth to be a dead Beauty in a live bodie. (D2<sup>v</sup>)

<sup>15</sup> See Ken Jackson’s “‘Grace to boot’: St. Paul, Messianic Time, and Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*” for an interesting account of grace and messianic time in the play, particularly his reading of Paul and the Corinthians based on which he reminds us how “the distinction between ‘law’ and ‘faith’ is nullified” (197).

Additionally, “Beauty without grace causeth every part and qualitie belonging there unto to languish” (D3<sup>r</sup>). Beauty devoid of grace is like “a dead beauty” that is comparable to a painting (“the Beauty of an Image, drawn in dead colours”) or a sculpture (a figure in marble or brass). Florizel’s desire that Perdita be fixed in a continuous motion and “own no other function” can be read as a desire for her to become art. In the absence of grace, she is reduced to what Buoni would call only the “Beauty of the body” and thus an incomplete and lifeless beauty. And Florizel has been unable to respond nonviolently to the Otherness of Perdita’s beauty. He is not, *pace* Scarry, ceding his self in the presence of beauty.

### **The Dance of the Graces**

Dance, along with music, was considered to be an imitation of the harmony of the universe. Ben Jonson, for instance, “employs the dance as an image of order, particularly the order of the heavens” in his masques (Meagher 82). The background against which Ben Jonson saw the dances of his masques is the background that Shakespeare and Spenser shared for the depiction of dance in their own work.<sup>16</sup> John C. Meagher gives a detailed description of dance and music in the period and describes how “dance is also an image of love” (86) and is closely allied with beauty. He cites John Davies’ *Orchestra, a Poem of Dancing* (1596), as the *locus classicus* for the poetry of the dance. To dance is to “Imitate heau'n, whose beauties excellent / Are in continuall motion day and night, / And moue therby more wonder and delight” (12). The origins of dance are described thus:

Dauncing (bright Lady) then began to be,  
When the first seedes whereof the world did spring

<sup>16</sup> Commenting on the importance of music and dance in the play, Northrop Frye reminds us, “Music also accompanies the revival of Hermione in the final scene of *The Winter’s Tale*. All the attention is absorbed in Hermione as she begins to move while music plays” (196). Frye adds, “[I]t is the dance [between Polixenes and Hermione] that most clearly expresses the pulsating energy of nature as it appears in *The Winter’s Tale*, an energy which communicates itself to the dialogue” (197).

The Fire, Ayre, Earth, and water did agree,  
 By Loues perswasion, Natures mighty King,  
 To learne their first disordred combating:  
 And, in a daunce such measure to obserue,  
 As all the world their motion should preserue.  
 (17)

Dance movements convey the motion, order and beauty of the heavens. They represent a cosmic order and harmony of being.<sup>17</sup>

The dance movements of the Graces at the summit of Mount Acidale convey two different orders of dance:

Therefore they alwaies smoothly seeme to smile,  
 That we likewise should mylde and gentle be,  
 And also naked are, that without guile  
 Or false dissemblaunce all them plaine may see,  
 Simple and true from couert malice free:  
 And eeke them selues so in their daunce they bore,  
 That two of them still *forward* seem'd to bee,  
 But one still towards shew'd her selfe afore;  
 That good should from vs goe, *then* come in greater store.  
 (X.12, emphasis added)

In the traditional order of the dance of the Graces, as depicted in Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera*, one Grace has her back to the viewer and is facing the other two Graces who come towards the viewer (see Figure 9). Hamilton explains that this is what "forward" in Line 7 suggests. (The 1596 edition reads 'forward'.) Hamilton also points out, "some editors emend forward to '**froward**' 1611, an elision of 'fromward' (i.e. away from us), claiming that Spenser reverses the traditional order" (672, emphasis in original). In this case, two Graces would have their backs to the viewers and one would be facing them. Geller notes that the position of the Graces in this case is in agreement with Pico della Mirandola's *Commento* (273).<sup>18</sup> And it would be important

<sup>17</sup> Roy Strong, while discussing *The Procession Picture* (c.1600) in relation to Davies' poem, comments: "... the idea of society as musically ordered, of political unity as musical harmony, of ritual and dance as physical expressions of such order, are commonplaces in Renaissance thought" (53).

<sup>18</sup> Pico notes, "Of the Graces one is painted looking toward us ... The other two with their faces from us, seeming to return ... What comes from God to us returns from us to God" (qtd. in Geller 273).

to remember that the context of Pico's description of the Graces "is one in which the Graces are seen as unfolding from a Venus who is depicted as Ideal Beauty" (Geller 274).



**Figure 9: Detail of the Three Graces from Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* (c.1482). Source: Wikimedia Commons. <<http://commons.wikimedia.org>>.**

Furthermore, while discussing the description of the Graces in Stanza 24 in Book VI, Catherine Bates talks about the ambiguity of how different readings of the word "then" transforms the meaning of the Graces' motion from one of courteous reciprocity "into one of self-sacrifice, the giver expecting to get considerably less than he gave" (154). This is counter to

the traditional gloss on the dance of the Graces that expresses, as Hamilton notes, “the reciprocal movement of receiving and returning and then giving and receiving” (602). But to read the motion as suggesting self-sacrifice, without the expectation to receive more or even the same, seems to suggest a different possibility. Self-sacrifice in the presence of beauty does not imply self-obliteration.<sup>19</sup> Rather, this formulation suggests giving over to the experience of beauty without expectation of a return in the shape of, for instance, meaning or gratification. Perhaps this reading of the dance of the Graces, this motion of the Graces, is the answer to how we can respond to beauty nonviolently.

### **Playwright-Artist-Courtier Figure**

We should not forget, however, that it is Colin Clout who is describing this experience of beauty to Calidore after he has reprimanded him; Calidore himself has not seen this exact dance. He needs Colin Clout to explain the inexplicable and ineffable, just as Leontes needs a Paulina prompting him on how to respond to the image of the still moving beauty of Hermione—Paulina instructs him, “It is required / you do awake your faith” (5.3.94-95).<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, for Calidore, too, it is the artist-persona who shapes his responses, a parallel perhaps to the playwright-artist figure, Paulina, who is shaping the audiences’ responses through the aesthetic.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, Paulina is entirely Shakespeare’s creation. Green’s *Pandosto* had no Paulina, no Antigonus (a

<sup>19</sup> For a different perspective on beauty and self-sacrifice, see Collinges who vehemently disparages earthly and physical notions of beauty “whether naturall or artificiall, borrowd from the Painter or Taylor” (sig. 48), expounding the need to efface the self (and all its associations with the material world and its people) entirely to make oneself deserving of grace.

<sup>20</sup> See Gross (1992) who contends that Paulina is instructing not only the onlookers, but is also persuading and urging both Leontes and the statue (102-06). For a compelling reading of this scene as a response to iconoclasm, see Michael O’Connell’s 2000 *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England*. See also Huston Diehl’s 1997 *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* on the relationship of forbidden spectacles and theatricality to Protestant reformed drama. Additionally, see Knapp who nuances O’Connell to argue that the scene is one of radical iconoclasm—one where Leontes’ ethical response to Hermione’s statue, a response of openness to the unknown without a desire to control it, occurs when he heeds Paulina’s call.

<sup>21</sup> For Paulina as artist, see Patricia S. Gourlay’s “‘O my most scared lady’: Female Metaphor in *The Winters Tale*.”



courtier) and no Autolycus (who poses as a courtier). In Shakespeare's play, Paulina functions not only as an artist figure (like Prospero in *The Tempest*), but also as the courtier figure after the death of her husband, Antigonus.<sup>22</sup>

While Paulina is not quite the courtier Castiglione describes in *The Book of the Courtier*, her function in the play bears a certain resemblance to the aspects of a courtier Castiglione has famously outlined. The ideal courtier needs to possess a certain *sprezzatura*,

so as to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it. And ... much *grace* comes of this: because everyone knows the *difficulty of things that are rare and well done*; wherefore facility in such things causes the *greatest wonder* ... Therefore we may call that *art true art which does not seem to be art*. (32, emphasis added)

*Sprezzatura* had been wrongly glossed as recklessness or nonchalance.<sup>23</sup> Simply put, it is the art of making the difficult look easy or, in other words, the art of making art look natural. In addition to possessing this quality, the courtier should aspire toward beauty, as explicated in Book 4 through Pietro Bembo. An older courtier will be more adept at attaining the ideal of beauty since he can move beyond just the physical aspects of beauty, and an older courtier will also be better at advising the ruler. It is interesting to consider that Paulina as a courtier serves as an advisor to Leontes, uses *sprezzatura* in a unique way to make art look natural (or "true art") and prompts Leontes to respond to its beauty. She "calls for music, music which will help change the nature of Hermione's statue" (Crider 27). Grace and wonder accompany this moment when art is seemingly transformed into nature. Paulina is indeed the courtier par excellence (only the wrong gender).

<sup>22</sup> For the idea of Paulina as a courtier figure, I am indebted to a lecture given by Lawrence Rhu at the 2009 Shakespeare Symposium "Shakespeare and the History of Philosophy" at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Hoby translates *sprezzatura* as "recklessness" in his 1561 translation of Castiglione's work; incidentally, Hoby's was the only 16<sup>th</sup>-century English translation.



In Shakespeare's hands Paulina as a playwright-courtier figure offers a solution to the problem of responding to the Otherness of beauty without doing violence to it: the solution is the still moving statue coming to life. This comes after Leontes responds by opening himself up or giving himself over to the strangeness of this experience. Gross discusses how the animation of statues (statues coming to life) brings about a recovery and restitution, but also makes another significant observation:

The basic point is perhaps simply that the animation of a statue is not purely liberating metamorphosis, a trope of release from death, an image of achieved mimetic work; the fantasy can entail a fall as well as a resurrection, both a release from enchantment and its perpetuation, both a transcendence and a descent. The fantasy seems in general to convey the idea of a made, constructed image becoming autonomous but also alien; if it suggests a redemptive gift, the restoration of a dead sign to use and relation, it may also suggest a kind of theft of life, as if something already autonomous was forced to yield to the demands of a life not proper to it. (9)

Additionally, while discussing the statue scene and the “complexly ambivalent staging of a statue’s animation,” Gross cautions against “any too idealized reading of the final scene” (108).

Indeed, by the end of the play, Leontes might be responding to Hermione’s “statue”—to its beauty and to it as art—but he has not done that with the live Hermione. Scott Crider too points out that Hermione’s first words when she stirs “remind us that the restoration is incomplete” (28). The animation of this statue is thus accompanied with the reminder that losses are unaccounted. To quote Gross’s thought-provoking summing up of the scene, “Finally, the enchantment of the scene is in the wilfulness of the fiction of disenchantment, the fantasy of the relinquishment of fantasy—the rebirth into a world in which possibly everything, possibly nothing, has changed” (109). The possibility that nothing has changed is one worth considering. Perdita still remains, to borrow a phrase Hermione uses to describe herself in relation to Leontes, “in the level of [Florizel’s] dreams” (3.2.80) and Florizel has not been able to engage non-

violently with her beauty. Like Perdita, the play remains suspended in a continuous repetition of the initial tragic and violent movement;<sup>24</sup> this provokes us to reassess the theme of redemption, particularly at the conclusion of this romance.

Indeed, Paulina prompts the audience on how to respond to the aesthetic, but the play does not offer an alternative to responding to beauty as anything but—to reinterpret a phrase from Leontes' mad raptures—"coactive art".<sup>25</sup> Coactive not only means "taking place together," it also means "of the nature of force or compulsion; coercive, compulsory" (*OED*). It is in the latter sense that I use it now to suggest that the responses to beauty forcibly perceive it as art. The play suggests that a nonviolent response to art might be possible (as Leontes does in the presence of Hermione's 'statue') but a nonviolent response to an individual's beauty is fraught with paradoxes and is near impossible to perform and stage. The concept of a nonviolent response to alterity works philosophically in Spenser and for Scarry; in the motion of the Graces, Spenser even offers us a clue on how to respond to beauty. But it is drama that lends itself uniquely to exploring the complexity and paradoxes of this issue, and helps tease out a plurality in our understanding and analysis. The question persists: if the ethical—ironically, much like Leontes' "affection"—"fellow'st nothing" or is companioned with nothing else (no subject, no object) then how can a nonviolent response to beauty be performed? This issue is important because it presses us for a clearer philosophical distinction between beauty and the aesthetic, art

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<sup>24</sup> The idea of suspension, and a continuous repetitive movement is particularly laden when we consider, as Inga-Stina Ewbank reminds us, that Shakespeare "chose a story with the sub-title 'The Triumph of Time' and developed it in a fashion which suggest a deepening and enrichment, rather abandonment, of time-thinking" (139). Additionally, to see how the notion of time is confusing for the characters in the play, see Jackson's "'Grace to boot': St. Paul, Messianic Time, and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*" where he explains the differences and similarities between chronological, virtual and actual time.

<sup>25</sup> (1.2.136-145) Shakespeare, however, is using the word "art" in the early modern sense: "are" in this passage: "with what's unreal thou coactive art." See footnote 7 for full passage.

and nature; it is a distinction that, given the dominant presence of Neoplatonism and the emphasis on beauty in early modern literature, is crucial. More importantly perhaps, it informs us of the acute difficulties of responding non-violently to any concept of the Other.

## Chapter 4

### **The Other of Beauty Manifested: Beauty, Identity, and Otherness in *Othello* and *Omkara***

The previous chapters of this dissertation offer an analysis of beauty in philosophical, theological, and literary discourses in the early modern period and have established the close relation between beauty and ethics. In this chapter I study *Othello* and Vishal Bhardwaj's 2006 Indian cinematic adaptation of the play, *Omkara*, to examine what the opposite or converse of beauty—its other—might be. Is it, as the film suggests, ugliness and unattractiveness, is it something that is marginalized by society, or is it a kind of cultural otherness? This examination sheds light on the intersubjective relation between beauty and “ugliness” that gives us insight into the relationship that lies at the heart of the philosophical notion of ethics—between the self and the Other. I use the filmic interpretation to illuminate Shakespeare's play and to address some of the play's old critical problems anew. Additionally, an attention to beauty and its ostensible opposite in the context of the play and the film helps us reassess the figure of Iago: rather than seeing Iago as a Vice figure, I propose that Iago is better viewed as a tragic philosopher figure who, in an encounter with beauty, gains insight into the nature of identity and selfhood.

#### **Religious, Social, and Philosophical Connotations of Beauty in *Othello***

Beauty is presented and perceived in different ways in the play. Most obviously, it is associated with the figure of the fair Venetian, Desdemona: she is described as “a maid so tender, air, and happy” (1.2.67), a “most exquisite lady” (2.3.17), “most fresh and delicate creature” (2.3.20), as “perfection” (2.3.25), and as “so lovely fair” (4.2.70). In Desdemona, beauty is

certainly a physical attribute but her beauty also carries divine and philosophical connotations. This is most evident when she arrives on the shore of Cyprus and Cassio describes her thus:

...a maid  
 That paragons description and wild fame,  
 One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,  
 And in th' essential vesture of creation  
 Does tire the engineer. (2.1. 64-66)

Bevington glosses these lines as, “and in her real, God-given, beauty, (she) defeats any attempt to praise her” (1166). The “essential vesture” or the essential clothing of creation refers to the naked body. Cassio is evoking a classic motif of beauty in the early modern period—of a naked Venus arriving on the shores of Cyprus, which is famously depicted in Titian’s *Venus Anadyomene* (c.1520) and Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* (1486). Cassio is painting a similar image of “the divine Desdemona” for who tempests, high seas, and howling winds, “having a sense of beauty, do omit / Their mortal nature” (2.1.70-75). In addition to these evocations of Venus Anadyomene (Venus rising from the waves), Desdemona is also viewed as Venus Armata (armed Venus) or a type of Venus Victrix (victorious Venus) who symbolizes military victory that is evident in Othello’s greeting, “Oh, my fair warrior!” (2.1.192) as she arrives on the shores of Cyprus.

Along with being affined to Venus and being a phenomenal representation of beauty, Desdemona is also depicted as a Marian figure—a figure of chastity, holiness, and divine beauty. Continuing his praise, Cassio speaks of Desdemona as if he was speaking of the Virgin Mary herself and creates a memorable image:

Let her have your knees.

Hail to thee, lady! And the grace of heaven

Before, behind thee, and on every hand

Enwheel thee round! (2.1.86-89)

The play contains several other references to Desdemona as a Marian figure. She is described as having “so blest a disposition” (2.3.314) and as “heavenly true” (5.3.140); she is compared to “votarist” (4.2.195) and she acts as an intercessor for Cassio to convince Othello to pardon him. Desdemona’s handkerchief is embroidered with strawberries, which is an emblem of the Virgin Mary as well as Venus;<sup>1</sup> it is a description that is not in the source text of Cinthio, so it would appear that Shakespeare added this particular detail to emphasize Desdemona’s connection with both. Desdemona’s beauty is at once earthly and divine and evokes the pagan and amorous Venus as well as the holy and chaste Mary.

It is important here to recall that for early moderns, Venus, the goddess of beauty and love, was symbolic of *Humanitas*—of disciplines that study the human condition. In his letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, Marsilio Ficino writes about why a painting of Venus should be viewed often and compares Venus to Humanity:

For Humanity (*Humanitas*) herself is a nymph of excellent comeliness born of heaven and more than others beloved by God all highest. Her soul and mind are Love and Charity, her eyes Dignity and Magnanimity, the hands Liberality and Magnificence, the feet Comeliness and Modesty. The whole then, is Temperance and Honesty, Charm and Splendour. Oh, what exquisite beauty! How beautiful to behold. (Ficino's 1576 *Opera Omnia*, qtd. in Gombrich 42)

Beauty, as represented through Venus, mattered for the same reason *Humanitas* did: it prompted and enabled an understanding of the human condition. Beauty became the symbol and source of

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<sup>1</sup> See Lawrence J. Ross’ “The Meaning of Strawberries in Shakespeare,” which discusses the contradictory emblematic meanings of the embroidered strawberries. Ross examines how strawberries were associated with the Virgin Mary and the Child and also with righteousness and hypocrisy. See also, Farah Karim-Cooper’s *Cosmetics in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (2006), which reads the red and white colors of the handkerchief as signifying the “Anglo-European feminine ideal” that is identified with Desdemona. (170)

humanistic inquiry that invited early moderns to explore everything related to being and beyond. In the play too, as I describe, beauty prompts inquiry into what it means to be human and facilitates knowledge of the self and its relationship to the Other.

A similar idea of beauty emerges in the way Iago perceives Cassio. In his last soliloquy in the play, just after he instigates Roderigo to attack Cassio, Iago says, “If Cassio do remain, / He hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly” (5.1.18-20). What kind of beauty is this daily beauty and how does it make Iago ugly? We know that Cassio is young and is usually depicted as being good-looking in various stage and film adaptations. He is described as an engaging and a “proper man” (1.3.394) who is charming and well liked by women. If Iago is talking merely about physical beauty and attractiveness, then how does this particular trait in Cassio make Iago ugly? It cannot simply be an inversely proportional relation between physical beauty and ugliness; surely this “daily beauty” is more than physical beauty. Beauty, after all, as Thomas Jeamson’s 1665 *Artificiall embellishments or arts best directions: How to Preserve Beauty or Procure it* informs us, was deemed essential to be a part of society and for purposes of social mobility. Othello promoted Cassio over Iago, so Cassio’s promotion has stopped Iago’s social ascent. In this respect, Cassio’s beauty can be understood as is his social success and Iago’s lack of this same success marks him as ugly.

Additionally, according to Jeamson, beauty enables people to become better versions of their selves. Ugliness is described as a “hideous Hagge,” as a disease, and people who do not have beauty are not fit to be a part of human society (sig. A4<sup>r</sup>). The implication for Iago is then also that since he is made ugly by Cassio’s beauty, he is also, as a result, unfit for society and is consequently alienated. That Cassio’s beauty has made Iago a metaphorical “Hagge” also implies an undermining of Iago’s masculine identity, an unsexing or emasculating of Iago.

Indeed, this would support Iago's suspicions of Cassio as a sexual rival: "For I fear Cassio with my nightcap too" (2.1.309). Cassio's beauty is thus a plausible cause for Iago's jealousy: it has supplanted his position in society and it has also undermined his manhood, both of which are markers of his identity.

### **Beauty, Identity, and Selfhood: Cassio's Truth as Iago's Fiction**

Sam Wood examines this connection between beauty and identity from a different angle. For Wood, beauty rightly becomes a placeholder for the idea of identity and also belonging. He begins by posing the question, "*what* it is about Cassio's beauty that makes Iago ugly?" (par. 8, emphasis mine) He posits, "the degree to which Cassio seems to belong to his context and himself, of Cassio's notion of home, and of Iago's perception of Cassio as a "proper man" (1.3.391)" (par. 20). Wood goes on to contrast Cassio's "daily beauty," that is, his sense of belonging to himself, with Iago and Othello's inability to belong. Unlike Iago, as I later show, who seems to be aware of the instability of any idea of a self, Cassio has a complete picture of what constitutes his being—his "place" in society.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Cassio is a Florentine. Francesco Bocchi, in his encomium *Bellezze della citta di fiorenza* (*The Beauties of the City of Florence*), describes the beauty of Florence and Florentines, and argues for beauty as a civic asset, something that defines the wholeness and integrity of its people. Cassio's sense of belonging, or his sense of being comfortable with his social and cultural identity is in no small part due to the fact that he is Florentine. John W. Draper discusses how Cassio "reflects Florentine elegance in speech and manner...a true gentleman, in both speech and action" (291). Iago, a Venetian, talks of Cassio disparagingly not only because of personal dislike but also because of, Draper argues, "the provincial animosity between the Italian city-states" (290). Draper points out that as a Florentine,



Cassio must have been trained in mathematics like the other Florentine officers for a new military approach that involved guns and building fortifications against them. This is precisely why Iago sneers at him for being “a great mathematician ... a bookish theoretic, / Wherein the togaed consuls can propose / as masterly as he. Mere prattle without practice / Is all his soldiership” (1.1.20, 25-7) This is also a reason why Othello promotes Cassio over the more old-fashioned, albeit more experienced, Iago. Unlike the displaced Iago, Cassio is comfortable in his identity as a Florentine in the world—he knows where he comes from and he knows how he is going to fit it. His “daily beauty” then defines Cassio not only for himself but also for others like Iago, whose cultural identity, just like Othello’s is never fully clear.<sup>2</sup>

Cassio, then, is exactly the man Iago claims to have never encountered: “I never found man that knew how to love himself” (1.3.317-18).<sup>3</sup> Cassio loves himself and is best described as being comfortable in his own skin. Woods argues that Cassio

seems to have overcome any sense of fictionality by becoming the face of his society and culture in a way that Iago and Othello have not. Cassio is coherent with his context and, perhaps more crucially, seems quite at home in that context, giving no sign of any discrepancy between an interior self and external self. (par. 24)

This is not to say that because Cassio conflates what Wood calls “his interior and external self,” his character is in any way inferior. Cassio becomes one way of looking at and shaping identity, one that sees his self as a sum total of social status, and his geographical and historical context. Iago, on the other hand, questions these markers and maker of identity: he “sees the very idea of

<sup>2</sup> On the possibility of Iago being Spanish and/ or Jewish see Paula Blanks’ *Shakespeare and the Mismeasure of Renaissance Man* where she points out that Iago not only has a Spanish name but is also speaking Spanish and she refers to his screaming “Diablo!” when he pretends to break up the brawl between Cassio and Roderigo (2.3.155) (100). Also see Eric Griffin’s “Unsainting James: or, Othello and the Spanish Spirits of the Globe.”

<sup>3</sup> Iago speaks these lines in response to Roderigo’s despair over Desdemona’s marriage to Othello.

home, the origin of any essential being, to be a fiction, because he realizes that any home is no more than a collection of stories that gives a person identity” (Woods, par. 24).

Another question that arises is how an encounter with beauty facilitates Iago’s realization about selfhood and identity. One way of understanding how beauty functions as a facilitator for knowledge is to turn to Immanuel Kant’s ideas about beauty and aesthetic judgment (see Appendix A). Aesthetic judgment for Kant is called “reflective” because it does not relate directly to the object but to the state of mind that is experienced as pleasure or displeasure. In Iago’s case, this would mean that he is less concerned about Cassio, his looks, and his social ascent, but more with what this encounter with beauty triggers off in his own mind. Aesthetic value lies *in* the bodily responses and judgments of taste of those individuals who experience the thing of beauty (the work of art or something in nature), rather than in the thing of beauty itself (in this case, Cassio). The main emphasis of Kant’s aesthetics is not on creativity or the production of the beautiful thing but on its reception and the experience of contemplation. Kant sees the beautiful not as qualities of an object but as that which would catalyze judgment; thus a lake (Kant’s example) is beautiful not because beauty is an intrinsic quality of the lake (or Cassio) but because of the experience that is produced at the sight of this lake. Beauty is thus not for beauty’s sake, but something is judged beautiful because of what it could do to and for the human being or the subject (Iago). This response to beauty is inherently contemplative and subjective. It occasions a moment of distancing not just from the object and the world, but also from what Kant calls agreeable and pleasure and thus, sensual desire. Aesthetic judgment also occasions a distancing from the self, in that this moment is intensely self-reflective: I am capable of experiencing and thinking that the lake is beautiful; I can understand the relation of my faculties to the world, and I can understand my limitations and the possibility of transcending

these very limitations. It becomes a moment of a kind of self-awareness, a realization of what constitutes subjecthood and subjectivity. For Iago, this moment of acute introspection becomes also a meditation on the fluidity of selfhood and, as I later argue when I return to a discussion of Shakespeare's play, the limitation of the self and of knowledge in the face of an unknowable alterity.

### **Forever Othering: Shifting Identities in *Omkara***

At this juncture it is worthwhile to look at the Indian film adaptation *Omkara* (2006) because even as the film depicts Iago and Othello as not adequately complete and not wholly defined, it challenges, much like Iago, the notion of an essential being; it posits instead the fluid nature of the self and its relation to the other, and underscores the impossibility of a fixed determinate identity. The film is set in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in a politically charged, violent, and rural landscape. It is directed by Vishal Bhardwaj who is has also composed the music and written the screenplay for this Shakespearean adaptation (his second after the 2004 *Maqbool* that was an adaptation of *Macbeth*). This is important to mention because even though the film is in Khariboli (*Khari*= "stiff"; *boli*= "speak")--a regional dialect of Hindi that is spoken in the rural areas surrounding Delhi that helps set up a distinctly visceral and gritty backdrop and carries connotations of being unrefined and rustic—the dialogues and the songs contain very deliberately nuanced meanings that, in addition to echoing the original Shakespearean poetry, also help parse out and enhance several of the themes in *Othello*.

The Othello figure is a gang leader named Omkara "Omi" Shukla (played by Ajay Devgan) who is a crucial player in the political mafia that uses violence to further a powerful politician's (Bhaisahab, played by Naseerudin Shah) bid at elections. Lalita Pandit Hogan has

written in depth about the religious significance of the names in *Omkara*—linking the Othello, Iago, and Cassio figures with the Hindu Trinity of Shiva (the Destroyer), Brahma (the Creator), and Vishnu (the Preserver)—to highlight the cultural and historical significance of the adaptation in the Indian context.<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on the literal meaning of the names in *Omkara*. In Hindi “Omkara” is a name of God that can be translated as “I am,” “I exist,” or “I am existence.” “Omkara” also carries the implication of “making articulate,” or “to make manifest.” I contend that these meanings strongly resonate throughout this film adaptation as the important characters struggle with the quintessential questions of selfhood and autonomy, existence, and being a part of society.

While Omkara enjoys respect, verging on reverence, his illegitimate birth is derogatorily harkened to throughout the film. Not only was he an illegitimate child, a *harami* as he is called, but he is derided even more because his mother belonged to a lower caste—she worked as a maid in his father’s household and is referred to as a *kanjari*, a prostitute. As a result, even though Omkara carries a Brahmin last name, Shukla, he is viewed as a mixed caste mongrel, often referred to derogatorily as *adha Brahmin*, a half or incomplete Brahmin. This description implies not just an undesirable social status but also a kind of undesirable intrinsic value in him. Within the Vedic Hindu caste system, a system of social stratification that is still prevalent in India, Brahmins were considered to belong to the highest caste. Member of this caste were stereotypically attributed with positive qualities such as wisdom, even-temperedness, devotion to God and learning. Other castes were similarly attributed with other traits and functions. The lowest caste, Shudra, is the caste that was traditionally assigned to the serve all the other castes. Then there is the category of Dalits that is out of the caste system: these were socially ostracized

<sup>4</sup> See Hogan’s “The Sacred and the Profane in *Omkara*: Vishal Bhardwaj’s Hindi Adaptation of *Othello*.” *Image & Narrative*.

people who were considered to be, as the traditional name suggests, “Untouchables” and impure. They were marginalized and assigned “impure” tasks such as cleaning sewers and toilets. Even touching them was considered to be a kind of pollution of the body that would require a complex process of purification. They were not just socially inferior but also regarded as lesser human beings fit to be placed only outside of society and physically outside the village boundaries. Omkara’s mother could have been either a Shudra or a Dalit. Either way, Omkara’s parentage is fraught with negative connotations.

Omkara is a sort of misfit in an otherwise traditionally organized and structured society; he is figured as someone or rather as something unnatural because his father’s upper caste and his mother’s lower caste should not have mingled to produce an offspring. Omkara is neither strictly an upper-caste Brahmin nor does he belong to the lower and consequently, baser caste. The underlying fear of caste pollution echoes Iago’s insinuations about Othello and Desdemona in Shakespeare’s play when he tells Brabantio that “an old black ram / Is tuppung your white ewe” (1.1.90-91). The pure Brahmin caste is polluted by his very existence; the entire caste system, which forms the base of society, is defiled and undermined because of this incomplete Brahmin. He just does not fit into a neat category, and as result, even though he is the figure of authority in his village, there is always ambivalence about his actual status.

These concerns are visible in Omkara’s purposeful depiction as the darkest skinned person in the film. Omkara is made to look especially darker and older than the actor playing the role, Ajay Devgan, therein also keeping with the depiction of Othello in Shakespeare’s play (see Figure 10). Within his village community too (the Cyprus equivalent), he stands out as a *kala kauwa* (“black crow”) and *amavas ki raat* (“moonless or darkest night” also carrying the connotation of being an ill-omened or sinister night). The title song of the film, which has a

celebratory and paeon-like quality about it, describes Omkara’s grim ferocity in specific animal imagery—his eyes are like wasps, his tongue is like a snake’s lunge. He is both man and beast, and his beast-like ferocity and anger are precisely what render him a very effective warrior and enable him to function as an important part of this society.



**Figure 10: Ajay Devgan as Omkara and Kareena Kapoor as Dolly**  
**Source: BBC. <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/shropshire/content/image\\_galleries/omkara\\_gallery.shtml?9](http://www.bbc.co.uk/shropshire/content/image_galleries/omkara_gallery.shtml?9)>.**

The Iago figure, Ishwar “Langda” Tyagi, similarly stands out visually, albeit for a different reasons. The word *Ishwar* means God, in the specific sense of God being the supreme controller or highest being, and this meaning is only reinforced by his desire to control every event and every person around him. Hogan accurately equates him with Brahma, the Creator. The word *Langda* means lame or limp, and this character walks with a very pronounced limp and is almost always referred to by this name. His physical appearance is very much reminiscent of



the deformed titular character from *Richard III*. In addition to being depicted with this deformity, Landga is physically grotesque and often menacing, with an unkempt appearance and hideously decaying teeth. See image below which is taken from a screenshot from the film at the moment when Landga gets his hands on the ornamental waist-belt (the handkerchief equivalent):



**Figure 11: Screenshot of a menacing Langda (Iago)**  
Source: Screenshot from the film *Omkara*

This depiction of the Iago figure as physically repulsive and menacing is not new. Marvin Rosenberg discusses a stage adaptation where an attempt was made to present Iago “as a fiend in human form”: “I have seen something of the sort tried in a performance wherein Iago appeared as an ugly, twisted, gnomelike creature, clinging like a dirty shadow to Othello” (150). In the film, Langda’s unattractiveness is conflated with his deformity and his deformity is conflated with his identity. Much like *Omkara*, but for different reasons, Landga too is perceived as other, as different from the norm.

Both Omkara and Landga are in sharp visual contrast to Dolly, the Desdemona figure. Dolly is the lightest skinned person in the film, and people around her remark on her beauty and fair skin quite often. This visual contrast between Omkara and Dolly would be immediately evident to Indian viewers given the obsession with and especially the recent debates about skin-whitening products and cultural ideals of beauty.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the film, this contrast is highlighted by way of lighting and juxtaposing Omakra with darkness and Dolly with light (See Figure 10).<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, Dolly is further contrasted both visually and verbally with the dusky and uneducated Emilia and Bianca figures. Dolly is rich, educated, and speaks in a refined dialect and even her apparel throughout the film is of a different regional style than what is worn around the village. Like Omkara and Langda, Dolly too is singled out because of how she looks. On her arrival at Omkara's village, a village elder remarks, albeit complimentarily, that she is alien to that community and does not belong there. Dolly's beauty defines her and indicates her upper-class status and is a distinct marker of her urban identity. This very beauty that defines her also makes her an other within this community.

Similarly, the Cassio figure too does not quite fit in this community. His name in the film is Kesu "Firangi" Upadhyaya. *Firangi* means foreigner, outsider; *rang* means "color," *fi-rang* means "other color." Like his Shakespeare counterpart, the Florentine Cassio who is a foreigner in Venetian society, Kesu Firangi is also a foreigner and is perceived as such. He is the only person apart from Dolly who has a college education. He can speak in English—which is

<sup>5</sup> The most recent skin whitening debate in India was kicked off by a tweet (Twitter post) about skin-whitening by economist Rupa Subramanya. In her subsequent piece "Is Fairer Skin Really 'Better'?" that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal-India*, Subramanya summarizes several studies done by economists that suggest a directly proportional relation between lighter skin color and economic and social advancement not only in developing countries but also countries such as the United States.

<sup>6</sup> See Hogan (2010) for a detailed account of black versus white in the film.



considered to be a sign of upward social mobility and cultural superiority—and is the only person along with Dolly who can sing “Happy Birthday.” In fact, it is pointed out that his English language skills are superior to even Dolly’s when he teaches her how to sing and correctly pronounce the lyrics to Stevie Wonder’s song “I just called to say I love you.” His attire and mannerisms are also markedly Western. Firangi is singled out from the village community because of these characteristics, but these are also the very reasons why he is chosen as Omkara’s lieutenant over Langda: he would be able to capture the educated youth vote during elections and prove to be an asset in Omkara’s election in that particular political domain. Thus, as in the case of Dolly, the very thing that defines Firangi’s identity becomes the thing that leads to his being marked as other. Firangi’s youth, attractiveness, education, and foreignness are also precisely what abet Omkara’s jealousy.

I suggest that all of these characters, Omkara and Langda as well as Dolly and Firangi, are othered in the film by the very characteristics that define them and give them an identity with which they negotiate their existence and function within the community. Another way to look at this is to say that none of their characteristics is depicted as the dominant norm. Beauty and attractiveness epitomized in the Desdemona figure and Cassio figure, and their corollary as seen in the dark, older Othello and the deformed Iago figure, are all markers of their identity but also the very reasons for their marginalization and depiction as other. Like Omkara, who is an *adha Brahman*, Langda, Dolly and Firangi too are perceived as *adha* or half and therefore incomplete. The other of beauty, once defined as unattractiveness and deformity, has the same status as beauty within the village community. The status of the other of beauty and beauty itself is interchangeable in so far as both are deviations from some imaginary norm.

This interchangeability is metaphorically represented in the lasting image of the play and of the film as well: the reverse gender pieta image where Othello holds the dead “sacrificed” (5.2.69) Desdemona in his arms. In the film, Omkara actually sings a lullaby to the dead Dolly, designed to make her wake up rather than fall asleep—calling her a *gudiya* which literally means a child’s doll or a girl child and is also a translation of her name Dolly. The image is made more compelling by the red bridal dress and adornments that Dolly is wearing and the completely white groom’s attire that Omkara is wearing. Dolly is at once, wife and child, and Omkara is at once the groom but also a paternal figure singing the lullaby. In the play, Desdemona, once the Marian figure, now lies sacrificed, a Christ-like death, in Othello’s arms. Othello, who once thought that he was God’s instrument, is now described as “the blacker devil” (5.5.135) by Emilia. Identities and categories of defining them are blurred and not constant. What we see in the film and in this lasting image from the play then is that there is a continuous displacement of identity.

### **Beauty, Elusiveness, and the Lack of Sovereign Self**

In Shakespeare’s play, Iago hits on this idea about the fluidity and even fiction of identity when faced with Cassio’s “daily beauty.” Cassio’s “daily beauty” is his blissful unawareness of the complexity of being; as Wood points out, his self is constituted by what others think of him (other people, that is) and his status and place in society. Iago realizes that he was wrong in his declaration of independent self-fashioning to Roderigo: “ ’Tis in ourselves that we are thus or / thus.” (1.3.322-23). Iago cannot be wholly defined or complete if he is alone because he, just like Cassio and everyone else, cannot exist entirely apart from other people. He needs others around to construct his social and cultural identity (as lieutenant, as friend, or even as diabolic enemy), variable as it may be. Above all, Iago realizes, unlike Cassio, that the self is more than a

collection of quantifiable facts about social and cultural identity; not only is any idea of the self and identity not stable but the self is also not autonomous. And this is unacceptable to him.

While I agree with Wood that Iago “feels himself to have no essential being” (par. 25), I take this argument a step further—using the Levinasian-Derridean notion of the Other—and suggest that in addition to this lack of an “essential being,” Iago’s realization is specifically about the utter and complete dependence of the self on something Other to be—something that is elusive, that cannot be seen and cannot fully be articulated. Iago’s self-description to Roderigo at the beginning of the play, “I am not what I am” (1.1.67)—a corruption of the God’s response to Moses, “I am what I am” (*Exodus* 3.14)— thus becomes true in more ways than he intended it. In the face of Cassio’s beauty, Iago is jolted into seeing that any idea of the self, any assertion of his self, his identity, is contingent first on an Other that cannot be articulated. In a play where the vocabulary and metaphors of the flesh and sex abound and much rests on the demand for ocular proof (Othello’s repeated demands to Iago to show him proof of Desdemona’s adultery, for instance), Iago is the only one who *sees* precisely that which cannot be seen. Cassio’s visible beauty makes Iago acutely aware of the lack of an independent self that is not contingent on anyone or anything else. Cassio’s beauty is then, to use philosopher Alexander Nehamas’ description of beauty, “the emblem of what we [and in this case, Iago] lack” (76).

Nehamas’ description of beauty “as the emblem of what we lack” and as “a call to look attentively at the world and see how little we see” (76, 131), helps get to the heart of the matter of what challenges Iago. Following Stendhal, Nehamas defines beauty as only a promise of happiness. Beauty is a promise of a future that is unknown, which may or may not bring happiness; nonetheless, the hope and promise for something yet to come always accompanies beauty. “Beauty always remains a bit of a mystery, forever a step beyond anything I can say

about it, more like something calling me without showing exactly what it is calling me to” (78). In other words, beauty is something that inspires toward an ideal that we cannot quite grasp or articulate the moment we experience it. This ideal might be love, divinity, truth, and it is also entirely possible that this is an ideal that is not. That is to say that beauty does not guarantee truth or divinity; it offers a possibility beyond the self that may or may not be realized. Iago is left grappling with this very possibility beyond the self, an Otherness that cannot be realized.

Perhaps then Iago is aware that there is an unseen alterity that actually constitutes the self. He can control and get rid of people, laws, and customs, but how is he to rid himself of this Otherness? I read Iago’s final lines, “Demand me nothing. What you know, you know. / From this time forth I never will speak word” (5.2.311-12), as his final gesture of resistance par excellence. It is a refusal to respond with openness to the Other. Through his silence, perhaps Iago is attempting to resist the demands of the Other. The realization that he cannot exist without the Other and his consequent resistance to respond with openness, I believe, are Iago’s true tragedy.

### **Existence, Knowledge, and the Pursuit of Infinity**

In the film, Langda’s (Iago) final dialogue is a telling meditation on nature of being, of the human condition. It occurs after Omkara has smothered Dolly and is told by Indu (Emilia) that she stole the ornamental waistband (the handkerchief substitute in the film) for Langda. Langda walks into Omkara’s bedroom and drives Indu away. As Omkara slowly walks toward Langda with a gun in his hand, Langda gropes for explanations saying that Indu is lying and is probably sleeping with Kesu (Cassio). Then he utters emotionally and entreatingly, “[I] believe you to be more than/in excess of/beyond God, that’s why...” (*arrey bhagwan se zyada apko manu, is liye...*) and his voice trails off; his countenance suddenly changes as if he realizes

something and he becomes stony-faced. I find this moment to be comparable to Iago's last soliloquy in the play when he comments on Cassio's beauty and becomes aware of something beyond his self, the otherness that constitutes him. In the play, it is an encounter with beauty that, as I have argued, triggers off the realization that the self is not autonomous and is dependent on an unknowable Otherness to be. In the film, this realization occurs at the moment when Iago unwittingly declares that he considers Omkara to be more than or beyond God.

This spontaneous admission by an Iago at his wit's end begs the question: What can be more than or beyond or in excess of God? Considering the multiple literal meanings of the name Omkara ("to make manifest or articulate," "I exist," "I am Existence"), Langda's believing Omkara to be in excess of God could imply that for him existence precedes God or Otherness. Within the context of Hinduism, Omkara is the also the enunciation of the first, the primordial sound *Om* and hence the meaning "to make manifest or articulate." *Om* is the necessary prerequisite for the phenomenal world to be articulated. It is difficult to pinpoint Langda's theology because it appears to be a complex mix of different strains of Vedanta Hindu philosophy--sometimes Advaita Vendanta (non-dualistic, monistic), sometimes Dvaita (espousing a dualism that is very different from the Western Cartesian dualism), and sometimes Vishishtadvaita. The theology in the film is worthy of a full length study but for the purposes of this chapter—since I am not attempting to interpret the film in terms of Hindu theology or reading the play through Hindu thought—it would be sufficient to say that Langda's last few words communicate a deep and deliberate engagement with existence, the nature of being, and the processes of the self and alterity, all of which becomes evident in the film in the next few seconds. These concerns that are central to Western thought are precisely what this filmic interpretation helps us reassess.

Langda's breaking off of his sentence after "that's why" and the immediate change in his expression is telling. The usually talkative and animate Langda is suddenly appears to be catatonic and is rendered laconic. It is as if that at that moment, he ceases to be himself. After a few seconds, Langda says in a dull, lifeless monotone, "*Aap jo jaante ho bas wohi jano; mere sach mein aur mere jhooth mein [pause] mein ab koi farak nahin hega.*" This can mean one of two things: he could either be saying a) "what you know is all you know" suggesting that Omkara's knowledge is incomplete, or b) what you know is enough for you to know, with the implication that Omkara should not attempt to know more. The second half of the dialogue after the semicolon is similarly nuanced and is open to two interpretations: a) there is no difference between my truth and my lie now, and b) between my truth and my lie [pause] I now don't make a difference. The first meaning of the sentence would be the one that people unfamiliar with Shakespeare's play would hear. The word for "in" and "me" in this dialect is phonetically similar, thus the repetition of "*mein,*" one before and one after the pause. It is hard to imagine that an excellent and deliberate craftsman like Bhardwaj—director, composer, and screenwriter of this film—who very familiar with Shakespeare would have let an additional "*mein*" in the dialogue unless it was to suggest the second meaning of the sentence. This is to say that it is more likely that Bhardwaj, through Langda, is underscoring the theme of existence and the desire to understand being in the film. In saying that he now does not make any difference, Langda is not only saying that he cannot or does not differentiate between his truth and fiction, thereby highlighting the contingent nature of all knowledge, but he is also matter-of-factly stating that his existence now makes no difference. His self is not unique and it is not autonomous, his entire existence is predicated on something he cannot control, let alone articulate: his identity is built

on an indeterminate set of categories, his self has limitations, and his knowledge of his self and the nature of being is similarly limited and will never be complete.

This is reinforced within a couple of seconds as Omkara puts the gun to Langda's forehead and Langda closes his eyes as if relieved and implores, "Mark/shoot my forehead" (*Dag do mattha*). His last words are, "liberate me" (*mukti kar do meri*). The word *mukti* means freedom and in Hindu philosophy it denotes *moksha*, that is, freedom of the consciousness or the soul from the endless cycles of reincarnation and being. Langda genuinely does want his life to end but not because he is remorseful for the havoc he has caused. He displays no feelings of guilt. Rather, his desire to have his life ended stems from his realization that he cannot exist as an independent, sovereign self. While Iago tries to resist the demands of the Other through his silence, Langda wants to disengage from the Other by ending his self.

But Omkara's response to him points to the futility of Langda's resistance and his final attempt to escape his self and the Other. Omkara replies, echoing Langda's existential futility, "[we will] get freed from the body, but [we will] never get freed from this consciousness; no you, no I" (*Sarir se to mukti mil jayegi, magar atma se kadi mukti nahin hone wal; na tu na main*). *Atma* or *atman* in Hindu philosophy refers to a primordial self or an observing spirit; it is a non-physical notion of the self, denoting a primeval, eternal individual, for lack of a better word, essence that has always existed and continues to exist despite the several physical manifestations and incarnations it undergoes or 'sees' through the passage of time. *Atma* also carries connotations of conscience and consciousness, as something that is both within the body and exists apart from it. Omkara's concluding words in this final dialogue, "no you, no I" can imply, "neither you nor I [will get freed from this consciousness]" and that would make sense in the context of the preceding words and the reference to of the Hindu belief in the cycle of

reincarnation and eventual release from it. But if that were the case, the words should have been “*na teri, na meri*”=“not yours nor mine” (and not “*na tu, na main*”=“no you, no I”). This leads me to contend that Omkara’s statement means “there is no you, there is no I” or/and “neither you nor I matter,” suggesting that that there is no distinction between the Omkara and Langda (between their two selves) and that neither of their individual identities matters. The implication here is that all that matters is the Otherness that constitutes them and it is something that neither of them can fully understand. Surendranath Dasgupta translates *mukti* as “emancipation” and points out that *mukti* is “a state of pure and infinite knowledge (*anantajnana*) and infinite perception (*anantadarshana*)” (207). The implication of what Omkara is saying is that neither Langda nor he will ever be able to reach that stage of pure and infinite knowledge, or absolute freedom from the Other.

I suggest that this is Omkara’s response to the unknown Other. He is not attempting to escape his responsibility; he is answering to the demands of the Other with respect and openness. By ceding his self and giving himself over to the Other, Omkara is in a way redeeming himself. He is less of a tragic figure than Langda because at the end he has accepted his responsibility and is opening himself to the possibility of the unknown. True to the literal meaning of his name, “to articulate,” Omkara is articulating his response by ceding his self and also accepting the impossibility of ever fully knowing the Other. Langda, on the other hand, remains to be an existentially tragic figure in his refusal to accept that he cannot escape the demand of the Other.

In an attempt to rehabilitate Iago, Tucker Brooke compares him to Hamlet arguing that they are the nearest in birth and the most subtle. Perhaps Iago is a tragic hero and perhaps it is no coincidence then that where Hamlet ponders about man as, “the beauty of the world” but also as “the quintessence of dust” (2.2.308-9), Iago finds, in an encounter with beauty, that his self is



truly nothing. Like Hamlet, Iago too is a philosopher figure. Hamlet's soliloquies can broadly be said to be meditations on the human condition, the nature of human beings, and the meaning of life. Iago's soliloquies are more of an affirmation of what he has done or will do to test the possibilities of the human condition. Iago is then acting throughout *Othello* on what Hamlet contemplates and tries to convince himself of in his final soliloquy:

What is a man,  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.  
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and godlike reason  
To fust in us unused. (4.4.34-40)

Hamlet is pondering about what it means to be human. If humans merely eat and sleep and attend to bodily and material needs, they are a little more than animals. Hamlet argues that the infinite faculties of the mind—the capacity to look to the past and the future and assimilate knowledge and use reason to understand our humanity—are meant to be used. Hamlet is advocating a serious consideration of the human condition and what defines us as human beings.

Where Hamlet advocates, Iago does. Throughout *Othello* Iago can be seen as pushing the boundaries of knowledge and truth, societal norms and relationships, and as exploring and resisting the limitations of being human. He is not going let his capabilities and power of reasoning “fust in him unused” (“grow moldy”): he is propelled by a desire to know, to know about his self and to know about the Otherness that constitutes him. He soliloquizes trying to understand his own motives, explaining his plans, and reveals the working of his fraught mind. He is, above all, a human being grappling with his own humanity and refusing to accept the limitations of his selfhood, constantly reaching for, to paraphrase and translate Langda's view of Omakra, what is beyond infinity.

A great Renaissance hero expressed an idea of beauty that indicates how pervasive this preoccupation with a possibility beyond the self was for writers of the period. As unlikely a spokesperson for beauty as Tamburlaine might be, it is Christopher Marlowe's protagonist who articulates the elusiveness of beauty precisely:

What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then?  
 If all the pens that ever poets held  
 Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,  
 And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,  
 Their minds, and muses on admired themes;  
 If all the heavenly quintessence they still  
 From their immortal flowers of poesy,  
 Wherein as in a mirror we perceive  
 The highest reaches of a human wit;  
 If these had made one poem's period,  
 And all combin'd in beauty's worthiness,  
 Yet should there hover in their restless heads  
 One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,  
 Which into words no virtue can digest. (*I Tamburlaine the Great* 5.1.160-73)

Stephen Greenblatt offers an interesting perspective on this speech, suggesting that it is Tamburlaine “who gives the whole problem of reaching a desired end its clearest formal expression in Marlowe: *beauty, like all the goals pursued by the playwright's heroes, always hovers just beyond the reach of human thought and expression*” (218). Greenblatt rightly contends that “the problem of elusiveness is one of the major preoccupations of Renaissance thinkers” and argues that while this topical issue deeply influenced Marlowe, “he subtly shifts the emphasis from *the infinity that draws men beyond* what they possess to the problem of the human will, the difficulty men experience in truly wanting anything” (emphasis mine, 218). I contend that for Shakespeare too, beauty “hovers just beyond the reach of human thought and expression,” and in *Othello*, just as in *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII*, the emphasis is precisely *on* “the infinity that draws men beyond.” *Omikara* shows us that it is this infinity, this

elusive reach beyond the grasp, this complete Otherness that an encounter with beauty prompts and that Iago is forced to face.

## Conclusion

Early modern literature abounds in references to beauty. However, in the past few decades, discussions of beauty have been sidelined in part due to the influence of approaches such as cultural materialism and new historicism; as a result, beauty often gets viewed as some kind of ideological mist that distracts us from ethical issues. By taking beauty as seriously as early modern thinkers did, my research underscores the importance of beauty in early modern literary criticism and reassesses the critical relationship between beauty and ethics. My study posits Shakespeare as philosopher of beauty and reinterprets several literary works, thereby challenging traditionally accepted criticism on these works.

This dissertation begins by addressing the centrality of the topic of beauty in humanist discourses and literary works of the early modern period and argues that beauty was a critical way through which early modern culture defined itself. Beauty instigates an inquiry into the nature of being human and the self and its relationship with the other—that, as I have shown, is the matter of ethics. Chapter 2 examines the nature of the experience of beauty and concludes and explains how an encounter with beauty is necessarily ethical and places a call on us to respond. A careful analysis of *Henry VIII* or *All is True* shows how beauty is in conversation with ethics in the play. Here, I also introduce the Levinasian-Derridean concept of ethics and Otherness, and discuss beauty in relation to notions selfhood. Chapter 3 explores the dynamics of a response to beauty in various literary works and studies the correlation between Neoplatonism, Protestant grace, and the Levinasian “ethical”. I elucidate the potential for ethical violence inherent in responses to beauty and show that these responses to beauty are fraught with difficulties and necessarily involve a consideration of the self’s relation to the other. The final chapter continues this examination of the nature of beauty and its connection to selfhood by

taking a look at the other or the ostensible opposite of beauty. My analysis of *Othello* and *Omikara* returns to the opening chapter in its assertion that for early modern thinkers, beauty is being. I explore the interchangeable nature of beauty and its other, the fluidness of selfhood, and the pursuit of the elusive otherness that beauty instigates. My examination of a contemporary Hindi cinematic adaptation of a Shakespearean play not only illuminates traditional critical concerns of the play anew but also shows how issues relevant to the early modern European world of the play are relevant and pressing in a postcolonial, contemporary world. The subject of beauty and ethics traverses time and space: it is critical and indispensable to a better understanding of our selfhood, our relationships, and the limitations and potential of our knowledge.

My study has been focused on beauty but there is a lot of work that remains to be done on this topic as well as the allied topic of aesthetics in the field of Shakespeare studies. Recently, a renewed interest in aesthetics in the form of a few journal articles and a couple of books is seen emerging in this field: Hugh Grady has explored the concept of “impure aesthetics”; Joel Stolkin has examined what he calls “sinister aesthetics” in *Richard III*; Richard Wilson has written about Shakespeare and the *hijab*, using the idea of the veiling of an Indian beauty in relation to secrecy and the silk trade; and Stephen Greenblatt has a chapter on Shakespearean beauty marks in *Shakespeare’s Freedom*. Indeed, this is a start.

Additionally, my dissertation contributes to the discussion of ethics in early modern methodology that is already underway—the “turn to religion”—that argues for a dynamic relationship between drama, in particular, and religion and religious culture of the period. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that that ethical position derives from a religious respect for the otherness of God. Understanding this connection of religion to ethics helps us understand

the “return” of the religious and our own ethical stance. Ethics and religion, too, have been ignored by New Historicism, which tends to see any discussion of such topics as ideological mystification of some kind. By ignoring the religious interest in alterity as its grounds, New Historicism has also left undeveloped any possible engagement with immaterial “abstractions” associated with religion; as a result, concepts of beauty and transcendence, for instance, are deemed ahistorical or simply irrelevant to social texts. Indeed, as I have shown in my dissertation, given the dominant presence of Neo-Platonism and theological aesthetics in early modern literature, this kind of a compartmentalization is reductive.

An under-discussed topic like beauty serves as a useful if provocative segue into the subject of ethics and religion. My dissertation presents beauty as a way to enhance the conversation on alterity in early modern studies. The subject of beauty offers us an aperture to talk also about political theology and ontotheology in the early modern period. As I have shown, positioning the topic of beauty within this critical interest in alterity opens up the possibility for discussions of similar topics sidelined by New Historicism. Furthermore, an attention to beauty also gives an opportunity to examine New Historicism’s denial of its philosophical basis and its limitations as a critical mode.

Admittedly, the scope of my study is limited by the particular critical and theoretical paradigm I have used to uncover and establish a relationship between beauty and ethics in early modern literary works. The paradigm of Levinasian ethics, while most compelling to me theoretically and philosophically, is not the only lens through which the topic of beauty and ethics in Shakespeare and his contemporaries can be examined.

Throughout my research, I have discovered that the definitions and connotations of beauty are varied and often contradictory. Standards of beauty keep changing, as do the practices

and methods of beautifying and beautification. The pursuit of beauty, however, remains constant. Whether denigrated and commodified, or deified and glorified, the striving toward an idea of beauty remains. In the works I have examined, an encounter with beauty propels us, like Omkara, to look beyond the self, to try to grasp to a notion of otherness and to know more than.

Further considerations of the importance of beauty and ethics in Shakespeare and his fellow thinkers, will undoubtedly lead to a clearer and more nuanced understanding of the early modern world and its self-definition and will also help us better understand our own place in our contemporary world.

**APPENDIX A: FULL DIALOGUE FROM *EL COSTUME DELLE DONNE***

- Phi. La prima fia i capegli, s' io non vario,  
e poi la mano, & per la terza pone  
la gamba: a questo so che non contratio. 51
- Di. Queste mi piacen, ch' an vera ragione;  
ma le tre curtì seguie incontenenti  
quai' sono, per veder se le consone. 54
- Phi. La prima, vo' che sappi, sono i denti;  
la seconda l' orecchie; & le mamelle  
che sian la terza vo' che te contenti. 57
- Di. Queste tre cose son ben vere e belle;  
ma qual' son le tre larghe fa ch'io intenda,  
che in me fai grizzar tutta la pelle! 63
- Phi. La prima larga, a cio che si comprenda,  
Egli è la fronte, & la seconda il pettto;  
La terza I fianchi che 'l traverso stenda. 61
- Di. Tu dici il vero in fine, & hai ben letto;  
ma le tre strette come se figura?  
chè 'n questo forsi haro qualche diletto. 66
- Phi. La prima stretta è dove è la ointura;  
l'altra le cosse; la terza fia quella  
dove ogni dolce pose la natura. 69
- Di. Questa terza per nome non si appella,  
ma credo che sia rara.... Ma di' pure,  
qual' son quelle grosse che la fan bella? 72
- Phi. Le tre grosse, pero con sue misure,  
sono le trezze, e poi le braze appresso,  
da poi le cosse, morbide e non dure. 75
- Di. Tu tocchi ben, per Dio, questo processo,  
che le cosse sian grosse e insieme strette;  
ma qual son le suttil? dille adesso! 78
- Phi. Le tre suttile, ben pero corrette,  
son li capigli in prima, e poi le dita,  
la terza i labri, che son cose elette. 81



- Di. Stab ben; tu tochi ben, dio te dia vita!  
hor su, a le tre tonde hora procede:  
fin qui m'hai satisfatto alla pulita. 84
- Phi. El collo in prima, e le braze succeed;  
de dreto poi tra la schena e le cosse  
quelle due grosse pome con che siede. 87
- Di. T'ho inteso, quelle pome non hanno osse:  
le crotte tonde fanno il bel cavallo!  
Tre piccole saper vorria che fosse. 90
- Phi. Io tel diro, perché al ver non callo:  
la bocca, il mento, il pié son le tre cose  
che vogliono esser piccol, s'io non fallo. 93
- Di. E ver per certo, e son ben gratiose  
queste tre parte; hor su, va' drieto bene,  
che le tre bianche non me sia nascose. 96
- Phi. La bianchezza a tre parte si conviene:  
de sopra agli altri i denti, e poi la gola;  
terza é la man che bella mantiene. 99
- Di. Per mia fe tu di' il vero, e questa sola  
gran gratia porge; hor séguita, e dichiara  
qual' son quelle tre rosse, & col dir vola. 102
- Phi. Le gotte prima, che fia cosa chiara;  
le labre appresso, e poi le due cerese  
che punta de la tette se ripara. 105
- Di. Questo son parte molto bene intese;  
ma le tre negre non posso comprendere  
se tu con dirlo non mel fai palese. 108
- Phi. Ancora queste ti voglio distendere:  
i cigli in prima, e gli occhi la sconda;  
la terza tu dovresti da te intendere.... 111

## APPENDIX B: DISCUSSION OF CASTIGLIONE AND KANT

I see Castiglione's conception of love and beauty intersect with Immanuel Kant's discussion of "the ideal of beauty" and his ideas on sensory and contemplative pleasure as laid out in his theorization of beauty in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), a work that has greatly influenced perceptions of beauty, aesthetics, and subjectivity in philosophy and literature. Kant's text not only shows the influence of Platonism (and Neoplatonism) on its ideas of beauty, but his notions of subjectivity and beauty inform themes of otherness, knowledge and sensory perception that I develop in Chapters 2 and 3.

Kant points out that "the highest model, the archetype of taste, is a mere idea, an idea which everyone must generate within himself...Idea properly means a rational concept, and ideal the presentation of an individual being as adequate to an idea" (79-80). Furthermore, Kant contends:

[t]he *ideal* of the beautiful ... must be expected solely in the *human figure*. Now the ideal in this figure consists in the expression of the moral; apart from the moral the object would not be liked universally and moreover positively...these moral ideas must be connected, in the idea of the morally good: goodness of souls, or purity, or fortitude, or serenity, etc. (84)

But this kind of judgment is not entirely a judgment of taste. It needs the "visible expression" of these moral ideas and these can be taken in only through experience, yet the sensual desire should not be mixed with "the liking for its object, while yet making us take great interest in it." This kind of judgment is thus not purely aesthetic either.

Pleasure is fundamental to the aesthetic; it is the basis of the judgment. Kant divides pleasure into three types. The first kind of pleasure is called the agreeable or the pleasant. Here personal gratification of the individual body through sensual stimulation is primary without a contemplative or cognitive aspect. The second kind of pleasure is tied with the notion of the

good. Here the pleasure realized is not in the experience of sensual gratification but is its end; in other words, there is a utilitarian purpose to this kind of pleasure that is the good. What can be called the aesthetic is really the third form of pleasure. Here, too, as in the case of the first pleasure, the body and sensory perceptions are involved but not to the end of gratification of appetite. Significantly, in this kind of pleasure there is not interest in the object—the subject is always disinterested in the judgment of taste. The important thing is the sensual experience of the object. This pleasure of beauty is disinterested because we do not care for the lake qua lake; we are not getting some kind of appetitive or sensual gratification of desire directly because of the lake. Thus, in passing a judgment of taste we disregard the utility of the lake (it provides a natural habitat for species of fish of the verge of extinction) and its relation or significance to another person or to ourselves but the utility, or the purposiveness of the lake becomes important later in the third moment where the imagination constructs a subjective purposiveness without purpose in freeplay with the understanding. Senses are, of course, invariably involved because without senses we would not be able to see the lake and the senses play a role in that the imagination later connects the “manifold of intuition” with the understanding. But once this catalyst is set, the lake itself (and so also, I contend, our senses and body) becomes secondary. In other words, mere sensation is transformed into aesthetic experience that marshals cognitive responses vis-à-vis freeplay. This pleasure thus comes from enjoying the free play of faculties and not by satisfying bodily desire.

## APPENDIX C:

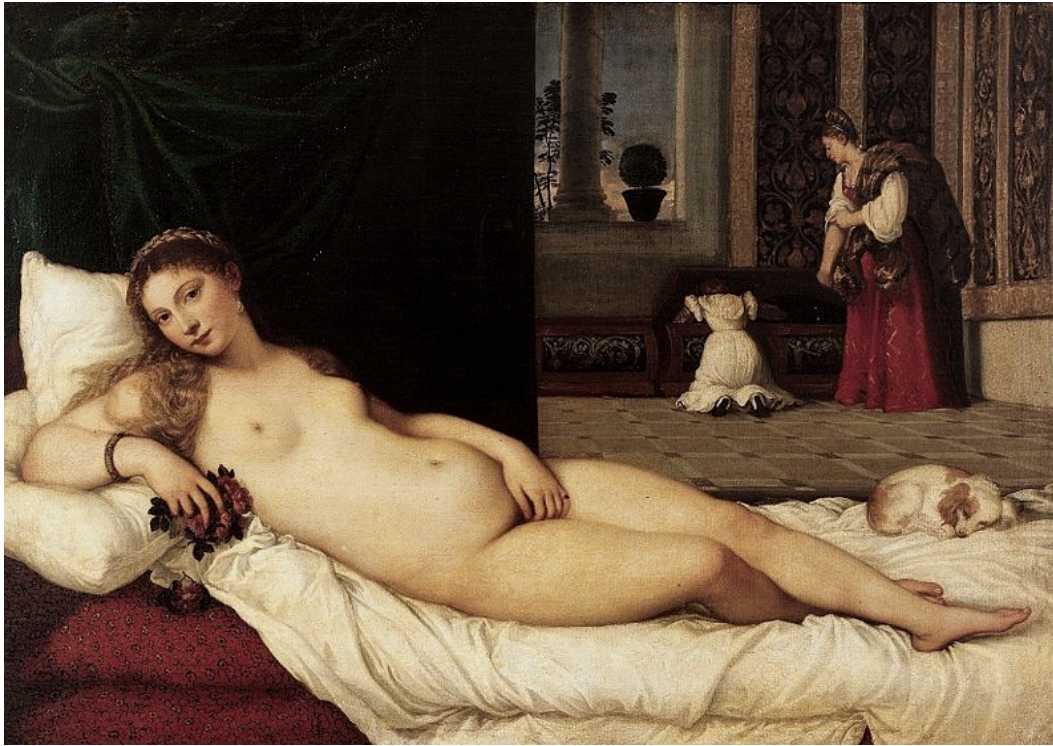


Figure 12: Titian's *Venus Urbino* (c.1538)  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons. <<http://commons.wikimedia.org>>.



Figure 13: Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (c.1510)

Source: Wikimedia Commons. <<http://commons.wikimedia.org>>.

Titian's painting itself was inspired by Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*. The Venus in *Sleeping Venus* is much closer to Fuseli's depiction of Katharine. Fuseli's Katharine has the other arm raised and other leg folded. She is, of course, also clothed, albeit in somewhat diaphanous clothes like the personages. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Katharine is Venus. But, juxtaposing these images renders visible the close correspondence between the eroticism and depiction of beauty of these paintings, and the spiritual ecstasy that Katharine seems to be experiencing in Fuseli's painting and, I argue, in the play.



## APPENDIX D: EMBODIED RESPONSE IN *ALL IS TRUE*

Another instance of an embodied response within the play is represented as a narrated miracle through the collective body of the women at Anne's coronation. The Third Gentleman narrates:

Such joy  
I never saw before. Great-bellied women,  
That had not half a week to go, like rams  
In the old time of war, would shake the press,  
And make 'em reel before 'em. No man living  
Could say 'This is my wife' there; all were woven  
So strangely in one piece.

(4.1. 75-81)

The Third Gentleman is narrating this to both the other gentlemen and to the audience. The audience is to imagine what he is describing and believe it to be true. It is seemingly comic and absurd but serves to reiterate the possibility of openness to what such an event will bring and also the miraculous and momentous nature of the birth yet to come. It is also simultaneously a celebratory moment of regeneration and procreation but also ironic in that the child that will be born will be a female. One of the reasons Henry gives for divorcing Katharine is precisely because she gave birth to children that either died or were female and that was a sign of judgment of a power greater than him. Going by that paradigm, Elizabeth as a female should be comparable to a dead child who cannot possibly be a *real* heir to the throne. At this time there is no assignable cause as to why she should be proclaimed as the future monarch at that moment. And yet it is this that has to happen. Elizabeth dies a virgin queen without an heir. And it is precisely this lack that has led to James's claim to the throne despite Henry's will. The miraculous gesture ironically beckons a moment yet to come, even beyond Elizabeth's birth. The big-bellied women are thus seen as bodily responding and opening up to the impossible possibility of the unknown and unknowable. Within the play this fantastical response is not staged. This moment too thus makes a demand of faith on the audience.

## APPENDIX E: RELIGIOUS VISION, KNOWLEDGE, AND SAINT PAUL

Katharine's vision suggests the complex relationship between seeing and knowing and religious revelation and knowledge; a discussion on the nature of religious experience is relevant here. Anston Bosman uses the example of Mary Magdalene to discuss the power of visual image to evoke devotion; he examines how her tears facilitate seeing Christ's resurrection and uses that to explain how Katharine's vision opens her eyes to "spiritual clairvoyance" (474).<sup>1</sup> While I fully agree with Bosman, I would like to complicate the idea of 'seeing a vision' by pointing to another Biblical instance, one that is more pertinent to my analysis of the play— Saint Paul's experience of resurrected Christ. It would be worthwhile to take a look at the Acts and the Epistles of Saint Paul to explore the relationship between a seeing a vision and the idea of God, and their paradoxical revelation and necessary invisibility that renders them paradoxically inaccessible and yet approachable.

The incident of Paul's conversion from a persecutor to an apostle of Christianity happens on the way to Damascus. A "great light" suddenly envelops him and a then voice speaks to him. A significant aspect of this incident is that while the light is first seen, it also results in temporarily blinding Paul. The blinding does not happen to those who were accompanying him; they are the ones who help him reach Damascus. Paul's experience, much like Katharine's vision, happens in absolute secrecy. Everyone accompanying Paul sees the light (not the vision) and yet their sensory experiences are significantly different. Only Paul hears the voice of Jesus that speaks to him and to which he responds; it remains unheard by others: "And they that were

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<sup>1</sup> Bosman makes a very strong case for "seeing tears" in the play- "the gaze as mediated by tears [that] enables the definitive revelations of truth" (470). He argues that the "truth" can be seen in the "show" not by the eyes, but by eyes that weep. Weeping eyes, he accurately observes, are figured as womanly traits in this play. But these are not associated with weakness, but as proof of truth. Drawing upon Andrew Marvell's "Eyes and Tears," Bosman discusses tears as the subject that see and the object that is seen (471). They are seen both by the characters and the audience.

with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me” (*KJV Acts 22:9*). This is thus both a sensory event and one that is extra-sensory; the interaction between Jesus and Paul is not entirely visual and happens at a level that cannot be explicated exactly. Paul receives his “sight” from Ananias who tells him: “The God of our ancestors designated you to know his will, to *see the Righteous One*, and to *hear* the sound of his voice for you will be his witness before all to what you have seen and heard” (*Acts 22:14-15*, italics mine). This complicates the idea of revelation. It is aural and yet strongly suggests a notion of visuality since Paul sees the Righteous One, i.e. Jesus. The concept of witnessing is crucial in here and appears to lend authenticity to the whole experience. This idea is reinforced when in his defense before Agrippa, Paul recounts the same experience of conversion calling it a “heavenly vision” where Jesus spoke thus: “for this purpose I have *appeared* to you, to appoint you a minister and a *witness* not only to the things which *you have seen*, but also to the things in which I will appear to you “ (*Acts 26:16*, italics mine). This is meant to establish Paul as a witness and lends credence to his experience of the revelation and the vision of Christ.

There is, however, no effort to make the distinction between the actual sighting of Christ and the idea of divine vision as a metaphoric insight into Truth. Considering it is both, this revelation still inhabits a complicated sphere: it is neither wholly aural nor wholly visual; it has to blind in order for Paul to see; and it is possibly an image of the spirit of the resurrected Christ that Paul equates with (having seen) Jesus. E.P. Sanders makes a strong case in pointing out that for Paul “the resurrection was of a spiritual body, not a physical body, not flesh and blood” (29). The very idea of an image of a spirit or the sighting of the invisible seems incomprehensible.

However, it is precisely this inability to experience this event, directly by a human that gives it the profound status it has. It attests to the nature of God that is beyond the parameters of



human senses and thought. Alain Badiou correctly identifies this event (for Paul) as *the* Truth Event even though it is a “fable” (4). It occurs in a non-space and outside time. The experience itself can be defined only in privatives, allegories or oxymorons and constructions like “invisible light”. God is simultaneously revealed and yet hidden, just as light in itself cannot be seen but is that which enables sight. Yet God can be experienced only indirectly, manifested in the spirit of the human-divine. The idea of God will invariably be anthropomorphized in some way in efforts to understand it. Even though it is rarely admitted, the element of this kind of paganism is thus inherent in this conception of God that is accessed through the vision of resurrected Christ.

Paul is to use this vision and idea of the resurrected Christ as the foundation of his Christian theology. His legitimacy and authenticity as an apostle and preacher is to rest on his having seen Christ: “have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor 9:1); God “called *me* by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen (Gal 1:15-16). The paradoxical and fantastical nature of this foundation is the necessary condition of its existence and it is what makes it a success. It is not to be accessible through rationality and reason. Badiou refers to it as “the moment of the real” or St. Paul’s Truth-Event where “the figures in distinction of discourse are terminated” (*Saint Paul* 57) because the space of the real is instated in a happening that is illusory. While Badiou is referring specifically to the division of the subject in reference to the Jews and Greeks, this idea can also be appropriated to arrive at some concept of Truth that is akin to God. By locating Truth in this realm, it is implied that Truth is similarly inaccessible directly and lies beyond human grasp. This Truth, similar to the Christ-event is pure. It is the universal and it is a declaration; Badiou points out Paul’s procedure: “if there has been an event” and “truth consists of declaring it and then being faithful to this declaration” (14). But

the moment Truth is seized, it will cease to be Truth much in the same way that the moment we try to visualize God, God ceases to exist.

Trying to avoid falling into the nihilism that Badiou reads in Nietzsche, the problem that arises for us is that if the Truth is invisible and cannot be brought into the world without becoming untruth, then what is our notion of ethics based on? It cannot be based on simply the law as derived from the politico-legal system because certain ethics, as in the case of Henry's prick of conscience, lie outside its purview. Pauline truth rises above human rationality to the realm of the universal precisely to avoid and efface such interrogations that almost get subsumed in its discourse. According to Badiou's reading of Paul, "a truth is a concentrated and serious procedure, which must never enter into competition with established opinions" (15). The implication is serious: we cannot get to it. In this very incapacitation, Truth and God exist. These concepts seem to exist beyond the scope of philosophy and the discourse of wisdom.

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**ABSTRACT****ON BEAUTY AND ETHICS IN SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES**

by

**Renuka Gusain****August 2013****Advisor:** Dr. Ken Jackson**Major:** English**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

Early modern literature abounds in references to beauty. However, in the past few decades, discussions of beauty have been sidelined in part due to the influence of approaches such as cultural materialism and new historicism; as a result, beauty often gets viewed as some kind of ideological mist that distracts us from ethical issues. By taking beauty as seriously as early modern thinkers did, my research underscores the importance of beauty in early modern literary criticism and reassesses the critical relationship between beauty and ethics. My study posits Shakespeare as philosopher of beauty and reinterprets several literary works, thereby challenging traditionally accepted criticism on these works.

This dissertation begins by addressing the centrality of the topic of beauty in humanist discourses and literary works of the early modern period and argues that beauty was a critical way through which early modern culture defined itself. Beauty instigates an inquiry into the nature of being human and the self and its relationship with the other—that, as I have shown, is the matter of ethics. Chapter 2 examines the nature of the experience of beauty and concludes and explains how an encounter with beauty is necessarily ethical and places a call on us to respond. Here, I also introduce the Levinasian-Derridean concept of ethics and Otherness, and

discuss beauty in relation to notions selfhood. Chapter 3 explores the dynamics of a response to beauty in various literary works and studies the correlation between Neoplatonism, Protestant grace, and the Levinasian “ethical”. I elucidate the potential for ethical violence inherent in responses to beauty and show that these responses to beauty are fraught with difficulties and necessarily involve a consideration of the self’s relation to the other. The final chapter continues this examination of the nature of beauty and its connection to selfhood by taking a look at the other or the ostensible opposite of beauty. My analysis of *Othello* and *Omkara* returns to the opening chapter in its assertion that for early modern thinkers, beauty is being. I explore the interchangeable nature of beauty and its other, the fluidness of selfhood, and the pursuit of the elusive otherness that beauty instigates. My examination of a contemporary Hindi cinematic adaptation of a Shakespearean play not only illuminates traditional critical concerns of the play anew but also shows how issues relevant to the early modern European world of the play are relevant and pressing in a postcolonial, contemporary world. The subject of beauty and ethics traverses time and space: it is critical and indispensable to a better understanding of our selfhood, our relationships, and the limitations and potential of our knowledge.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

**Renuka Gusain**

After graduating top in my class at high-school in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., I went to my passport country, India, to pursue university education. I earned my BA in English (Honours), MA in English (Gold Medalist), and MPhil in English at Delhi University. My plan had always been to follow in my father's footsteps, join the Foreign Service, and become a diplomat who would change the world for the better. My specialization in Literature was part of that plan, so that I would have the necessary discipline expertise to ace the brutal civil services exams that only a fraction of a percent qualify for every year. That did not happen because as I was wrapping up my MA, I cleared the National Eligibility Test (for lectureship) administered by the University Grants Commission in India in my very first attempt. I had taken the exam on a whim, for no particular reason. At the same time, I had applied to the MPhil program because that would look good on my credentials when I was a diplomat. I was one of less than a dozen students in the country who cleared the exam and the interview and got accepted.

I was in a prestigious MPhil program and now that I had my lectureship certificate, I could teach at any Indian university and make some money while preparing for the civil services exams. I was an impatient 22 year old the first day I taught and I had no idea what was in store for me. The combination of learning how to teach literature and really having to push myself intellectually in my MPhil classes annoyed me to no end. It also challenged me. My students and teachers thought I was rather good and liked me, but I felt like a fraud, like I would never truly be prepared. And that is really when I decided to pursue a career in academics. For me, being a scholar and a teacher meant acknowledging, much to my chagrin, that I would never ever know everything about everything, I would always be ignorant of many things, and I would constantly be learning, always challenging and questioning what I already knew.

My coming to the US and joining the WSU PhD program was serendipitous, a combination of my parents being posted to Chicago, a boy I really liked (now, my husband) who matched at a medical residency program in Michigan, and the Detroit city bus running straight from my house to the English Department. I had the magnificent fortune of taking courses with Ken Jackson and James Knapp at the same time: I became an early modernist and decided to stay at WSU and in the US. This PhD is one of the most challenging and fulfilling projects I have ever undertaken. I have had opportunities to share and discuss my work with brilliant scholars at national conferences and have published two articles, one in a peer-reviewed journal and the other in an international anthology. I have already started work on and presented parts of my second project on North Indian devotional poetry. More than anything else, this PhD has taught me humility, discipline, the value of collaboration, and a need to engage truly and deeply with a subject matter.

While I have since tempered my impatience ever so slightly, some old habits die hard and I still want to change the world for the better. Only now, I hope to do it as an educator, even as I myself remain a lifelong learner.