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Fake News and News Anxiety in Early Modern England

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FAKE NEWS AND NEWS ANXIETY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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INTRODUCTION

STAGING UNCERTAIN NEWS

The Folger Library's copy of a news pamphlet titled *A true Relation of a barbarous and most cruell Murther, [com]mitted by one Enoch ap Evan. who cut off his owne naturall Mothers Head, and his Brothers* (1633) includes the following manuscript annotations on the verso of its title page: "It is upon good groundes suspected that this peice was penned rather attonding to the authors fancy, then the truth of the matri: e fatri: cides [the matri- et fatricide's] behaviour in the prison," to which a different contemporary hand has added "though the thing in it selfe was too abominable." The pamphlet account includes a poem ascribed to Enoch ap Evan himself. This confessional poem blames "Non-Conformists" for inspiring his violent murders:

> You Non-Conformists, unto you I call,
> Take heed in Pulpits how you raile and baule;
> Draw not poore Lay-men quite beyond true sense,
> Which caused me to doe this foule offense.
> Because my Mother and my brother both,
> To stand at the Communion were loath,
> But kneel'd with reverence at that holy Act
> I through your treachery did this wicked fact. (B1)

At the conclusion of this poem, the anonymous pamphlet writer comments, "Thus you heare the poore wretched mans repentance; The hainousnesse of the fact, and his sorry for the same; You here moreover how lamentably hee complayneth how visiously hee hath bin misled by these reproaching *Sectists*, who as well in their doctrine publikely, as in their perswasions privately, oppose our Ecclesiasticall Jurisdiction" (B2). The first marginalia writer, however, deemed this confessional-poem-cum-non-conformist-polemic as the murderer's "behaviour in prison" that

likely "was penned rather attonding to the [pamphlet] authors fancy, then the truth," and the second marginalia writer seemed to have agreed. The "abominable" crime was real; the confessional poem was not.

Printed confessions of the condemned, as these two annotators recognized, could be outright inventions—in other words, fake news. The clergyman Henry Goodcole complained in one of his own news pamphlets that "most base and false Ballets…were sung at the time of our returning from the *Witches* execution" (A3v). One wonders if such "false Ballets" magically included penitent remarks from the scaffold, for the "ballad-monger," as the satirist Richard Braithwait joked, "ha's a singular gift of *imagination*, for hee can descant on a mans *execution* long before his confession" (B3/9). The "fabulous relations" of the "corranto-coiner" were no better: "You shall many times finde in his Gazetta's, Pasquils, & Corranto's miserable distractions; here a City taken by force, long before it bee besieged; there a Countrey laid waste before ever the enemie entered" (Braithwait B9/21).

Shakespeare's News

This work is the first to study William Shakespeare's anxious preoccupation with news, especially with what we today call *fake news*. As chapter one details, early modern contemporaries both lament and laugh over the prevalence of what they termed *false news, false report,* and *false intelligence*: news that was not merely incorrect, but, in their parlance, *forged, coined, cogged, feigned, counterfeited, made,* and *invented*. By the time Shakespeare satirized newsprint in *The Winter's Tale* (c.1610), early modern England faced a news crisis. The amount of newsprint swelled in the 1590s, and contemporaries complained that news was overabundant, confusing, trifling, and distracting. More seriously, such news was unreliable—unreliable because even well-intentioned, good-faith actors in the nascent news industry found it difficult to

produce reports that were both timely and verified, and unreliable because false reports proliferated. Newswriters invented false reports to sell copy, governments invented false reports to gain a political or militaristic advantage, and companies invented false reports to game a global economy.

Broadly speaking, this work investigates how and to what ends news transmission is dramatized on the early modern English stage, and in Shakespeare's plays particularly. This study focuses more narrowly, however, on the negative elements of these news dramatizations. The dramatic portrayal of *news anxieties*, a term I define in the following chapter, thus forms the principle subject of this work. Shakespeare carefully stages news *and* the anxieties news incites.

As a cursory search of the Open Source Shakespeare Concordance shows, news is a mainstay of Shakespeare's work. The word *news* occurs 317 times across 38 works; *report*, 150 times across 37 works; *tidings*, 55 times across 23 works. This is to say nothing of Shakespeare's use of other newsy terms, such as *messenger*, *post*, *intelligence*, *process*, etc. The Shakespearean stage is noisy with news, crowded with messengers and missives. Shakespeare stages news to provide exposition, to narrate events that he prefers not to stage, and to push along his plots. Frequently then, the staging of news is showy: a nameless Messenger, a ghost, a principle character strides out on stage and delivers a report. But news is a frequent background hum as well, for characters are constantly judging and being judged on the basis of prior reports. Consider for example the layers of verbal transmission of which report plays the key role in the following passage from *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth reads tidings from her husband of his encounter with the prophetic weird sisters, whose pronouncements were confirmed as "the perfect'st report" by "missives from the king":

> Lady Macbeth [*reading*]: "They met me in the day of success, and I have learned by the perfect'st report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the king, who all-hailed me 'Thane of Cawdor,' by which title, before, these weird sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time, with 'Hail, king that shalt be!' This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell." (1.5.12)

Everything becomes deeply mediated by report in the openings scenes of this great play. Macbeth is first introduced through the reports of Ross and the wounded Captain. The weird sisters give their "strange intelligence" directly to Macbeth and Banquo (1.3.74). Ross and Angus, whom Macbeth calls "missives" in his letter, report to Macbeth that glowing reports to the king have resulted in his new title as Thane of Cawdor: "The King hath happily received, Macbeth, / The news of thy success…As thick as hail / Came post with post, and every one did bear / Thy praises in his kingdom's great defense, / And poured them down before him" (1.3.87-98). So, numerous reports to the king result in a report from the king that seemingly confirms the witches' report. All of this Macbeth "thought good to deliver" in a report to his wife. Shakespeare thus constructs the beginning of this play on a substrate of intertwined reports.

Macbeth's letter "transport[s]" Lady Macbeth into a dark reverie (1.5.54):

> Lady Macbeth: Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
> What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way […]
> Hie thee hither,
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
> And chastise with the valour of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round,
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crown'd withal.
> *Enter* [*a Servant*]
> What is your tidings?

> Servant: The King comes here tonight.
> Lady Macbeth: Thou'rt mad to say it.
> Is not thy master with him, who, were't so,
> Would have informed for preparation?
> Servant: So please you, it is true. Our thane is coming,
> One of my fellows had the speed of him,
> Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more
> Than would make up his message.
> Lady Macbeth: Give him tending;
> He brings great news. (1.5.13-36)

Her reverie on Macbeth's news is interrupted by the servant's news that King Duncan is on his way. She doubts this report, for other reports say that Macbeth is with the king, and her husband, she reasons, would have informed her of the king's approach in his letter. The servant's report is itself mediated: the servant reports that another servant reports that the king is on his way, and that this fast-riding servant was an eyewitness of the king's train.

There may be a whiff of witchcraft in Lady Macbeth's desire to "pour" her spirits into her husband's ear, but the air itself is uncanny in this play: full of the "spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts" and haunted by the weird sisters—who have "made themselves air"; "Into the air…Melted as breath into the wind"—and their "strange intelligence" of future things (1.5.38-39; 1.5.4; 1.3.78-80, 74). The weird sisters call themselves "Posters of the sea and land" before they dissolve into the air (1.3.31). The term *posters* is often glossed as *swift travelers* (posters travel with post-haste) but the word could also signify those who delivered post, that is, *messengers*.[1] The evaporation of these posters is a fitting emblem, for news is almost always in

[1] The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* cites an example (c. 1614) from the diary of James Melville: "The noble poster of newis athort the world." See the entry for *poster n.1.2*.

the air in Shakespeare's plays, even when no letters or messengers take up the stage.[2] News and report texture Shakespeare's theatrical world.

All the Bad News That's Fit to Stage

The dramatic possibilities of swirling rumors, multiple messengers, diverging accounts, and rapid-fire, increasingly dire reports were clearly attractive to Shakespeare, for he repeatedly stages such scenarios. He shows, that is, a keen interest in dramatizing anxious news scenarios. But how and to what ends are scenes of news transmission dramatized? Clearly, news transmission can serve many purposes in drama—e.g. provide exposition for the audience, alter the plot, inform a character of something necessary for the plot to proceed, etc. What is surprising in Shakespearean drama, however, is how often he stages news not to clarify but to confuse. Shakespeare employs reports to incite confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety—for both his characters and his audience—as much as he uses them to clarify plot points. He stages in his plays the sense of (mis)information overload that Robert Burton would memorably describe in his *Anatomy*: "I hear new news every day…A vast confusion…daily brought to our ears" (18).

Formally, Shakespeare likes his news delivery to be piecemeal and piled on. He frequently divides information among multiple messengers. These messengers then either heap on the agony with consistently dire news or contradict one another. This piecemeal delivery of news serves both to dramatize the exposition—a train of messengers who disagree or bear escalatingly bad news is inherently more interesting than one long expository speech—and to highlight the chaos, abundance, and uncertainty of news intelligence. We see the confusion caused by an abundance of news at the start of *2 Henry IV*. Lord Bardolph brings "certain news"

[2] While contemplating that the murder of the virtuous Duncan will be trumpeted far and wide, Macbeth refers to the news-dispersing winds as "the sightless couriers of the air" (1.7.23). News was truly in the air.

of military victory; Travers, news of defeat (1.1.12). The bad news is confirmed by a third messenger: Morton, who was himself an eyewitness of the defeat. The supremely confident Lord Bardolph has been duped by a rumor or false report. *Othello* provides another example of conflicting reports. The Venetian council receives multiple newsletters, prompting complaints:

> Duke: There is no composition in these news
> That gives them credit.
> First Senator: Indeed, they are disproportioned. (1.3.1-3)

The saving grace of these reports is that they agree on "the main article": the Ottoman fleet makes for Cypress (1.3.11). A sailor then enters the scene and declares that "the Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes" (1.3.1-14). This, the Venetian council decides, must be a false report. In *Coriolanus* the same bad news is delivered in quick succession by multiple messengers. An Aedile reports that a "slave…Reports the Volsces, with two several powers, / Are entered in the Roman territories" (4.6.40-42). "Go see this rumourer whipped," replies an incredulous Brutus, but the slave's report is soon "seconded, and more" by a Messenger who confirms that "many mouths" report that Coriolanus has joined with Aufidius. Cominius then enters as a third, decisive messenger, an apparent eyewitness to the invasion. In the opening scene of *1 Henry VI*, a messenger brings the dead king's mourners "Sad tidings," only for a second messenger to bring "letters, full of mischance," who is himself topped by a third messenger who must "add to [their] laments" (1.1.57, 1.1.89, 1.1.103). As Alan Stewart has recently written, "In dividing the news between messengers [in *1 Henry VI*] Shakespeare introduces a flexible motif that will become a staple feature of his history plays (and also find a place in his comedies and tragedies)—a motif, moreover, that can evoke not only a changing situation but also confusion, contradiction, and tension" (150). Shakespeare revels in the ability

of news—particularly piecemeal, inconsistent news—to confound rather than clarify. News could provide revelatory relief, but it could also add tension to a plot.

In *The Common Liar*, Janet Adelman notes the profusion and unreliability of news and messengers in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, arguing that the unrelenting stream of messengers in the play is "symptomatic" of a "breakdown in direct and reliable information" (34). The audience is thus "continually bombarded with messengers of one kind or another, not so much to convey information as to convey the sense that all information is unreliable, that it is message or rumor, not fact" (Adelman 34-35). More recently, Stephen Wittek argues that "a dramatic situation…repeatedly becomes manifest in Shakespeare's plays when serious thinking about the news occurs: an anxious, bewildered enquirer struggles to find meaning in a hazy profusion of information" (33). Such scenarios are especially noticeable in Shakespeare's work, but other early modern playwrights also exploit the dramatic possibilities of besetting characters with "a hazy profusion of information." At the climactic end of Middleton's comedy *The Roaring Girl*, for example, the Servant reports that Moll and Young Wengrave have absconded to the Sluice; a moment later, Trapdoor reports with equal confidence that the pair is "landed now at the Tower" (11.14). As Greenwit comments, no one can help the desperate Sir Alexander, who wishes to prevent the elopement, when "All assistance is as frail…Full as uncertain":

> Where's the place that holds 'em?
> One brings us water-news; then comes another
> With a full-charged mouth, like a culverin's voice,
> And he reports the Tower: whose sounds are truest? (11.42-46)

Sir Guy cuts the Gordian knot by declaring "Both news are false" (11.49). By the end of the play, a chastened Sir Alexander, having revised his judgment of Moll, learns to be more suspicious of the interconnected dangers of rumor, news, and public opinion:

> I'll nevermore
> Condemn by common voice, for that's the whore
> That deceives man's opinion, mocks his trust,
> Cozens his love, and makes his heart unjust… (11.247-250)

Middleton stages the comic ruse of a frantic man caught between two competing, equally false, accounts. Early modern playwrights learned to cudgel their characters with news reports, for it produced a chaotic energy akin to the bear-pits: the drama of one beset by many.

Defining Fake News

"Shakespeare's plots frequently pivot upon news, revealed by messenger or letter," as the news historian Joad Raymond has noted ("Introduction" 14). In *The Merchant of Venice*, "the news on the Rialto" provides one such pivot: the reported sinking of Antonio's ships leads to his loan default. Another report, the "certain" news that three of his ships "Are richly come to harbor suddenly" completes the happiness of Antonio's second reversal of fortune (5.1.276). Is the untrue report of his ships' destruction *fake* news?[3] Not in the strict sense, unless we believe it was an invented rumor (by Shylock?) instead of a merely inaccurate report. Rather than being fake news, the initial report, "unchecked" (i.e. uncorrected by additional reports) though it was, is an indication of how difficult news reporting in the early modern age of global commerce proved (3.1.2). Antonio sent his ships to Tripoli, Mexico, England, Lisbon, Barbary, and India. In this way he spread his financial risk but he also increased the difficulty of accurate information about all of his ventures. By fixating on the word *hazard*, a word that is repeated throughout the play, *The Merchant of Venice* connects merchant-financial risk to the hazards of

[3] There are in fact three explicit reports of lost ships: Salerio's report of one ship lost near England (3.1.1-15); Tubal's report of one ship lost coming back from Triploli (3.1.85); and Antonio's letter to Bassanio that "my ships have all miscarried" (3.2.314).

accurate news reporting.[4] Antonio is nearly undone by inaccurate or imperfect news, not fake news.[5] But his financial credit—and thus, his life—is intimately connected to the credit of news reports.

In this work I will reserve the incendiary term *fake news* for news reporting (usually of a sensational nature) that is either deliberately false or demonstrably unconcerned with the truth. Fake news then is news that lies, wherein to lie is to *intentionally* deviate from the truth: a high bar.[6] Rumor, misinformation, and inaccurate reports are not then, necessarily, fake news in this strict sense, just as not every falsehood is a lie. As noted above, early modern contemporaries do not speak of *fake news*; they complain of *false news*, and often in the strict sense discussed here. That is, they complain not just of inaccurate news but of invented reports: news created to deceive.

Shakespeare writes of "false reports," in both literal and figurative senses. Rumour brags of "Stuffing the ears of men with false reports" (*2 Henry IV* 1.1.8). Hubert promises Arthur that "I'll fill these doggèd spies with false reports" to protect him from his murderous uncle (*King John* 4.1.128). Admitting that he severely underestimated the shabbily dressed Coriolanus (*Enter Coriolanus in mean apparel, disguised and muffled*, as the stage direction goes), a servant realizes that the visitor's "clothes made a false report of him" (*Coriolanus* 4.5.150). *Othello* contains a notable example of a false military report, apparently invented and bruited by the

[4] The word *hazard* occurs eleven times across seven speeches, far more than in any other Shakespearean work.

[5] Given that Antonio had at least one ship returning from six locations, and that only "three…argosies," according to Bellario's letter, return to Venice by the end of the play, it would seem that he has truly lost at least three ships (5.1.275). The news on the Rialto of his bad luck was only half-wrong then.

[6] I write this, admittedly, at a time when the President of the United States regularly uses the term *fake news* to characterize news reporting he finds unfavorable.

Ottoman Turks to disguise the true target of their naval attack.[7] A Venetian senator deems the report a "pageant / To keep us in false gaze" (1.3.19-20). Many other plays include reports invented to deceive. Helen spreads the report of her death in *All's Well*. Giacomo's false report of Imogen to Posthumus nearly results in her death in *Cymbeline*. Pisanio responds to this false report by inventing one of his own: he writes to Posthumus that "Imogen was slain" (4.3.37). In Shakespeare's most famous tragedy, all of Denmark is deceived by an invented report:

> Ghost: 'Tis given out that, sleeping in mine orchard,
> A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
> Is by a forgèd process [false account] of my death
> Rankly abused. (1.5.35-38)

Here, literal poison to the ear leads to aural poisoning of a metaphorical nature. The ear of Denmark is abused; King Hamlet's ears are poisoned with Claudius' "leperous distilment"; Hamlet requests that a self-deprecatory Horatio not "do mine ear that violence / To make it truster of your own report / Against yourself. (1.2.170-73). Slander, poison, and false reports: all three did violence to the ears. Shakespeare conflates false reports with poison on more than one occasion. Reading Posthumus' letter instructing him to kill Imogen, Pisanio bemoans:

> What monster's her accuser? Leonatus,
> O master, what a strange infection
> Is fall'n into thy ear! What false Italian,
> As poisonous tongued as handed, hath prevailed
> On thy too ready hearing? (Cymbeline 3.2.1-5)

Fake news was dangerous, on and off the stage.

[7] It is ultimately unclear whether the report was invented by the Turks themselves or whether their naval maneuver—sailing toward Rhodes to join with another Ottoman fleet before making for Cypress—tricked others into making the false report for them.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one of this work surveys negative early modern characterizations of news, including fake news. The varieties of news anxiety—e.g. epistemic, political, scholarly, existential—are defined and illustrated. The chapter ends with a brief case study of *True and wonderfull* (1614), a news pamphlet with an unusually rich reception history. This pamphlet, and the dragon it describes, became seventeenth-century emblems of fake news.

Chapter two solves a crux in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* involving a headless bear by examining a sensational news pamphlet titled *A true and most Dreadfull discourse* (1584). The extraordinary print history of this pamphlet and the interpretive difficulties surrounding the headless bear image are explored at length.

Chapter three gives a detailed reading of the news satire in 4.4 of *The Winter's Tale*. I argue that the implicit fraudulence of newsprint—including its guarantors of truthfulness, e.g. eyewitness names and affidavits—in this scene intensifies the epistemic crisis that haunts the entire play, and, indeed, much of Shakespeare's work.

Chapter four details the political and existential news anxieties present in Shakespeare's final tragedy: *Coriolanus*. I argue that these news anxieties explain an otherwise intractable feature of Coriolanus: his resistance to language, especially the language of report.

CHAPTER ONE

NEWS ANXIETY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

> Now-adayes, that is not the trueth which is true, but that which is perswaded to others. As we call mony not onely that which is true and good, but also the false; so it be currant.
>
> –Michel de Montaigne, "Of Giving the Lie," translated by John Florio (LL1-LL1v)

> Nay, what can we know? We hear with other men's ears; we see with other men's eyes…All our intelligence is idle and most of our intelligencers knaves; and, by your leave, ourselves thought little better, if not arrant fools, for believing 'em.
>
> –Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair* (2.1.28-38)

People in early modern England craved news. After greeting one another, *What news?* was the first question from their lips. As Thomas Lushington teased his congregation in an Easter Monday sermon preached in 1624, the question "What news?" was *de rigueur*. "What's the best News abroad? So we must begin: 'Tis the Garb (*les novelles*) the grand Salute, and common Preface to all our Talk" (A3). In a sermon in 1592, Henry Smith admitted that news from the pulpit attracted souls: "One [type of sermon-goer] is like an *Athenian*, and he hearkneth after newes: if the Preacher say any thing of our Armies beyond sea, or counsell at home, or matters at Court, that is his lure" (qtd. in Raymond, *Pamphlets* 146). "If we come from the Court, what Newes; if we come from the Countrie, what newes: So from whencesover wee come or goe, what Newes," as one author griped in 1607 (qtd. in Randall, *Credibility* 38). Robert Burton bemoaned that his countrymen's "sole discourse is dogs, hawks, horses, and what news?" (i.320). When Monsieur Le Beau arrives in *As You Like It* "with his mouth full of news," Rosalind warns Celia, "we [shall] be news-crammed" (1.2.77-89). This however will make them "the more marketable," as Celia notes, with a metaphor working on two levels: the ladies will be

more vendible as fattened animals and more socially attractive as ladies full of the latest news. England gorged on news.

But news, especially the recent phenomenon of commercially printed news, provoked anxiety as well as delight. Between the surge of printed news, professional newsletters, private letters, and the constant ebb and flow of oral news, the news was overwhelming. There was too much news and little of it credible. Multiple reports on the same event were often contradictory. The dangers of rumor and *fama* (fame, rumor, report, reputation) had long been commonplace concerns, and the rise of commercial newsprint sharpened the edges of these cultural anxieties.

News and the thirst for it were sometimes pictured as maladies. "There is no humour in my countrymen, which I am more inclined to wonder at, than their general thirst after news," Joseph Addison wrote in *The Spectator* in 1712, but the observation had been made for at least a century (193). "You cannot imagine to what a disease the itch of news is grown," John Cooper lamented in 1667 (qtd. in Atherton 39). In John Earle's 1628 portrayal of St. Paul's Walk and its habitués, the center for news in England was "the eares Brothell and satisfies their lust, and ytch" (I12v). Before the advent of the newspaper and periodical in England, Ben Jonson declared that a "folly" of his age was its "hunger and thirst after published pamphlets of news, set out every Sunday but made all at home, and no syllable of truth in them." For Jonson, "there cannot be a greater disease, or a fouler scorn put upon the times" than its itch for printed news (*Staple*, To the Readers, 11-14). The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the first use of "news-thirsting" in 1600 and "news-greedy" in 1605. "That newes-loving beast the multitude," writes Dekker in 1603.

The sentiment of there being both excessive news and an excessive greed for it—a danger of being "news-crammed"—is well expressed on the early modern stage as well. In Richard

Brome's *The Antipodes* (pub. 1640), Peregrine is made sick by the surfeit of news he consumes. What Peregrine reads is not dry factual reporting but exotic wonder news. He is stuffed with too much news, and likely false news at that. A doctor is called in to lance his ulcerous mass of fanciful delusions:

> Barbara: Yes. Pray, Doctor Hughball
> Play the man-midwife and deliver him
> Of his huge tympany [tumor] of news[1]—of monsters,
> Pygmies and giants, apes and elephants,
> Griffins and crocodiles, men upon women [i.e. hermaphrodites],
> And women upon men, the strangest doings—
> As far beyond all Christendom as 'tis to't. (1.1.176-182)

Like an English Don Quixote, Peregrine has a head full of exotic wonders, but the sources of these marvels include not just the older travel narratives of writers like Mandeville but the more recent flood of news pamphlets. The term *tympany* refers to a swelling, including sometimes pregnancy, and is a figurative extension of the medical condition *tympanites*: a distention of the abdomen by gas. Peregrine is full of the hot air of fake news.[2]

But never mind far-flung news, even domestic news proved overwhelming. In response to the conventional *What news?* Barbara can only give voice to her own confusion.

> Blaze: Now, Bab, what news?
> Barbara: There's too much news within
> For any homebred, Christian understanding. (1.1.173-4)

The news had grown unwieldy. This too was not a new complaint: "We have every daye severall newes, and sometyme contraryes, and yet all put out as true," as Henry Radeclyffe wrote in 1569

[1] Anthony Parr conjectures that Brome is recalling a conceit of Jonson's in *The Staple of News*: "there are a set of gamesters within in travail of a thing called a play, and would fain be delivered of it; and they have entreated me to be their man-midwife" (Induction 55-58; Parr *Staple* 67). The allusion is suggestive given the similarities between news narratives and plays.

[2] Playing off of the sexual "itch" or "lust" for news, Shakespeare's Cleopatra conflates the receipt of news with impregnation. Seeing a messenger, she exclaims, "Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears, / That long time have been barren" (*Anthony and Cleopatra* 2.5.24-25).

(qtd. in Shaaber 241). But commercially printed news turned a stream of (mis)information into a deluge. The pamphlet translator of the capacious *Newes from France* (1616), which included three reports, compared the fusillade of printed ill tidings coming out of France to the trials of Job:

> Many small Treatise and Pamphlets (that were daily thronged as it were to the Presse) doe give hereof sufficient testimonie: so that wee might in a manner say (as it is in the first chapter of Job often repeated) *Whiles hee was yet speaking, another came, and said,* etc. While one booke of bad newes was yet a-printing, another came and brought us worse newes. (AA2)

Job suffered a battery of tragic oral reports; the early modern man, a barrage of news pamphlets.

Defining News Anxiety

The news took many forms in early modern England: ubiquitous word-of-mouth gossip and tidings, officially sanctioned ritual news (e.g. bell-ringing to announce a military victory), royal proclamations, manuscript news, printed news, sermons, and even play performances. The dangers of rumor, slander, and careless reports (perilous to both soul and state) had long been considered by kings, queens, preachers, and poets.[3] News anxiety, in a loose sense, was not new. When I refer to *news anxiety* in this study, however, I have in mind more specifically the unease and concerns that cheap newsprint stoked. Such cheap newsprint in our period includes broadsides, ballads, pamphlets, and corantos. By 1600, print had existed for one-hundred and fifty years in Europe. Ephemera, in the form of indulgences and, later, polemical pamphlets, had been produced since the birth of European print. But the 1580s saw a surge in the publication of

[3] Skelton, for instance, has a poem "Against Venemous Tongues Empoysoned with Slaunder and False Detractions" that addresses the dangers of false tidings in addition to the perils of calumny: "For men be now tratlers and tellers of tales, / What tidings at Totman, what newis in wales? / What shippis are sailing to Scalis malis / And all is not worth a couple of nut shalis / But lering and lurking here and there like spies. / The devil tere their tunges & pike out their ies" (Aa2v).

cheap newsprint, in Europe generally, and in England particularly, partly in response to the wars in France.[4] News anxiety was old, but *newsprint anxiety* is a late-Elizabethan phenomenon.

What I am terming *newsprint anxiety*, or print-inspired news anxiety, has several faces. This anxiety is an extension of the low view of ephemera combined with a growing nervousness about the glut of printed works. There were too many books, contemporaries groused—especially false, worthless, distracting books like pamphlets—and quality and good sense were being diluted by the flood of cheap print. Dilution through vulgarization is one issue then. A related concern is the fear that cheap newsprint encroached on the intellectual domain of others (statesmen, artists, theologians, etc.) and both meddled—and encouraged meddling—in matters of church and state that were best left strictly to the proper authorities. Printed news was vulgar and often presumptuous. As has already been mentioned, sheer quantity was an issue. There was too much news to keep up with. To compound the problem, this growing swell of literature contained much that was untrustworthy. For contemporaries, there was too much news and too little truth, and they feared that threshing the latter from the former would prove an onerous, perhaps impossible, task. Contemporaries evince considerable nerviness—verging on cynicism—concerning the reliability of commercial news.

But information overload, news fatigue, reservations about the cultural role of printed news, and an abiding mistrust of the credibility of news are not only cultural anxieties of the time: they are themes of the early modern English stage. My work aims to reinscribe and analyze these anxieties within the drama of the period, particularly the plays of Shakespeare.

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[4] See Raymond, *Pamphlets* 11-12 and 99-100; Voss 7-33; Clark 86; F. J. Levy 20; Parmelee, ch. 2; Stewart 152-53; and Petteegree *Book* 339-41. Raymond has argued that "Prior to the 1580s printed news was scarce, and, with the exception of ballads offering superficial coverage of recent affairs, was exclusively for the elite." And: "From the 1580s pamphlets were a regular feature of booksellers' stalls, and an increasingly important element in the economy of the book trade" (99, 12). For print figures for broadside ballads, see Watt.

That the stage should enact anxieties about printed news is unsurprising. The power of oral and manuscript news was already a preoccupation of the English stage well before the rise of corantos and newsbooks and newspapers. (Shakespeare, for example, shows a keen interest in the epistemic dangers of reports of all kinds.) The growing production of printed news, as well as professional newsletters, no doubt heightened the concern of a people already concerned with the power and credibility of rumor and report. Additionally, professional theater and commercial news came of age together in England. Both performed similar functions: to delight and instruct. But as far as the dramatists were concerned, printed news was not only a source of plot material; it was a competitor. Stage, pulpit, and newsprint all served a public function.[5] All three disseminated news and topical commentary, sometimes with dangerous consequences. Raymond has argued that the "satire of the corantos was pervasive because the corantos were themselves so invasive of the territories occupied by other literary forms," namely sermons and plays (*Pamphlets* 138). Writers and dramatists practically had a professional obligation to belittle the news hacks—upstart crows beautified with their own feathers of topical entertainment and moral admonishment. But as I discuss below, there were other reasons to scorn the rising tide of newsprint.

The Credibility Complaint

Early modern newsprint (whether ballad, pamphlet, coranto, or newsbook) accumulated a formidable amount of scorn. "Judging by literary sources," writes Ian Atherton, one of the "strongest and quickest reactions" to the growth of the news business "was ridicule. The news writer, the news reader, and the newsletter became stock targets of wits and dramatists in the

[5] On this shared public role, see Pettegree, *News* 135-38; Raymond, *Pamphlets* 144-49; Walsham 32-64; Wittek 1-26.

early seventeenth century" (43). Atherton refers to the professional manuscript newsletter; even more derided was printed news. There is a pattern to this derision, for a few key criticisms were voiced over and over. It is these repeated jibes that give us our best sense of how Shakespeare's contemporaries defined the shortcomings of the nascent trade in newsprint.

What then did contemporaries decry? First and most prominently, contemporaries attacked the honesty of newsprint.[6] Often, these were not accusations of subtle bias or discrete factual inaccuracies so much as wholesale invention—the idea that newsprint was the fakest of fake news. Well-intentioned newsprint got things wrong; other printed accounts simply lied. Contemporaries mocked printed news because such news, like rumor, was unreliable.

Today we speak of "fake news." In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they spoke of "false news," "false reports," and "false intelligence." *Not a syllable of truth in them*, Jonson said of news pamphlets—but how exactly did the news lie? Contemporaries deemed that printed news could deceive in several ways. Most extremely, it could be an outright fabrication. Complaints and jokes about *coined, cogged, feigned, forged, invented,* and *made* news abound. Such invented reports were further termed *conceits, chimeras*, and *fables*. In his portrait of "A Curranto-Coiner" (1631), Richard Braithwait writes that the coranto writer's "owne *Genius* is his intelligencer" (B6/15). Or as Donald Lupton writes in his *London…Carbonadoed* (1632), "Currantoes or weekly Newes…are all conceits ordinarily, which their [newswriters'] owne idle braine, or busy fancies, upon the blockes in *Paules*, or in their Chambers invented…every one can say, it's even as true as a *Currantoe*, meaning that it's all false" (K7/141-K7v/142) In 1618 George Lord Carew could assure Thomas Roe, then Ambassador to India, that he had not

[6] On the discredit and public ridicule of printed news, see Randall *Credibility* and "Joseph Mead," Woolf esp. 100-107, Pettegree, *News* esp. 256-61, and Peacey 92-123. On the discredit of manuscript news, see O'Neill178-84 and Atherton 42-53.

invented his news, not that it was credible: "I will not sweare thatt all which I have written is trew, but you may well beleeve thatt I have coyned nothinge" (qtd. in Randall, *Credibility* 25). In John Earle's 1628 portrayal, St. Paul's—the center of both gossip and printed news—was "the generall Mint of all famous lies…All inventions are emptyed here, and not few pockets" (I12). When news from abroad was tardy, the temptation to invent was all the greater, or so it was suspected. The prolific letter writer John Chamberlain wrote in August 1619 that "I never knew a more empty and barren time for newes then this vacation hath ben, so that they are faine almost every weeke to coyne great battells in Bohemia" (259). Such reports of imaginary battles on the continent flourished in England during the Thirty Years' War. As John Taylor, a savvy critic and participant in news culture, joked:

> These things [battles] in England prattling fooles do chatter,
> When all Bohemia knowes of no such matter:
> For all this Summer, that is gone and past,
> Untill the first day of October last,
> The Armies never did together meete,
> Nor scarce their eye sight did each other greete. (qtd. in Randall, *Credibility* 24-25)

The "newsmaker," as a character in Shirley's *Love Tricks* marvels, "will write you a battle in any part of Europe at an hour's warning, and yet never set foot out of a tavern" (1.1.22, 50-52). In addition to versifying and translating news accounts, literary drudges were also "paid to cast verbal reports or rumours in the form of first-hand descriptions which would carry greater credence with readers" (Parr, *Staple* 24).[7] The countryside was devoid of "the many and most innocent monsters" with which the lying pamphleteers populated it, as Ben Jonson put it in his

[7] Parr does not cite any specific cases to support this assertion, but for one example of news-pamphlet ghostwriting, see Randall *Credibility* 40. Nashe complains in *The Anatomie of Absurditie* that versifying the news inevitably introduced lies, even if the original report was true: "Be it a truth which they would tune, they enterlace it with a lye or two to make meeter, not regarding veritie, so they may make uppe the verse" (qtd. in Würzbach 258).

Staple of News (1.5.40). Newsletters were no better for Jonson, for in this same work Nathaniel, the news clerk, transcribes, classifies, and—when needed—invents the news: "And for a need can he make 'hem." Jonson's imaginary news business has no qualms with inventing the news, because that is what, he assures us, newsmen really do. "I'll give anything for a good copy now, be't true or false, so't be news," as the Printer says in Jonson's masque *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon* (16-17). Truth, in Jonson's estimation, was not essential to those involved in the news industry, for a fresh falsehood was always more vendible than a stale truth. Likewise for Jonson, the social value of news meant that news consumers also prioritized new news over true news. As Gossip Tattle admits, "But whether it were true or no, we gossips are bound to believe it…How should we entertain the time else, or find ourselves in fashionable discourse for all companies, if we do not credit all and make more of it in the reporting?" (*Staple* 3.intemean.37-41).

Anxiety that news was sometimes fabricated was not new. Royal proclamations against "rumour" go back at least to the fourteenth century. Proclamations against the spread of "feigned" and "forged" tidings were made in both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (qtd. in Randall, *Credibility* 35).[8] In the mid-sixteenth century Robert Crowley penned an epigram entitled "Of Inventers of Straunge Newes." False news was dangerous for Crowley, a stationer, because it could foment unrest:

> Some men do delite
> straunge newes to invente,
> Of this mannes doynge,
> and that mannes intente…

[8] "Statutes against false news date from the late fifteenth century and were revived and enhanced under Elizabeth I" writes Daniel Woolf (103-4). Charges brought against individuals for the spread of false news exist in judicial records (see David Coast). On the spread of false news by the elite class, see David Coast. On royal proclamations against false tidings, see Randall, *Credibility*.

What the Kynge and his counsel,
  do intende to do;
Though for the most parte
  it be nothynge so.
Such men cause the people,
  that els woulde be styll,
To murmour and grudge,
  whych thyng is very ill…
Oh! that these newes bryngars
  had for theyr rewarde,
Newe halters of hemppe,
  to sette them forwarde! (38-39)

Rabblerousing newsmongers who "invente[d]" false reports should be bound and led with "halters," writes Crowley, though he also plays off of another meaning of the word: noose. The inventers of false news deserved to be corrected ("sette…forwarde") by the hangman. False news, as contemporaries realized, could be a weapon of war (used to fool an enemy) or a weapon of commerce (used to influence markets, plummet stocks).[9]

Less damnably, news could exaggerate or be distorted by bias. As Solanio says in *The Merchant of Venice*, "gossip Report" could easily transgress "the plain highway of talk" and fall into "slips of prolixity" (3.1.9-10). Small skirmishes swelled into full-scale battles; one murder multiplied into many. News grew in the retelling, as the first English news editor, Thomas Gainsford, understood: "for fame [i.e. *fama*] and snowballs increase as they goe" (qtd. in Randall, *Credibility* 11). Contemporaries also gripe about what we today would call bait-and-switch and clickbait tactics, complaining that what was promised in a title was not delivered in the actual news text. "To speake truly, I have many times beene deceived with these flourishing Titles that I have seene pasted upon a Post, for bestowing my mony in haste at my better leisure looking into the book, and finding such slender stuffe, I have laughed at my owne folly,"

[9] On fake news as a weapon of war, see Randall, *Credibility* 26. On fake news as an economic ploy, see O'Neill 178-79.

Barnaby Rich, a pamphlet writer himself, wrote in 1606 (qtd. in Raymond, *Pamphlets* 87). In his 1624 screed against stationers, George Wither complained of the "large promising title" that made the work of an "IGNORMAUS…vendible for an impression or two, as though it had the quintessence of all Art" (I1v/130). A dishonest newswriter "will be sure to put more in the Title page then is in all the booke besides," as one anonymous pamphlet writer put it (*A Fresh Whip* 5). Writers' penchant for moralizing their news narratives at length abetted this chicanery, for many titles promised wonders to which the text itself gave short shrift.[10]

More seriously, newsprint could lie by presenting itself as new news when in fact it was a reprint of old news. Dishonest news reprints either explicitly re-dated the reported events or eliminated the original date while calling themselves current. They also potentially altered the names of locales, participants, and eyewitness. That printers reprinted already mendacious news with altered dates was cited as further proof of their mendacity. John Taylor compared the practice to an old prostitute applying cosmetics. In his long poem "A Whore," specifically the section entitled "A comparison betwixt a Whore and a Booke," Taylor writes:

> When *whores* wax old and stale, they're out of date,
> Old Pamphlets are most subject to such fate.
> As *whores* have Panders to emblaze their worth,
> So these have Stationers to set them forth.
> And as an old *whore* may be painted new
> With borrowed beauty, faire unto the view,
> Whereby shee for a fine fresh *whore* may passe,
> Yet is shee but the rotten *whore* shee was.
> So Stationers, their old cast Bookes can grace,
> And by new Titles paint a-fresh their face. (*Workes* 112)

Ben Jonson twice mocked the print practice of reprinting old news disguised as fresh news. In *News from the New World*, a Printer admits, "I do keep my presses and so many pens going to

[10] On early modern newsprint's intermixing of information with commentary, see Shaaber 204-221.

bring forth wholesome relations, which once in half a score years (as the age grows forgetful) I print over again with a new date, and they are of excellent use" (59-62). In *The Staple of News* Jonson repeats his carp—indeed, some of the lines from the masque are, ironically, recycled in this play:

> Cymbal: Nor shall the stationer cheat upon the time
> By buttering over again—
> Fitton: Once in seven years,
> As the age dotes—
> Cymbal: And grows forgetful o'them,
> His antiquated pamphlets, with new dates. (1.5.58-61)

This play opens with a suspicious Gossip Tattle warning, "Look your news be new and fresh, Master Prologue, and untainted. I shall find them else, if they be stale or fly-blown, quickly" (Induction 25-7). As Anthony Parr notes, in the context of news, "stale" might have implied not merely old but stolen—*stale* being an obsolete past participle of *steal* (*Staple* 66 f.).[11]

Translation, when acknowledged, was an honest form of news recycling, but here too there could be a temptation to re-date reports. *Corante, or, news from Italy and Germanie* (1621) was, according to its title page, "Printed…the 20. of June 1621." As Folke Dahl notes, this work is a word for word translation of a Dutch pamphlet printed June 11th, 1621. Dahl writes that there are "news reports from 11 different places in the two corantos but the translator has changed (perhaps the word 'freshened' can be used) the dates of nine of these," making them more recent by only one to five days (8). News-report dates could be altered in decades or days.

Clear-cut cases of *dishonest* news recycling are rare, it should be noted, though recycling was common. There are in fact only a handful of extant, dishonest news reprints that are known

[11] *Stale* was also an early modern term for a decoy or snare or trick. *Stale news* thus leant itself to several sinister suggestions.

to scholars. But precisely because these pamphlets disguise their status and do not acknowledge their source, which must also be extant to uncover the deception, it is hard to know how widespread the practice was.

Further complicating the picture is the fact that reprinting news pamphlets was not in itself uncommon or deceptive. The act could be explicitly acknowledged and justified—often on the basis of renewed relevance—in new paratext.[12] Often the justification was to update and expand a news story or to place older reports next to newer accounts so that their moral message might ring out all the clearer. Sometimes this print history was acknowledged in the title of the work, e.g. *Newes from Ireland…Newly Imprinted and Inlarged* (1608). The anonymous author of the 1607 pamphlet *A True Report of Certaine Wonderfull Overflowings of Waters* explains that he has included an older tale of disaster with his new tales in order that readers might compare the disasters and consequently calculate the degree of God's current displeasure:

> Reader I have to these late accidents (whereby some parts of this our kingdom have bin punnished) added some other, that happened in the yeare 1570 to the intent that by comparing the one with the other, Gods Justice and mercy may both be seene: If those Waters of his wrathe (powred down then) weare more cruell then these. It is a signe (and a comfort let it bee unto us) that he doth but stil threaten and shake the rod, for no doubt but our faults at this time are as great as in those daies: If this affliction laide upon our Countrey now, bee sharper than that before, make use of it: tremble, be fore-warned, Amend, least a more feareful punishment, and a longer whip of correction draw blood of us. Farewell. (A2)

An older tale of flooding was naturally more interesting in a time of floods, and to this the writer has added a moral-spiritual gloss.

Invention, exaggeration, bait-and-switch tactics, and dishonest recycling: these were only the most cynical sins that newswriters and editors committed. Finally and most forgivably,

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[12] Joad Raymond explores more honorable motives for recycling news, such as renewed topicality, in *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering*, and Sandra Clark discusses different ways of reusing material in *The Elizabethan Pamphleteers* (96-7). See also Andrew Pettegree's *Invention of News*.

printed news could, despite its best efforts, just get the facts wrong—because of a bad source or some other prosaic reason (time, distance, the confusing nature of the event itself, etc.).

News reports of all kinds, especially initial reports, were proverbially unreliable. In his diary of news, Walter Yonge sometimes confirms or revises entries with a postscript *True* or *False*. A corrected entry from 1621 reads: "//It is reported that the Turk hath landed an army in Spain.// —A false report" (39). Bets were placed at the Exchange in London on whether reports would prove true or not. "What finer example of the uncertainty of even the best informed could be expected?" muses Raymond (*Invention* 89). Addressing Spinola's siege of Bergen in 1622, Chamberlain wrote, "We have ben as yt were wholly entertained with uncertain reports of Spinolas rising from Bergen: and great wagers were laide both in court, citie, and specially in the Exhaunge *pro et contra*…in this suspense we continued till the post of Antwerp came on Wednesday last and cleered the doubt" (453-54). As this example indicates, given enough time and enough accounts, the truth of a matter could be reasonably well established. For all contemporaries' cynicism, a news consensus or accumulation of corroborating reports could establish the fact of a matter. (I will return to the issue of corroborating reports in chapter three). But initial reports and rumors always outstripped plodding-paced certainty.

The purveyors of newsprint might not always lie, but they would often credulously print others' lies when they should have known better. (Of course, the cynic thought, perhaps they *did* know better but didn't care since they continually needed something to print for profit.[13]) Wielding an epigraph, John Donne mocked one of Europe's first news periodicals, the Latin-language *Mercurius Gallobelgicus*. This serial first appeared in Cologne in 1595, contained

[13] "False news was the product of both the increased amount of news flowing through the wider British world and the fact that news had become a commodity…and truth came second to profit" (O'Neill 178). Jonson was especially attuned to the latter issue, the commodification of news.

primarily European military news, and quickly "developed a reputation for spreading error to the credulous" (Raymond, *Pamphlets* 128). In a 1616 letter to James I, Francis Bacon "described one of the charges against Somerset as 'No better than a gazette or passage of Gallo-Belgicus'" (Randall, *Credibility* 88). Credibility and credulity are Donne's themes:

> Like Aesop's fellow slaves, O Mercury,
> Which could do all things, thy faith is; and I
> Like Aesop's self, which nothing. I confess
> I should have had more faith, if thou hadst less:
> Thy credit lost thy credit: 'tis sin to do,
> In this case, as thou wouldst be done unto,
> To believe all. Change thy name: thou art like
> Mercury in stealing, but liest like a Greek. (20)

As the Roman god of messages and travelling, Mercury naturally became adopted by newswriters and printers as a symbol for their craft. Donne ends the poem by reminding his readers that, though Mercury was also appropriately the Roman god of trickery and outright thievery (perhaps with news-story poaching in mind), *Mercurius Gallobelgicus* is dishonest *par excellence*. Thus its name should be changed to the equivalent Greek deity's name, *Hermes*, given the proverbially deceptive behavior of Greeks. "Thy credit [i.e. credulousness] lost thy credit."

Other writers would echo Donne's assessment. "Starting with Joseph Hall's *Characters of Virtues and Vices* (1608), few character books were complete without satirizing the news. The common theme of this mockery was that written news was untrustworthy: intelligencers were inconstant, peddling lies, and the truth was no concern of theirs" (Atherton 43).[14] In the 1611 revision of his Italian-English dictionary, John Florio defined *Gazzétte* as "running reports, daily

[14] Some of these character books have already been cited—e.g. Lupton and Braithwait. See also Thomas Adams' *Diseases of the Soule*, discussed below.

newes, idle intelligences, or flim flam tales that are daily written from Italie" (205).[15] A clergyman prayed for "the Saviour to inspire the curranto-makers with the spirit of truth, that people might know when to utter praises for the King of Sweden's victories and when to pray for him in his distresses" (qtd. in Dahl 23). "In the 1620s, English military news was unstable in medium, uncertain in credibility, contradictory in content and never to be read with blind faith" writes David Randall in his study of early modern news credibility (2). Newsletters sometimes enjoyed more cachet than printed news, but were still read critically. In her study of letter-writing networks, Lindsay O'Neill writes that "Letter writers often felt the need to preface their news with the phrase 'Tis credibly reported' for many newsreaders were incredulous about what they read, and for good reason. The news flowing through letters, newsletters, and newspapers was often false" (178). A letter reader might well know the letter writer, but the news conveyed in letters was often still secondhand, or worse. "All forms of news could come under suspicion," O'Neill concludes, "in part because all forms were involved in the same project: to get news to readers as quickly as possible…A sense of unease runs through [contemporaries'] constant news gathering" (184).

Newsprint suffered the deficit of trust that the print medium as a whole endured, as defined by Adrian Johns in *The Nature of the Book*. Indeed, printed news—cheap and typically anonymous—bore a heightened level of mistrust. Donne and the other wits judged that printed news had little to no credit. Some newsmen seemed to agree. A newswriter admitted he had refrained from publishing a report based "upon the bare credite of a common *Curranto,"* for

[15] Florio's original 1598 definition was more neutral: "the daily newes or intelligence written from Italie, tales, running newes" (145).

"popular opinion…[was] set against the credite of these weekly *Currantoes*" (qtd. in Randall, *Credibility* 88-89).

Newsprint Its Own Fiercest Critic

It wasn't only wits, poets, preachers, and dramatists—all of whom justifiably suspected that the nascent news industry was a cultural and commercial threat—who critiqued the news. The newswriters themselves were their own biggest detractors and perpetuated the specter of newsprint's discredit more tenaciously than anyone else. In a word, newswriters constantly denounced each other as liars, as peddlers of false news. As Matthias Shaaber writes in his study of early modern news, "It would be a tedious task to enumerate all the books of news of our period [1476-1622] which advertise themselves as correctives of falsehoods; such a list would include many more than half of all books which assert any motive at all" (235-36). The disparagement of other news accounts is such a common tactic that one suspects many authors of pamphlet and ballad news treated news credibility as a zero sum game: to gain credit, discredit.

News pamphlets, especially those that dealt in wonder accounts, anticipated skepticism and took steps to counteract it. Thus the writer of *Somewhat: written by occasion of three sunnes seene at Tregnie* (1622) opens, rather hopefully perhaps, with "Beleeving Reader, You are saluted, by (I thinke) you know not whom: I would be sorrie you should: for a beggerly generation of mercenarie liers haue drawen an ineutible suspition upon the reporters of all truths in this kind" (A3).[16] The tone of the preface is coy throughout, and qualifies its own truth claim in this way:

[16] The writer also suggests he has withheld his name so that he will not "be exposed to the tyrannous rage of them, who by my expense of two hours, are anticipated in their project, importing at least two peeces, and twentie or thirtie copppies" (A3). In other words, our newswriter does not wish to suffer the scorn of other newswriters who he has

> Beleeve this therefore, as you would beleeve any thing that is not *de fide*, that what I have written, is the truth as I beleeve; and I thinke I have just reason to beleeve it, for it hath beene confirmed by the voluntarie oathes of many…I confess I heard not of it (how could I?) till it was too late to see it; but if I had, the remotenesse of the place would peraventure have perswaded me (according to the proverbe) rather to content my selfe with beleeving it, than to goe see it. (A3v).

Not himself an eyewitness, the author acknowledges he gives us no more than a probable account we have "just reason to beleeve."

Gilbert Dugdale, the author of the crime pamphlet *A True Discourse of the Practises of Elizabeth Caldwell* (1604), is by contrast supremely confident that his eyewitness report provides the unvarnished truth. He laments "how incredulous our Nation is in things true, and how uncertaine they are to beleeve fopperies fayned" (A3). An eyewitness of Caldwell's murder trial, he writes so "that others, not eye witnesses thereunto, might the rather assure themselves of the same" (A3-A3v). This was all the more needful since "divers reports passed up an downe the streets of London as touching this act of murder, but how scandalously, as five murdered, three murdered by meanes of six persons," when in fact "only three murdered one" (A3v) The rumors and exaggerations were examples of "the worlds idle fabling" (A3v). "Therefore being an eare-witness to this false alarum, it made me more diligent in the setting foorth of the truth…For as it was, it was, and no otherwise, and thus it was…and how odious it is to heare any truth rackt by slaundering tongues" (A3v).

"So many poeticall fictions haue of late passed the print, that [readers] have some cause to suspect almost every extraordinary report that is printed," lamented the author of *The Wonderfull Battell of Starelings* in 1622 (A3v). The author of *Lamentable newes out of Monmouthshire* (1607) bemoans "the usual unfaithfullness of men ordinarily in reporting of such

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beat into press, depriving them of the coins and pamphlet copies ephemeral authors were typically paid in. The vast majority of news pamphlets are anonymous, for reasons discussed in Raymond, *Newspaper* and Randall, *Credibility*.

accidents as these bee: whereby it often falleth out, that the relater of them reapeth much discredit" (A3). Henry Goodcole defends the truth of his pamphlet *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch* (1621)—"I meddle here with nothing but matter of fact, and to that end produce the Testimony of the living and the dead"—while at the same time decrying the printed lies that had instantly sprung up around the case (A3). Despite his reservations about broaching the topics of witchcraft and demonology—"knowing the diversitie of opinions concerning things of this matter, and that not among the ignorant, but among some of the learned"—he publishes his account

> to defend the truth of the cause, which in some measure, hath received a wound already, by most base and false Ballets, which were sung at the time of our returning from the *Witches* execution. In them I was ashamed to see and heare such ridiculous fictions of her bewitching Corne on the ground, of a Ferret and an Owle dayly sporting before her, of the bewitched brayning her selfe, of the Spirits attending in the Prison: all of which I knew to be fitter for an Ale-bench then for a relation of proceeding in Court of Justice. And thereupon I wonder that such lewde Balletmongers should be suffered to creepe into the Printers presses and peoples eares. (A3-A3v).

Goodcole feels the need to set the record straight in print precisely because other printed works had lied. His pamphlet would serve as the source material for the play *The Witch of Edmonton*.

Authors hoped to disarm skepticism by acknowledging that rumor and spurious newsprint abounded, building rapport with their readers while at the same time tantalizing them with the promise that their work set the record straight. After all, if false news accompanied every event, then the reader might already be misinformed. Newswriters tended to stoke anxiety about the credibility of newsprint, for this meant that they—as honest, truly informed authors—were all the more valuable. But this rhetorical gamble, the refrain that *Newsprint is full of lies, but this account is most true*, was risky.

Effects of Constant Self-Criticism

Though the popular image of the rabble—all naïve as Shakespeare's Mopsa—was that they swallowed news credulously, newswriters consistently anticipate a skeptical reader. It is hard to judge why pamphlet writers expected such skeptical readers. Was it primarily a rhetorical flourish, or was it a defensive reaction in light of the many criticisms of printed news as well as evidence that, on the whole, readers were in fact skeptical of printed news? After all, the writer of *Somewhat* exempts his "Beleeving Reader" "from the number of ordinarie censurers" (A3). How well does the new writer's formulaic rhetoric reflect the attitudes and (in)credulity of readers? It is impossible to say. "Good yf true," as a contemporary reader scrawled in the margins of a 1626 news pamphlet (Dahl 149). Is this cynical skepticism or, as Wittek argues, provisional doubt, "cautious optimism, an inclination to reserve judgment until further information becomes available"? (Wittek 25).

As we have seen, no one laments the abundance of printed lies and false news as much as newswriters. Yet it is likewise hard to judge to what extent their execrations of each other are real ploys to garner credibility at the expense of their medium versus empty rhetoric. Shaaber concludes that the newsman's ubiquitous castigation of other printed reports was, to a significant extent, hyperbole—a fiery yet formulaic trope (235-242). Jason Peacey has made a similar assessment of the "rhetorical bombast" of the highly combative partisan newsbooks of the 1640s (97). Even so, one would presume that the constant refrain of "Much of the news lies" from the pamphlet writers themselves would have further undermined the credibility of cheap news. Most likely it did. In Shaaber's assessment, there is no doubt that "this incessant contradiction of one news-report by the other had bred a rather general distrust of all 'reports of truth' in print" (239).

Individual credit was acquired at the expense of printed news, considered as a medium, as a whole. The newswriter's formulaic and hyperbolic apology topos (e.g. I have suffered myself to appear in print despite the abundance of false reports and/or to rebuke the liars and set the record straight) likely did more harm to the good name of printed news than any dramatist's lampoon. Still, appetite for printed news only grew with each decade, and there is evidence that many readers approached the news in a nuanced way, in-between Mopsa's *all true* and Jonson's *all lies*. As I discuss in the next chapter, newswriters like Gainsford encouraged a measured, patient consideration of news-reports and their verification.

A second effect of the constant accusations among newswriters (I speak the truth; the rest all lie) might have been to tacitly promote a new consensus view that factual accuracy—truthfulness as we commonly understand it—mattered above all else. After all, such accusations did not dispute the derived moral truths that remained a common part of occasional news pamphlets throughout the seventeenth century. What was mocked and condemned was factual accuracy. Never mind if the moralizing was right; the facts had to be right.[17]

Finally, a surprising effect of newswriters' constant aspersion-casting might have been to undermine faith in any particular report of news while at the same time *promoting* faith in the process of news. Given enough time and enough reports—whether they discredited or corroborated prior reports—the truth would emerge. A consensus was always more credible than a single account, of course, but especially so among the competitive newswriters. Contemporaries complained of false news; contemporaries complained of contrary news, which meant that at least one report was a false, if not both. When a consensus appeared among the

[17] Wittek makes a similar point with reference to Thomas Gainsford's rhetoric. See Wittek 23.

news pamphlets and time passed without an excoriating correction, readers presumably felt comparatively assured. If the truculent newswriters had peaceably agreed on something, it must have been taken as a good sign.

Heightened Criticism of Serial News

Raymond has argued that occasional news pamphlets "did not provoke the same satirical heat as periodicals or serials," beginning with the translated corantos that first appeared in London in 1618 (*Pamphlets* 129). (A notable exception is *True and Wonderfull*, an occasional news pamphlet with an extensive track record of ridicule, discussed below.) It is this "weekly" news that Jonson attacks in his Address to the Reader in *The Staple of News*. "Periodical news was more threatening, because it promised a continuous supply of news" (Raymond, *Pamphlets* 129), and thus perhaps it appeared especially meddlesome. Serial news does indeed appear to have provoked more mockery than occasional news and thus, we may presume, more anxiety. Serial news is more threatening, I would argue, for precisely the formal reasons that serial news differs from occasional news.[18] Occasional news was complete, digested, moralized—written after the event had concluded. It was a *story*, with a beginning and an end. But serial news was often an undigested stream of information (or misinformation). It was less reliable because it was more timely, composed in the midst of the event rather than after its conclusion. One issue picked up where the last left off, making for difficult reading, for its narratives had the structure of haphazard serials rather than neat plots. It was thus more confusing to readers and necessitated constant retractions, revisions, confirmations, and hedgings. It was also therefore more transgressive to critics like Jonson. The serial was generically different than the occasional news story; it was immediate and undigested information. It was the newsiest of printed news.

[18] Petteegree elucidates these differences in *News* 260.

The partisan serials of the 1640s and 1650s cast constant aspersions against each other. The royalist newsbook *Mercurius Aulicus* "doth write all false newes," proclaimed a 1643 issue of *The Welch Mercury*, and then went on to "make an Inventory of her Lyes" (qtd. in Brownlees 67). The Civil War period saw an uptick in such accusations of "false reports." Newsbooks began to proclaim on their title pages that they had suffered themselves to come into print to prevent current and future "false reports" or "false news." The full title for *Mercurius Publicus* ran: *Mercurius Publicus, Comprising the Sum of all Affairs now in agitation in* England, Scotland, *and* Ireland, *Together with Foraign Intelligence; For Information of the People, and to prevent false News* (1661). "Printed to prevent False Reports" became a common refrain on title pages. The prevention of false reports remained a part of the traditional modesty *topos* that authors still frequently employed. A pamphlet title from 1642 exemplifies this strategy well: *A Little true forraine newes better than a great deale of domestick spurious false newes, published daily without feare or wit to the shame of the nation and beyond the liberty of Paris pasquils*.

Attacking other newsmen was never more in fashion, as the partisan serials catalogued one another's lies and misdeeds. The author of a pamphlet titled *A Fresh Whip for al Scandalous Lyers. Or, A true description of the two eminent Pamphliteers or Squibtellers of this Kingdome* (1647) complains of one newswriter that "he hath an excellent faculty to put a title to an old book" (5). Of another notable newsman he writes

> I may not unfitly tearme him to be the chiefe Dirt-raker, or Scafinger of the City; for what ever any other book lets fall, he will be sure, by his trotting horse, and ambling Booke-sellers have it convey'd to his wharfe of rubbish, and then he will as a many petty fogging scrivoners do…put out here and there to alter the sence of the Relation; and then he shelters it under the title of a new and perfect Diurnall. This merchant when he hath loaden his Sheet (or Dung-Cart) with his stale informations, and mis-informations; then ye shall have him strut up and down with his gingling spurs, as if…hee had done the state mighty good service. (1-2).

"Scurrilous Pamphlets," he concludes, "have done more mischief in the kingdome then ever all my Lord of *Essex's*, or Sir Thomas *Fairfaxes* whole traine of Artillery ever did" (6).

Throughout the seventeenth century, the greatest critic of printed news remained the newswriter.

Other Criticisms of News

Contemporaries did not only mock the trustworthiness of printed news. They also groused about other interrelated issues: the abundance of newsprint, its triviality, its presumptuous meddling and vulgar impropriety, and even its ontological status as news in print.[19] As Raymond writes, "Commercially produced news publications were always suspected of being false, partly because they contained inaccuracies, but also because they triggered anxieties about information and publicity" (*Pamphlets* 129). Information in the hands of the rabble was worrisome. The corantos, in Lupton's expression, were "busie fellows, for they meddle with other mens Affaires: No Pope, Emperour, or King, but must be touched by their pen" (K6v/140-K7/141). When news corantos by the likes of Thomas Gainsford tacitly criticized James' pro-Spanish foreign policy, the king told "his loving subjects" to remember their place. He "straitly […] command them and evry of them, from the highest to the lowest, to take heede, how they intermeddle by Penne, or Speech, with causes of State, and secrets of Empire, either at home, or abroad, but containe themselves within that modest and reverent regard, of matters, above their reach and calling, that to good and dutifull Subjects appertaineth" (Larkin and Hughes 495–496). As with translation, there was a fear that printed news would reveal too much to the common people: it would rip the necessary veil off of *arcana imperii*.

[19] On contemporary objections to newsprint for political reasons, see Peacey, esp. 3-4.

Likewise the idea that one's image was now at the mercy of the rabble because of vulgar newsmen unsettled the elite. As a character jokes in Chapman's *Monsieur d'Olive*, "I am afraid of nothing but I shall be balladed" (3.1). The joke seems to have masked a real cultural anxiety, for the joke is made often.[20] Newswriters meddled with superior issues and men, both of which were tainted by their presumptuous handling. There was something corruptive about that touch, that vulgarization, a worry that is expressed most clearly on the stage in *Coriolanus*, as discussed in chapter four.

There were other concerns with newsprint as well. James Shirley opens his first play, *Love Tricks* (first performed 1625, pub. 1631) with a satire of the nascent news industry that predictably skewers the reliability of news:

> Antonio: Prithee what's the news abroad? I came forth o' purpose to hear some, and this is an age of novelties [news].
> Gasparo: News? O, excellent news!
> Ant: Prithee, what is't? I long to hear some.
> Gasp: There is no news at all.
> Ant: Call you that excellent news?
> Gasp: Is it not good news, that there is no bad news? The truth is, the news-maker, master Money-lack, is sick of a consumption of the wit.
> Ant: The news-maker! why, is there any news-maker?
> Gasp: […] It has been a great profession; marry, most commonly they are soldiers;[21] a peace concluded is a great plague unto them: oh, they are men worthy of commendations; they speak in print…these, I say, will write you a battle in any part of Europe at an hour's warning, and yet never set foot out of a tavern; describe you towns, fortifications, leaders, the strength of the enemies, what confederates, every day's march,—not a soldier shall lose a hair, or have a bullet fly between his arms, but he shall have a page to wait on him in quarto;—nothing destroys them but want of a good memory, for if they escape contradiction they may be chronicled. (1.1.13-57)

[20] This issue is discussed at length in chapter three. A number of similar examples are cited in Würzbach and in Rollins, "Ballad."
[21] Thomas Gainsford, the editor for Butter and Bourne's news serials of the 1620s whom Ben Jonson and others mock, was the proto-typical soldier turned newsman.

Most obviously, Shirley portrays the newsman—the "news-maker"—as nothing but a liar, hindered not by faulty news networks but writer's block: "a consumption of the wit." Like the playwright, the newsman invents, but with the added irony that a news narrative (in addition to furnishing a dramatist with a plot) might one day reappear in a more respectable chronicle (which, like Holinshed's *Chronicles*, might once again prove major source of material for dramatists).[22] With the remark that "not a soldier shall lose a hair, or have a bullet fly between his arms, but he shall have a page to wait on him in quarto" we see a different complaint: this was the common gripe that newsprint exhaustively described the most trivial (not to mention, *invented*) events and details. This lack of discretion contributed to the glut of bad books and the exhaustion and distraction of readers.

Less obviously, the satirical passage also highlights the uneasy hybrid nature of newsprint in the period. For as Gasparo says with mock admiration, the newsmakers "speak in print." Theirs was a print form of unmistakable orality. They dealt in reified rumor: gossip, tales, and invention—all oral and ephemeral—but preserved and somewhat dignified by being pressed into print. Shakespeare, as will see, highlights this tension in *The Winter's Tale*, and Ben Jonson pushes this critique even further in *The Staple of News*.

The status of print as a medium is complex in our period. On the one hand, it appears low—for authors continue to open with the conventional apology for foisting a printed work on the public at all, and printed works continue to be deemed, often but not invariably, less

[22] In Jonson's *News from the New World*, the Chronicler complains "I have been so cheated with false relations i'my time, as I ha' found it a far harder thing to correct my book, than collect it" (x).

trustworthy than manuscript or oral sources (see Pettegree, *News* and O'Neill).[23] Considered as information delivery, the manuscript letter or oral discussion appeared to contemporaries as considerably more trustworthy (who was speaking was clearer) and direct (less intermediation). Or perhaps more trustworthy *because* more direct. On the other hand, the credit of print gradually increased, and print still conferred a degree of authority despite misgivings about the medium. As Adrian Johns has argued, stationers had to work hard to establish the trustworthiness of the medium of print itself. That trust was not a given. At the same time, contemporaries might assume what we do today: that what they saw in print was true, precisely because it had been printed. Print dignified, no doubt because it implied it was credible, authenticated information. "I love a ballad in print, alife," Mopsa, says in all sincerity in *The Winter's Tale*, "for then we are sure they are true" (4.4.251-52). Mopsa may be an uneducated country girl, but she was not alone. In Jonson's *News from the New World*, the Factor (i.e. a professional manuscript newsletter writer) upbraids the Printer not for his lies (both Printer and Factor invent their news) but for the vulgarity of his medium:

> Factor: …it is the printing I am offended at, I would have no news printed; for when they are printed they leave to be news. While they are written, though they be false, they remain news still.
> Printer: See men's divers opinions! It is the printing of 'em makes 'em news to a great many, who will indeed believe nothing but what's in print. (53-59)

Jonson would repeat these lines in *The Staple of News*.

Print could be base *and* authoritative, and that contradiction is heightened in news pamphlets, which came armed with the hallmarks of credibility (in the form of eyewitness

[23] News pamphlets would sometimes tell skeptical readers where they might examine the manuscript letter they were based on—a defensive move that tacitly acknowledged that the printed pamphlet had at best a borrowed credibility. On this point, see Randall, *Credibility*.

signatures and affidavits) at the same time that they were eminently cheap, ephemeral productions with a reputation for deceit.[24]

The odious nature of cheap print was a common complaint. In his "Execration Upon Vulcan," Jonson faults the house fire he suffered for consuming his literary works yet sparing news pamphlets and other piles of worthless print. The god of fire had lacked discretion. When Thomas Bodley made an arrangement with the Stationers Company whereby every registered book would be deposited in the library that now bears his name, he famously exempted playbooks and pamphlets, writing, "Were it so that some little profit might be reaped (which God knows is very little) out of some of our playbooks, the benefit thereof will nothing near countervail the harm that the scandal will bring into the library, when it shall be given out, that we stuff it full of baggage [rubbish] books" (222). Newsprint mingled the profound with the trivial and consequently, contemporaries complained, it both lacked discretion and fostered indiscretion. Jonson complains of this fault in the corantos of the 1620s; Addison, in the newspapers of the early eighteenth century.

The swelling abundance of ephemera was especially offensive during this period. Every fool thought he was qualified to write a pamphlet, and thus a flood of trash was released. William Cupper decried in a preface to his sermons that "manie private persons, tickeled with vaine-glorie…bolde in the pride of their wittes uppon the reading of a fewe bookes, or the hearing of a fewe Sermons…thrust foorth a Pamphlette unto the worlde, never reverencing the grave censure of learned men" (qtd. in Walsham 43). It is not difficult to catch a complaint of

[24] As David Cressy writes, "the very form in which [broadsheets and pamphlets] operated, akin to the broadside ballads, was notorious for interlacing lies and truth" (*Travesties* 47).

professional encroachment. The author of the 1591 pamphlet *Martine Mar-Sixtus*, possibly the little-known dramatist Robert Wilson, voices a similar grievance:

> I was content for once to become odious, that is, to speake in print…We live in a printing age, wherein there is no man either so vainley, or factiously, of filthily disposed, but there are crept out of all sort unauthorized authors, to fill and fit his humor, and if a mans devotion serve him not to goe to the Church of God, he neede but repayre to a Stationers shop and reade a sermon of the divels: I loath to speake it, every red-nosed rimester is an author, every drunken mans dream is a booke, and he whose talent of little wit is hardly worth a farthing, yet layeth about him so outragiously, as if all *Helicon* had run through his pen, in a word, scarce a cat can looke out of a gutter, but out starts a halfpenny Chronicler, and presently *A propper new ballet of a strange sight* is endited: What publishing of frivolous Prognostications? as if Will Sommers were againe revived: what counterfeiting and cogging of prodigious and fabulous monsters? as if they labored to exceede the Poet in his *Metamorphosis*… (A3v)

What begins as a conventional apology for printing his work turns into a condemnation of how print-saturated the world has become: the heterodox and the trivial are given ample accommodation in the house of print. By referring to sectarian (or popish, or irreligious?) works as "sermon[s] of the divels," the author not only reinforces his point that readers can seek out whatever viewpoint will reaffirm their own in the glut of print, he also conflates pulpit with pamphlet. News accounts of prognostications and fabulous monsters were not only "frivolous" but inventions—examples of "counterfeiting and cogging."

In a dialogue of *The World Tost at Tennis* (1620), Thomas Middleton also makes sport of the profligacy and pettiness of newsprint:

> Scholar: I could make ballads for a need.
> Soldier: Very well sir, and I'll warrant thee thou shalt never want subject to write of: one hangs himself today, another drowns himself tomorrow, a sergeant stabbed next day, here a petitifogger a'the pillory, a bawd in the cart's nose, and a pander in the tail.[25] *Hic Mulier Haec Vir*, fashions, fictions, felonies, fooleries—a hundred havens has the balladmonger to traffic at, and new ones still daily discovered. (Masque 27-35)

[25] Carts were used to transport convicts to the gallows and shame lewd women. Sometimes offenders were tied to the cart's tail for shameful processions.

Though the two characters speak of ballads in general, the topical subjects the Soldier runs down ("though shalt never want subject to write of") indicate that what is primarily under consideration is the news ballad, which was (going by Stationers' record) the most common type of printed ballad (see Davis and Voss). The reference to two polemical pamphlets published by the infamous newsmonger John Trundle, *Hic Mulier* and *Hoec Vir*, suggests that too was a lucrative possibility. "Fashions, fictions, felonies, fooleries"—in Middleton's characterization, the topic matter of news ballads was frivolous, sensational, and dubious.

John Earle's character sketch "A Pot Poet" (1628) describes the ballad and pamphlet writer's penchant for borrowings and topical matter, and echoes the complaint that news pamphlets bestow dignity and permanence on frivolous matters, at best, and lies, at worst.

> His Verses are like his clothes, miserable Centos and patches,[26] yet their pace is not altogether so hobbling as an Almanacks. The death of a great man or the burning of a house furnish him an Argument, and the nine Muses are out strait in mourning gownes, and *Melpomine* [a Muse] *cryes* Fire, Fire. […] His frequent'st Workes goe out in single sheets, and are chanted from market to market, to a vile tune and a worse throat, whilst the poore Country wench melts like her butter to hear them. And these are the Stories of some men of Tyburne, or a strange Monster out of Germany: or sitting in a Baudy-house, hee writes God's Judgements. (E9v-E10v)

The pot poet's productions may be, as Earle says, "the dreggs of wit; yet mingled with good drink mae have some relish" (E9) Earle, like the essayist Sir William Cornwallis, enjoyed a third-rate ballad and preposterous pamphlet even while he sniffed his nose at ephemeral literature as a class. As Cornwallis wrote in his "Of the observation, and use of things," pearls did indeed lurk among the swine:

> All kinde of bookes are profitable, except printed Bawdery; they abuse youth: but Pamphlets, and lying Stories, and News, and two penny Poets I would knowe them, but beware of beeing familiar with them: my custome is to read these, and presently to make

[26] The playwright was also accused of patching his scripts together from other works, thus the derisive term *play-patcher*. See Stern 1-2.

> use of them, for they lie in my privy, and when I come thither, and have occasion to imploy it, I read them, halfe a side at once is my ordinary, which when I have read, I use in that kind, that waste paper is most subject too, but to a cleanlier profit. (I7)

In what must be one of the earliest remarks about toilet-reading, Cornwallis reveals that news pamphlets and ballads were for him literal bumfodder. "I would knowe them, but beware of being familiar with them": Cornwallis tellingly puts the issue in class terms. A gentleman was not to be on overly close terms with cheap print.[27]

For sheer scatological grandiosity, few complaints about the abundance of cheap print can rival those of John Davies' *A Scourge for Paper-Persecutors* (1625) and Abraham Holland's *A continued just inquistion against paper persecutors* (1625), which was appended to the former. Both satires single out pamphlets, and more specifically news pamphlets, as particularly pernicious examples of cheap print. In Davies' *Scourge,* Paper, personified as a much-abused maiden, laments how she is stained and drowned with rivers of ink. Cornwallis, Jonson, Dryden, and no doubt many others, joked about the sanitary use of cheap print. Davies' despairing Paper, in an extensive metaphorical conceit, notes that wits first defecate onto her. She declares:

> An other comes with Wit, too costive [constipated] then,
> Making a Glister-pipe [clyster-pipe, i.e. a pipe for delivering enemas] of his rare pen:
> And through the same he all my brest becakes,
> And turnes me so, to nothing but *Ajax* [a jakes].
> …….
> Yet sith his wit was then with Will annoyd,
> And I enforct to beare what wit did void,
> I cannot choose but say as I have said,
> His wit (made loose) defiled mee his maide. (A3v)

[27] Cornwallis also comments on the credibility of news reports in his essay "Of Flattery, Dissimulation, and Lying": "There is another kinde of people, that builde a certain reputation with beeing the Chroniclers of uncredible relations, marvailes impossible to swallow without faith. The vanitie of these is impardonable, giving [surrendering] precious truth, for base leasings [lies]" (Nn7v).

Cheap print is nothing but paper defiled twice, stained with metaphorical shit (words) before being stained with literal shit.

Holland's follow-up satire employs fecal metaphors of its own, singling out corantos as especially ubiquitous and worthless:

> …But to behold the wals
> Butter'd with weekely Newes compos'd in Pauls…
> To see such *Batter* everie weeke besmeare
> Each publike post, and Church dore, and to heare
> These *shameful lies*, would make a man in spight
> Of Nature, turn *Satyrist*, and write
> Revenging lines, against these *shameless men*,
> Who thus torment both *Paper*, *Presse*, and *Pen*.
> Th' Impostors that these *Trumperies* doe utter
> Are, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and (-----). (A3v-A4)

The above passage puns on Nathaniel Butter's name twice (*Butter'd* and *Batter*) and leaves it as the implicit rhyme of "utter." In a 1644 pamphlet, John Taylor—invoking the voice of Thomas Nashe's ghost and looking back nearly sixty years to the Marprelate controversy—would push the fecal-print metaphor even further. The printed works of "the Rascalls called *Martinists*" with "Laxative Purity did most shamefully in printed toyes, Pamphlets, and Lying Libells, besquitter all *England* over" (*Crop-Eare Curried* A2v). Cheap print, wrote the prolific pamphlet writer Taylor, could stain the world.

Though it does bear a lion's share of censure, ephemera—what I have been calling cheap print—was not the only form of print excoriated in *A Scourge for Paper-Persecutors* and its *Continued Just Inquisition*. The two-part pamphlet decried the flood of bad writing in general, whether a tawdry news pamphlet or a needless, insipid classical commentary, and in this way it expressed the broader unease concerning *multitudo librorum*, the abundance of books.

In *Too Much to Know*, Anne Blair argues that feelings of information overload as well as anxieties about the surfeit of books predate the early modern period. We can see such sentiments as early as Seneca's admonishment to read deeply among a select group of books for "an abundance of books is a distraction." Likewise, the author of *Ecclesiastes* remarks "And further, by these [the words of the wise], my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

But the sense of information overload and unease with the ever-growing *multitudo librorum* would increase with the invention of the printing press, especially as the output of ephemera increased. Cheap print was notably culpable for diluting the quality of literature, for it was abundant and low in worth. In 1526 Erasmus was already singling out pamphlets: "Is there anywhere on earth exempt from these swarms of new books? Even if, taken out one at a time, they offered something worth knowing, the very mass of them would be a serious impediment to learning from satiety if nothing else" (qtd. in Blair 55). Printing was at fault for the influx of inferior, distracting books, for printers, Erasmus claimed, "fill the world with pamphlets and books [that are]…foolish, ignorant, malignant, libelous, mad, impious and subversive; and such is the flood that even things that might have done some good lose all their goodness" (qtd. in Blair 55-56).

George Wither lambasted stationers' preference for "termely Pamphlets" and "Curranto's," "which they provide to take up the peoples money and time; that there is neither of them left to bestow on a profitable book" (I1/129). Consequently, doctrine (the "tenets of our Church"), learning, and the arts "are already almost lost among the writing of Mountebank Authors" (I1/129). If the English gentry ever chanced to a read a book, Robert Burton scoffed,

"'tis an English Chronicle…a play-book, or some pamphlet of news" (i.320). In 1640 a petition signed by 15,000 citizens spoke of "The swarming of lascivious, idle, and unprofitable books and pamphlets, playbooks, and ballads" that caused the "withdrawing of people from reading, studying, and hearing the Word of God and other good books" (qtd. in G. Taylor 46). Good books were in danger. It was as if contemporaries feared a new Babel, built of bad books, which would be toppled not by God but by its own inordinate size. The result was once again confusion: good citizens undone—stupefied and distracted—by the mountains of paper. Spenser's allegorical monster Error tellingly spewed out not only poison but a vomit of gobbets, books, and papers.

"Warnings about overabundance became more alarmist" in the print-saturated seventeenth century (Blair 58). By 1685 Adrien Baillet could warn of a coming apocalypse: "We have reason to fear that the multitude of books which grows every day in a prodigious fashion will make the following centuries fall into as barbarous a state as that of the centuries that followed the fall of the Roman Empire" (qtd. in Blair 59). News pamphlets formed a part of this diluting superfluity of words, posted on every wall, public post, and church door as Holland complained. "Any scurrile Pamphlet is welcome to our mercenary Stationers in *English*," Robert Burton griped, but in learned Latin works "they will not deale" (16). For "as Scaliger observes, 'nothing…sells better than a scurrile pamphlet,' *tum maxime cum novitas excitat palatum*" [most of all when it has the spice of novelty] (Burton 20).

The omnivorous Burton seems to have felt a sense of news overload himself. In "Democritus to the Reader," the long preface to *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, he writes:

> A mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they act their parts, which methinks are diversely presented unto me, as from a common theatre or scene. I

> hear new news every day, and those ordinary rumours of war, plagues, fires, inundations, thefts, murders, massacres, meteors, comets, spectrums, prodigies, apparitions, of towns taken, cities besieged in France, Germany, Turkey, Persia, Poland, etc., daily musters and preparations, and such-like, which these tempestuous times afford, battles fought, so many men slain, monomachies, shipwrecks, piracies, and sea-fights, peace, leagues, stratagems, and fresh alarums. *A vast confusion* of vows, wishes, actions, edits, petitions, lawsuits, pleas, laws, proclamations, complaints, grievances are daily brought to our ears. New books every day, pamphlets, currantoes, stories, whole catalogues of volumes of all sorts, news, paradoxes, opinions, schisms, heresies, controversies…Thus I daily hear, and such-like, both private and public news…(18)[28]

Burton read it all, classics *and* sensational pamphlets. Indeed, he collected ephemera, and that collection is housed today in the Bodleian. (One of the two extant copies of Trundle's *A Miracle, of Miracles,* discussed in chapter two, belonged to Burton.) "The pamphlets of news deepen Democritus Junior's melancholy in his solitary existence," Raymond writes (*Pamphlets* 51). Roger Chartier detects a complaint of information overload in Burton's "vast confusion…daily brought to our ears." Burton seems to express unease with "the superfluity of news," as Chartier puts it (53). "This unremitting flow of news can only complicate the task of true judgment, which calls for privacy and quiet reflection…For Burton, the publication of news in whatever form merely aggravated the disorder attendant upon novelty" (Chartier 53). The hunger for news was thus a dangerous appetite: "We are most part too inquisitive and apt to hearken after news," Burton wrote (ii.81). The glut of news and surfeit of information struck Burton as a curse, even as he greedily consumed and collected it. In the same year as Burton's *Anatomy* preface, John Earle described St. Paul's Walk, the site of those who "trafficke in Newes," with precisely the same phrase: *a vast confusion*. With its "vast confusion of Languages…strange humming or buzze, mixt of walking, tongues, and feet…still roar or loud whisper," St. Paul's was "nothing liker Babel" (I10v).

[28] The edition quoted here is the first revised version (1628), but the preface first appears in 1621, at the dawn of English corantos.

Early modern newsprint anxiety, as I am defining it, therefore goes beyond the issue of mistrust—beyond the worry that news was often unintentionally or intentionally false. It encompasses anxiety about the overabundance of news, the triviality of news, the meddling of news, and the medium of print itself. The medium of print already suffered under a potential deficit of trust for reasons elucidated by Adrian Johns in *The Nature of the Book,* and cheap print like news pamphlets even more so. If print was bad, cheap print was worse. And worst of all perhaps was newsprint, for it struck contemporaries as a somewhat monstrous thing: an oral report transfigured and fixed into permanent type. Tattle arrested into print.

The Sussex Serpent: An Example of Fake News

Examples of extant early modern news that are demonstrably *willfully* false are rare, though they do exist. Chapter two will discuss one of these fake news stories, and its surprising connection to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, at length. There are also examples of news stories that contemporaries widely deemed to be impostures, news stories which were judged to be fake news in the court of public opinion. One notable such case is the reception of a 1614 news pamphlet about a dragon on the loose in England. Though we cannot demonstrate that no such monster existed, we can recreate the monster's scornful reception.

The pamphlet in question—John Trundle's *True and Wonderfull. A Discourse relating a strange and monstrous Serpent (or Dragon) lately discovered, and yet living, to the great annoyance and divers slaughters both of Men and Cattell, by his strong and violent poyson* (1614)—might well be the most infamous case of fake news in the early seventeenth century, an instance of both invention and bait-and-switch. The title page features an arresting woodcut of a

dragon spewing poison on a man, woman, and two animals, with three of the four already on the ground dead.

The prefatory address in *True and wonderfull* is unusually reflective on the issue of how lies are promulgated in news pamphlets, and explicitly considers several key issues, namely vetting and confirmation, translation, and difficulties born of time and distance.

> The just rewarde of him that is accustomed to lie, is, not be believed when he speaketh the truth: so just an occasion may sometimes be imposed upon the pamphleting pressers; and therefore, if we receive the same rewarde, we cannot much blame our accusers, which often fals out either by our forward credulity to but-seeming true reports, or by false coppies translated from other languages, which (though we beget not) we foster, and our shame is little the lesse. But, passing by what's past, let not our present truth blush for any former falsehood sake: the countrie is near us, Sussex; the time present, August;[29] the subject, a Serpent; strange, yet now a neighbour to us; and, *it were more then impudence to forge a lie so near home*, that every man might turne in our throates; believe it, or reade it not, or reade it (doubting) for I believe ere though hast read this little all, thou wilt not doubt of one, but believe there are many serpents in England. (A3-A3v, italics mine)

The author diagnoses two ways that pamphlet writers are responsible for the *spread* of false reports: by printing with "forward credulity" written accounts based on insufficiently vetted "but-seeming reports," and by translating "false coppies." The former is a failure of due diligence and a problem of time, of being overly hasty; the latter is a problem of distance: translated news was foreign news, and that meant distant sources, eyewitnesses, and far-flung guarantors of veracity. In the case of translation, the author is not responsible for "beget[ting]" the lie into print but for "foster[ing]" it. In neither case anatomized here by the pamphlet author is there an intent to deceive, an intent to propagate what we now call fake news.

Judging from the historical record, *True and wonderfull* was taken for a lie, for it is one of the most ridiculed news pamphlets of its age. It was scorned by contemporaries for being fake

[29] Both nearness and recentness are emphasized in the extended title of the pamphlet. The dragon's forest home is but "thirtie miles from London" and his rampaging occurred "this present month of August. 1614" (A2).

news: not merely a false report but a wholly invented story designed with no regard for truth and maximum regard for profit. For his dragon and other printed wonders, Trundle saw his name become a byword among the satirists, who couldn't believe their good luck at being dealt such a pun-able surname. The author of *Lachrymae Londinenses* (1626) expresses his disgust for "Spuriall pamphlets, which the presse hath of late spewed out, (broods of Barbican [the location of Trundle's shop], Smithfield, and the Bridge, and Trundled, trolled and marshaled up and downe along the streets" (B2-B2v). A character in Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* wagers, "Well, if he read this [letter] with patience, Ile be gelt, and troll ballads for Mr. JOHN TRUNDLE, yonder, the rest of my mortalitie" (1.3.62-4).

Contemporary references to Trundle and his Sussex Serpent, as it came to be known, show that the dragon "acquired a name and reputation which lasted nearly eighty years after its first media appearance" (Harte 104). *True and wonderfull* appeared in 1614, the same year as Trundle's reprinted and re-dated pamphlet *A miracle, of miracles*, which details a demonic attack by headless bear and the prophecies of a resurrected girl (see chapter two). In 1616, Thomas Adams published his character book (in the form of a mock-medical treatise) *Diseases of the Soule*. He names Disease 17 "The Itch, or the Busy-body" (63/I4). As if infected with a venereal disease, the busybody unwittingly spreads lies: "He heares a lie in private, and hastes to publish it; so one knave guls him, hee innumerable fooles, with the strange *Fish at Yarmouth*, or the *Serpent in Sussex*" (65/K1). In this way credulous readers unwittingly propagated the fictions of news. In 1617, the anonymous author of *A True Report and Exact Description of a Mighty Sea-Monster, or Whale* laments that those who "busse and abuse" readers "with any fond fables of flying Serpents, or as fond delusions of devouring Dragons, of Men or women burned to death

miraculously without fire," etc., have made his job as a conscientious reporter of a true event all the more difficult. Trundle's is the only early modern dragon sighting to this point, so his serpent must be the dragon the anonymous author has in mind. Indeed, the mention of men "burned to death miraculously without fire" refers to another Trundle production from the same period, *Fire from Heaven* (1613), which tells the story of an unfortunate man "consumed to ashes, and no fire seene" (Hilliard A1). The author of *A Wonder Woorth the Reading* (1617) prefaces his account of a monstrous child with a poem, which begins:

> Ile broach no lye, past mans beliefe or reason,
> For that I would keepe custome with the Season,
> I bring no newes here of some hideous Dragon,
> […]
> But here I bring (in a new true-borne Storie) (A1v)

Jonson refers to "the serpent in Sussex" in *News from the New World* (acted 1620) as a "printed conundrum," an example of "news that, when a man sends them down to the shires where they are said to be done, were never there to be found" (42-46). Fletcher references Trundle's dragon in *Wit Without Money* (pub. 1639), with the idea being that to make money in newswriting an author should compose the most sensational material: "The world's a fine believing world; write news. / Dragons in Sussex, sir, or fiery battles / Seen in the air" (2.4.70-72).

The translated news pamphlet *Good Newes to Christendome* (1620) includes a significant reference to Trundle's dragon, a reference unknown to previous scholarship on the matter. Printed for the often-mocked Nathaniel Butter, the translator of this pamphlet opens his address to readers with the confession that he was initially disinclined to translate the following Italian narrative (ostensibly from a letter, a common conceit) because he at first deemed the account untrue:

> Gentle Reader: I confesse unto you, when this letter came first into my hand…I read it as a thing according to the Italian phrase, *trouata* [invented] or *bugiarda* [false]; and christned it with this opinion, that it could march in no other rancke of veritie, then amongst our selves the Sussex Serpent, the German Ghosts, and the great Armiemet [Armie met] in Tartarie marching by the Caspian shore over Taurus, all which of my owne knowledge came out of the shop of invention… (A3)

The Sussex Serpent is grouped with two other fake reports, which the translator expects his newsreaders to also recognize via his brief descriptions. Furthermore, he presumes readers will have scorned and dismissed all three of these reports, which would indicate Trundle's dragon was but one actor in a rotating cast of infamous impostures. As for how the translator knows the three stories mentioned "came out of the shop of invention" is not clear, but he feels he can presume that "amongst our selves"—i.e. all good Englishmen[30]—the three cited stories will be considered patent hogwash. (There is no evidence that Trundle's contemporaries somehow *proved* the dragon was an imposture, though no doubt if anyone arrived in London from Sussex they were asked whether or not the news of a dragon there was really true.[31]) As we have seen, these jabs conform to the pattern of one newsman denouncing another in order to enhance his own credibility. What is notable is that the translator of *Good Newes to Christendome* references specific reports more or less by name, and, in the case of the Sussex Serpent, an account already six years old.

The early modern court of public opinion deemed numerous stories to be outright inventions, *Good Newes*—itself an account of stupendous marvels in the Middle East—would seem to suggest. Yet the Sussex Serpent endured as a news story of scorn. According to

[30] Another possibility might be that "amongst our selves" refers to news stationers and professional newswriters, which would suggest that the translator knows the three cited news stories are inventions via his professional connections and/or stationer gossip.

[31] Indeed, far from a printed refutation, there was a follow-up ballad about the slaying of the Sussex dragon, though this work has not survived. On this point, see Johnson.

Braithwait in his satirical character sketches titled *Whimzies* (1631), the only silver lining was the short lifecycle of printed false news: "Yet our best comfort is, his [the curranto-coiner's] *Chymera's* live not long; a weeke is the longest in the Citie, and after their arrivall, little longer in the Countrey. Which past, they melt like *Butter*, or match [i.e. light] a pipe, and so *Burne*" (B9/21-B9v/22).[32] But Braithwait was himself still deriding the supreme imposture of Trundle's dragon years after the fact. For in the same 1631 book he satirized the ballad-monger in addition to the curranto-coiner. Both invented news whole-cloth in a pinch : "for want of truer relations, for a neede, he [a ballad-monger] can finde you out a *Sussex Dragon*, some Sea or Inland monster, drawne out by some *Shoelane* man, in a *Gorgon-like* feature, to enforce more horror in the beholder" (B3/9). Trundle's dragon did not melt like butter. Instead, it enjoyed a remarkable shelf-life, at least in part—the contemporary references indicate—because it was perceived by many as a notably outrageous example of false news. A ballad printed in a 1652 collection and titled *Will you buy a new merry Booke* jokes that "heer's no Sussex Serpent to fright you here in my Bundle, nor was it e-ver Printed for the Widdow Trundle" (Hilton F2).[33] This sales ballad seeks to tempt listeners into buying a ballad of a maid undone. The claims just quoted would seem to be in effect then: *I don't sell preposterous stories about dragons; none of my ballads were printed for John or Margery Trundle, so they are fresh* and *you can believe what they say*.

The news historian Matthias Shaaber deems *True and Wonderfull* "as gross an imposture as cynicism or credulity ever practiced" (239). Trundle's "monster," he writes, "was too much

[32] Braithwait puns on the names of Nathaniel Butter and Nicholas Bourne, the principal curranto printers of the 1620s.

[33] Trundle's wife Margery continued her husband's print business after his death. See Johnson 180 and Smith 190. Würzbach cites a version of this same ballad titled *A Song for Autolycus*, which the nineteenth-century music antiquarian E. F. Rimbault dates c. 1620 (Würzbach 272).

even for the credulity of a credulous age and it was laughed out of existence" (Shaaber 154). In fact, derisive laughter seems to have preserved the beast. "As late as 1692," writes Jeremy Harte, "the astrologer John Gadbury had to defend a policy of putting scientific notes in his almanac instead of 'a story of dragons seen in the air in Sussex'" (103). *True and wonderfull* was memorable precisely because it was so widely deemed to be the purest incarnation of fake news. Trundle's dragon became a byword for fake news, a fake-news touchstone.

We are fortunate that such a rich record[34] of derision exists for *True and wonderfull*, making for one of the most robust accounts of contemporary reaction to a news pamphlet. Two outstanding questions remain, however. First, was *True and Wonderfull* consistently read as a cynical imposture, or was it sometimes read—especially given its literate, wry tone, its long, erudite preamble on the history of dragons in literature, and its heavily moralized reading of the dragon itself[35]—as a literary jest? Was this "news" pamphlet a serious imposture or a playful imposture, a lie or a literary game, and did contemporaries distinguish between the two?[36]

Second, why was Trundle's dragon seemingly singled out as patently false, an obvious invention, when wonder news abounded? Why did the serpent so gall when magic fish and showers of blood and floating armies did not? Why did Trundle's venomous dragon provoke extensive derision when his tale of a demonic headless bear of the same year apparently did not? As the next chapter details, Trundle's account of the headless bear can also properly be called

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[34] Contemporary references to Trundle and his Sussex Serpent are recorded in Johnson, Harte, Walsham, and Hadfield. Further contemporary references to Trundle's dragon are still likely to be discovered. The references in *A True Report and Exact Description of a Mighty Sea-Monster*, *A Wonder Woorth the Reading*, and *Good Newes to Christendome*, all discussed above, are not recorded in the aforementioned scholarship.

[35] The pamphlet author interprets the dragon as representative of our own "Serpentine sins" (C1.).

[36] How the pamphlet was read—as fake news or as game—is considered briefly by Johnson and at length by Hadfield.

fake news, though fake news of a different kind. The headless bear is in fact more *demonstrably* false than the dragon, and it is to this monster, and its surprising connection to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CASE OF THE HEADLESS BEARS: HOW A FAKE NEWS PAMPHLET SOLVES A CRUX IN SHAKESPEARE

> The manner in which Mephistopheles acquitted himself in his amorphous shape and the tribulation of all concerned must be read in this curious work, the interest of which extends beyond the locality connected with the incidents described.
>
> –Anonymous, from the Notes on Books section of *Notes and Queries*, 1886, reviewing a modern reprint edition of *A true and most Dreadfull discourse*

> Lord helpe us what maner of thing is this?
>
> –*A true and most Dreadfull discourse*, 1584

Shakespeareans, to use the term Ben Jonson applied to John Trundle's infamous dragon, have a headless bear *conundrum*.[1]

The troublemaker is not the bear of *The Winter's Tale*, who very much required his head in order to eat Antigonus. Rather, the offending beast occurs in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, composed sometime in the mid-1590s. As Puck runs after the Athenian rustics, who have just beheld the transmogrified Bottom—who, it will be recalled, has lost his human head and received an ass head in its place—he declares:

> I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round,
> Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier.[2]
> Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,
> A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire,

[1] In Jonson's masque *News from the New World*, the Factor complains of the Printer's untrustworthy "printed conundrums of the serpent in Sussex, or the witches bidding the devil to dinner at Derby" (43-45).

[2] In Robert Burton's metaphor, melancholy recluses—those who engage in "voluntary solitariness"—become lost in their own fancies, "as he (they say) that is led round about a heath with a Puck in the night, they run earnestly on in this labyrinth of anxious and solicitous melancholy meditations" (i.247).

> And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,
> Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn. (3.1.94-99)

Adventurous scholars occasionally ventured emendations to edit the monster out of existence: in place of *headless* they proposed *heedless*, *leadless*, and *curbless*.[3] After all, why would Puck want to be a *headless* bear, a creature much more specific and bizarre than the generic horse, hound, and hog? The seemingly definitive adjective is not repeated in line 99, though for obvious reasons, I think: *headless*, or whatever the adjective should be, would spoil the metrical exuberance created by the spondaic pileup of monosyllables. From a semantic standpoint, *heedless* works best of the proposed emendations: the bear is fearless, vicious—*curst*, as the bear in *The Winter's Tale* is described—and the word resonates with the heedlessness of those whom Puck misleads in the form of a fire, that is, a willow-o'-the-wisp.[4] Finally, and perhaps most convincingly, a headless bear, one could presume, cannot "roar" as Puck has it. A heedless bear certainly could. Emendations have been argued on lesser grounds, no doubt.

This curious headless bear does not appear in any of the extant ballads about Robin Good-fellow, but a comparison of Puck's speech and the Robin Good-fellow ballads shows the porous relation between play, pamphlet, and broadside. The ballad "The Mad Merry Pranks of Robin Good-fellow. To the the tune of Dulcina" (1680) appears to imitate Shakespeare. Robin boasts:

> If any wonderers I meet
> that from their night-sports do trudge home,
> With counterfeiting voice I greet
> and cause them on with me to roam;

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[3] See Littledale 63, Simpson 89, and Rahter 157. In his 1858 edition of Shakespeare, the German scholar Nicolaus Delius had written in a footnote on *headless*, "Vielleicht wäre *heedless* zu lesen" (Perhaps should read *heedless*). Simpson quipped, "Delius conjectured 'heedless,' which must have been symptomatic of his own state of mind" (89).

[4] Puck "Mislead[s] night wanderers, laughing at their harm" (2.1.39).

> through woods, through lakes,
> through bogs, though brakes,
> O'er bush and briar with them I go,
> I call upon
> them to come on
> And wend me laughing, ho ho ho.
> Sometimes I meet them like a man,
> sometimes an ox, sometimes a hound.
> And to a horse I turn me can. (Paster and Howard 317-319)

Though both passages include the same landscape (bog, bush, brake, and briar) and agree on Puck's transformation into horse and hound, the ballad says nothing of a headless bear. But Shakespeare in turn was relying on earlier ballads. As Julie Crawford writes, "Oral tales of the 'mad merry pranks of Robin Good-fellow' were the sources of Shakespeare's Puck, and they were printed in ballad, pamphlet, and chapbook forms from at least the 1590s until well into the 1690s" ("Oral Culture" 116). Crawford cites, for example, *Tell-trothes new-years gift being Robin Good-fellowes news out of those countries* (1593), *Robin Good-Fellow, his mad prankes, and merry jests full of honest mirth* (1628), and the aforementioned 1680 ballad. But no Robin Good-fellow ballad makes any mention of a headless bear.

A poem by Robert Burton makes Shakespeare's headless bear even more intriguing. In the third edition of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1628), Burton added a prefatory poem entitled "The Author's Abstract of Melancholy." It includes these lines:

> Methinks I hear, methinks I see
> Ghosts, goblins, fiends; my phantasy
> Presents a thousand ugly shapes,
> Headless bears, black men, and apes,
> Doleful outcries, and fearful sights,
> My sad and dismal soul affrights. (12)

Did Burton take his headless bear straight from Shakespeare, or were there other headless bear sources? Or, strangest of all, was the headless bear a recognized type of apparition in early

modern culture—a distinct ghost or puck or monster with which Shakespeare and Burton were both familiar?

By 1906, the scholar H. Littledale had made the connection between Burton's poem and Puck's speech and reasoned that Shakespeare's "headless bear" was neither a misprint nor a bizarre one-off of the age. The headless bears had to be confronted. Littledale, however, lacked the key to his puzzle. Based only on the Burton and Shakespeare passages, he rather boldly surmised: "It seems clear, therefore, that the 'headless bear' was a popular terror, and 'roared' when it appeared to children and others in those believing ages. The various emendations, mine included, go down before this quotation from Burton" (63). The key to the conundrum that Littleton lacked was a news pamphlet from 1584—a full ten years before *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—with an astonishing title: *A true and most Dreadfull discourse of a woman possessed with the Deuill: who in the likenesse of a headlesse Beare fetched her out of her Bedd, and in the presence of seuen persons, most strangely roulled her thorow three Chambers, and doune a high paire of staiers, on the fower and twentie of May last. 1584. At Dichet in Sommersetshire. A matter as miraculous as euer was seen in our time*.

This chapter gives a comprehensive account of the print history and significance of *A true and most Dreadfull discourse*, a sensational news pamphlet that tells the tale of a woman named Margaret Cooper, who was assaulted by the devil in the form of headless bear. The pamphlet is of interest to print and news historians because it was deceptively reprinted multiple times (in 1614, 1641, and 1843) and offers one of the few clear-cut cases of disguised news recycling, i.e.

silent plagiarizing with re-dating.[5] It is a news story that demonstrably *became* fake news, even if it was not an invention from the start. The pamphlet is of interest to folklorists and scholars of the occult because of the narrative itself, including its unusual devil. Finally, the pamphlet is of importance to Shakespeareans for the light it sheds on the crux discussed above. But, as I will argue, *A true and most Dreadfull discourse* does more than solve a crux in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: it alters our reading of Shakespeare's Puck while also underscoring several thematic preoccupations of that play. The headless bear of the pamphlet was a demonic threat, and thus a potent reminder of the demonic forces that could lay waste to (typically wayward) Christians. Shakespeare, however, adapted the headless bear of the pamphlet narrative into something more benign: a symbol of lover's madness. As I will show, though the symbolic significance of the pamphlet headless bear is overdetermined, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Puck's headless-bear form amplifies the play's thematic concern with sudden transformation and romantic irrationality—the latter a kind of headlessness.

The Headless Bear Pamphlet and Its Afterlife

A true and most Dreadfull discourse was printed for Thomas Nelson in 1584, and its title page includes a crude woodcut of the fearsome creature, which is indeed headless and looks like a cross between a bear and a frog. But despite the flirtation with whimsy—a headless bear that rolls a woman around her house!—the account soberly describes a terrifying event: demonic assault.

The story, briefly, is this: a wealthy yeoman named Stephen Cooper, being sick, sends his wife Margaret on business to a farm in Gloucestershire. Margaret Cooper does not find all things

[5] Old news could be disguised as new news in one of two ways: the old date could be changed to a more recent date, an explicit deception, or the old date could be removed and no date, beyond the new publication date, included. The removal of the original date in conjunction with a phrase in the title that denoted contemporaneity (e.g. A Strange Occurrence *lately happened*) and the current publication date completed the deception.

to her liking at the farm, though what is amiss is not specified. When she returns, her husband has recovered, but she begins "to use much idle talk" (A4v). In a manic, fixated fashion her words keep returning to the farm she's just visited and to the groat that their son found a week earlier: "Thus she continued (as it were one that had been bewitched or haunted with some euill spirite)" for some time (A4v). Her behavior "disquiet[s]" her husband, and he asks her to say the Lord's prayer, which she begins but cannot finish, as she soon becomes fixated on the groat and on her wedding ring (A5).

The situation worsens. Margaret begins to have violent spasms, and must be held down in bed (by friends and family, now present) while she foams at the mouth. After her fit subsides, Margaret says that on her recent trip she had "to beat awaie the Beare whiche followed her into the Yarde when she came out of the Countrie, which to her thinking had no hed" (A5v). She calms down and seems "to be very patient and comformable to reason, until midnight," at which point she "suddenly waking, called to her husband, and cried out, saying she did see a strange thing like unto a Snaile, carrying fire in most wonderfull sort" (A5v-A6).[6] This, as might be expected, alarms her husband. The candles will not burn properly, and Margaret asks if anyone else can see the devil. There is a dramatic pause worthy of a Hollywood screenplay. "Well (quoth she) if you see nothing now, you shall see something by and by" (A6). And then with a great noise and noxious stink something comes "to the bedd muche like unto a Beare, but it had no head nor no taile, halfe a yarde in length and halfe a yarde in height" (A6-A6v).[7] Stephen

[6] Nelson's *snaile* would eventually metamorphose into *snake* in a 1922 reprint of the pamphlet entitled *Two Strange Tales from Ditcheat*. Though a flaming snake makes a good deal of sense—the creature would thus be a dragon or fire drake—early versions of the pamphlet all have some spelling of *snail*. The modern reprint has mistaken an *l* for a *k*.

[7] I presume that this was half of a *linear* yard (i.e. half of 16.5 feet), also known as a *land yard*, rather than half of three feet. An eighteen-inch headless bear would not make a very formidable impression. The artist who carved the woodblock for Trundle's title page—discussed below—clearly gives us a *large* headless bear. It is difficult to

Cooper strikes the bear with a stool to no effect ("the stroke sounded as though he had stroken uppon a featherbedd"), and everyone present is understandably confounded when the bear grabs Margaret and "roll[s] her to & fro in the Chamber, and under the bed" (A6v). Then, as the title page promised, "this Monster which we suppose to be the Deuill, did thrust the womans hed between her legges and so roulled her in a rounde compasse like an hoope through three other Chambers downe an high paire of staires in the hall" (A6v). The seven witnesses lament and pray. The monster finally leaves and Margaret is put to bed, only to float halfway out the window. In short order, her "sorrowfull husbande and his brother imboldened themselves in the Lorde" and rebuke the devil, Margaret is pulled back inside, and a shining baby angel appears. The candles flame back into life, and all is well (A7-A7v). The narrative ends with Margaret "acknowledging that it was for her sinnes that she was so tormented of the evill Spirite," though these failings are never specified (A7v). The pamphlet concludes with the names of the witnesses who "all attest that this [account] is most true" (A8).

The afterlife of Nelson's bear is almost as interesting as the story itself. About the stationer Thomas Nelson only a few things are known. His extant topical works include a number of translated news pamphlets, primarily detailing events in France. He also both printed and penned ballads. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Nelson states that he was a "bookseller and ballad maker" of "obscure origins:" "The Stationers' register from 1583 to 1592 records a number of ballads and topical works licensed to Nelson, few of which have

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imagine a tiny headless bear rolling Margaret Cooper around in a hoop, as the pamphlet describes. The size of the bear is not insignificant for interpreting the nature of this supernatural creature. A small demonic bear would be more puck- or bug-like as opposed to a large demonic bear reminiscent of other fearsome forms of demonic assault, such as the black dog or giant cat. Nelson's woodcut shows only the bear, so its size cannot be judged relative to anything else.

survived, but among these four were by Nelson himself" (Larkum).[8] Nelson was arrested in 1586 "by officers of the Stationers' Company for an unnamed offence" (Larkum). Possession accounts could get a printer into trouble, especially if these stories involved exorcisms or were based on cases known to be fraudulent. Keith Thomas notes that in 1574 church leaders took measures "against unlicensed printers who disseminated the story" of two English women who had counterfeited their [possession] symptoms (483).[9] One might speculate that Nelson was arrested in 1586 for printing the story of Margaret Cooper's possession in 1584, but it is hard to see what in the pamphlet narrative would have been objectionable to authorities.

What is known is that in 1614 Nelson's pamphlet was plagiarized, nearly word for word, in a pamphlet printed for John Trundle and re-titled *A Miracle, of Miracles. As fearfull as ever was seene or heard of in the memorie of Man. Which lately happened at Dichet in Sommersetshire, and sent by divers credible witnesses to be published in London…Also a Prophesie…Withall, Lincolnshires Teares*.[10] Trundle's pamphlet includes three narratives, as noted on its elaborate title page: the stolen possession story of Margaret Cooper, the story of a prophetic resurrected girl (also poached from an earlier pamphlet), and a tale of flooding. All three stories are presented as if they had "lately happened," as the subtitle puts it, and indeed the title page attaches a date of 1613 explicitly to the second and third tales (A1).

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[8] Some of the ballads Nelson authored can be found in the English Broadside Ballad Archive.

[9] See Thomas' discussion (483-492) on "the increasingly political character of these possessions and dispossessions" (483). For example, John Darrell, a Puritan exorcist, touted Puritans' reported wonder-working as a validation of Puritan beliefs (Thomas 483-85).

[10]The Trundle pamphlet exists in two versions, both of which exist in only one known extant copy. One is titled *A Miracle, of Miracles* (1614) and one *The Miracle, of Miracles* (n.d.). As Simon Davies writes, "the title-page of the copy of *The Miracle, of Miracles* has been cropped, so its date is unknown. It could plausibly be a second edition, indicating that the pamphlet was a commercial success" (51). The text of *The Miracle, of Miracles* has been reset, but does not significantly vary from *A Miracle, of Miracles*. Most intriguingly, *The Miracle, of Miracles* looks to have been owned by Robert Burton.

Trundle's title page refrains from mentioning a "*Deuill…in the likenesse of a headlesse Beare*," as Nelson's title page had it—perhaps suggesting Trundle felt the explicit mention of a headless bear would be too brazen an imposture—but it does feature its own striking woodcut. And whereas Nelson's woodcut shows only a crude headless bear in an awkward walking posture, Trundle's woodcut has a more detailed scene that was clearly commissioned for this narrative: a headless bear sitting (or perhaps it is meant to be a fearsome rampant-style pose) by the bedside of Margaret Cooper. Cooper is lying in the bed, surrounded by her family, friends, and the angel from the end of the story. The location and the characters come from the story, but this scene never occurs—the bear and the angel are never seen together, most likely because the angel registers (or actually causes) the expulsion of the evil spirit. The artist has created extra drama by cramming all the essentials of the narrative into one bedroom tableau. This bear is obviously large—it towers over the reclining Margaret Cooper—though the image contradicts the text by granting the bear a small tail.

Nelson's pamphlet begins with an address entitled "To the Reader."[11] It is the kind of moral admonition that typically prefaced an account of strange news:

> Beloved and curtious reader, we have to consider by this strange discourse, how ready Sathan is to take hold on us if we fall from God never so little. He continually runneth up an downe seeking whom he may devour: But notwithstandying his temptations which are great, the mercie of God is greater, who never faileth to send comfort in temptation, if we accept thereof. Great are the examples, both of Gods mercy and might, to put us in remembrance of our sinnes which are infinite and loathsome, wherein if we continue, let us undoubtedly looke for the reward thereof, which is an everlasting destruction both of bodie and soule. Let not this which is here declared seeme a fained fable unto thee, but assure thy selfe that all such thinges are sent as warninges for our wickednesse. […] Many are the woonders which lately happened, as of suddaine and straunge death upon perjured persons, straunge sights in the Aier, straunge birthes on the Earth: Earthquakes, commetts and fiery Impressions, and all to put us in mynde of God, whose woorkes are

[11] For the sake of clarity, I have written the following account as if Nelson authored his edition and Trundle authored his. That is far from certain, of course. The preface in Trundle's pamphlet is in fact signed "T. I.," which may or may not be Trundle's own initials reversed.

> wonderfull. Remember the late storme of haylstones in which many thinges were slaine and beaten to the ground, which Hailestones were equall in greatnesse to a Goose Egg, of eight inches about. These and suche like examples (good Reader) warneth us to be watchfull for the day of the Lorde which is at hand, least sodainly his wrath be kindled against us… (A3-A3v)

This address to the reader is the standard admonishment to trust the veracity of the following story, which (as is stressed at the conclusion of the pamphlet) is confirmed by worthy witnesses, and to take the prodigies described as an opportunity to reflect upon God's judgment.

Trundle reproduces Nelson's preface verbatim, with four exceptions. The preface title now reads: "To My Loving Friends and Readers in London." Nelson's preface is unsigned, but Trundle's is signed "Your friend, T. I." In *The Miracle, of Miracles* (but not *A Miracle, of Miracles*), "T.I." also graces the title page of the woodcut. Trundle cuts the paragraph about the recent and wondrous hailstones. Finally, and most cheekily, Trundle has added a sort of advertisement within his stolen preface by mentioning another work that he'd recently printed. This bit of self-promotion is his only original contribution to Nelson's preface:

> Many are the wonders which have lately happened, as of soddaine and strange death upon perjured persons, strange sights in the Ayre, strange births on the Earth, Earthquakes, Commets, and fierie Impressions, with the execution of GOD himself from his holy fire in heaven, on the wretched man and his wife, at *Holnhurst* in Hampshire; written by that worthy Minister maister *Hilliard*; and all to put us in minde of God, whose workes are wonderfull. (A2-A2v)

Trundle refers here to his own pamphlet *Fire from Heaven* (1613), written by the preacher John Hilliard. Trundle's self-advertisement makes one suspect whether Nelson's reference to "Goose Egg" size hailstones was itself a bit of self-promotion.

Trundle also reuses Nelson's running-title, which begins the story proper, "Strange Newes out of Sommersetshire." The first line of each pamphlet makes it clear that Trundle was not merely reprinting Nelson's work but passing it off as fresh news. Nelson's version begins:

"Upon the ninth day of May last past *Anno 1584* there was a yeoman of honest reputation" (A4). Trundle's version begins: "Upon the ninth day of Sept. past, there was a yeoman of honest reputation" (A3). Alas, the latter printer was not as honest as his yeoman.

As mentioned, Trundle also pirates his second story, and here too he updates the tale with a current date. The pamphlet Trundle cribs from is itself a translation of a still earlier, German work. The English translation is titled *A Prophesie Uttered by the daughter of an honest Countrey man, called Adam Krause*. Its title page informs us that "This happened at a Towne called Rostorff a mile from Melwing: written for a worthy remembrance of Gods omnipotency, by the worshipfull Maister Eyriak Schlichtenberger, Superintendent at Melwing. 1580" (A1). This pamphlet is unusually clear about it origins: it not only states that it was "Truly translated according to the Copy Printed in highe Dutche" (A7), but also details the tale's publication history: "First printed in Dansk, next at Lubick, then at Hambrough: and nowe at London, by John Charlewood, for William Wright, 1580" (A7v). Trundle hides these origins. His running-title reads: "The Wonderfull Worke of God shewed by a Prophesie of a poore Country mans Daughter. 1613" (B1v). Beyond the date, Trundle changes only one other detail, and probably unintentionally at that: for the original "Maister Eyriak Schlichtenberger, Superintendent at Melwing" his version has "*Knact Clighton, Berger* and Superintendent *of* Melwing." As Simon Davies points out, "The alteration offers a glimpse of the producers at work: whoever it was that was editing this account, they were dictating it" (20). Our pirate reader and auditor-cum-transcriber stumbled over the German name.

Gerald Johnson writes that of the three narratives in *A Miracle, of Miracles*, Trundle entered only the third, "with the proviso that it was 'to be printed when it is further allowed'," citing Arber's *Transcript of the Stationers' Registers* (194). This third story is the one narrative

in *A Miracle, of Miracles* that might in fact be original, though it recapitulates without copying Trundle's own pamphlet *Lamentable Newes out of Lincolnshire* (1614). Trundle republished other old news reports during this same time with fresh dates. He updated the life and execution date of *Anthony Painter the Blaspheming Caryar* (1613), a tale "Translated out of French" and translated into the present. In his *Three Bloodie Murders* (1613), Trundle also mixed the old (the first tale, stripped of its tell-tale 1603 date) with the apparently new (the second and third tales).[12]

Trundle's *Miracle* was not the end of the headless bear's career in newsprint. The bear, as Percy Simpson put it, "had a new lease on life in 1641 when John Thomas revived Trundle's pamphlet in a garbled form and published it with a new title page" (92-93). This version, alas, does not feature a woodcut interpretation of the headless bear. In Thomas' pamphlet, Margaret Cooper is "Margret Hooper[13] of Edenbryes" (A1), and the address "To the Reader" eliminates both Trundle's mention of Hilliard and Nelson's mention of astonishing hailstones. Once again Nelson's story was passed off as if it were fresh news, though this time in a new location and with a new set of witnesses.[14] And once again, this plagiarized printing was itself plagiarized: Thomas's pamphlet was reprinted in Newcastle in 1843 (Simpson 93). The same year that he stole the headless bear, Thomas also reprinted in disguised form the second of Trundle's pirated stories as a separate pamphlet: *The Wonderfull works of God. Declared By A Strange Prophecie Of a Maid, that lately lived neere Worsop in Nottingham-shire*.[15] This too was re-dated and recast in a different location, indeed a different country. Inside the world of cheap newsprint, a

[12] Trundle's re-dating of the pamphlets is discussed by Shaaber (290-91) and Johnson (194).
[13] Is the name a joke—a pun on the fact that Margaret C[H]ooper is rolled around, as the text reads, like "an hoope"?

[14] Rather outrageously, there is secondhand evidence that the list of witnesses includes the name of real people from the time and area—see Johnson and Simon Davies.

[15] I owe this find to Simon Davies.

poor maid died, revived, and prophesied only to die again many times. Likewise, poor Margaret Cooper was endlessly harried by a headless bear.

Recycling Newsprint

As we saw in chapter one, early modern writers complained about the dishonest recycling of news stories, among other sharp practices that eroded the credibility of newsprint. John Taylor compared the practice to an old prostitute applying cosmetics: "And as an old *whore* may be painted new…So Stationers, their old cast Bookes can grace, / And by new Titles paint a-fresh their face" (*Workes* 112). Taylor perhaps knew firsthand of what he spoke, for one of his own publishers was John Trundle. Trundle gained a reputation in his day for printing sensationalist pamphlets and ballads, and is best known to scholars today for his involvement in the bad quarto (Q1) of *Hamlet*. In his pioneering study *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England* (1929), Mathias Shaaber reserved extra vitriol for Trundle, whom he calls "that busy miracle-monger and father of lies" (291). More recent scholars have not been any kinder in their assessments, variously deeming Trundle a "pirate of pamphlets" (Johns 147), "the most enterprising—and unprincipled—publisher of the early Stuart age" (Walsham 47), and "the most notorious publisher of popular ephemera," (Crawford, "Oral Culture" 123). Gerald Johnson's bibliographical study of Trundle's catalogue gives the most complete picture of the stationer's dubious print practices:

> Trundle devoted most of his twenty-three years in the trade to the publication of pamphlet literature meant to catch the eye of the lower-class reading public. Trundle missed few opportunities to exploit the public's taste for news of the current sensation…When the present scene failed him, he republished old stories with dates expunged or fresh dates inserted, or he offered translations of astonishing news from foreign lands. Of course, other publishers of this time brought out such titles and engaged in similar practices, but none of them seems to have cultivated this area as assiduously as did Trundle, and few of them gained Trundle's reputation for the publication of such items. (177)

Trundle has garnered critical attention no doubt in part because he was infamous among his own contemporaries. Modern critics continue the abuse that Trundle received at the hands of early modern readers.

Trundle's infamy notwithstanding, it is difficult to conclude how common dishonest print recycling proved in the period. Contemporary complaints about the practice are abundant, but—for the modern scholar—examples are tantalizingly scarce. In his study of the print history of Nelson's pamphlet, Simon Davies argues that the story of the headless bear has become the most well-known example of the practice of reprinting old news disguised as new news. This is probably right, but the headless bear wins largely by default. For as Davies' work helps to establish, *known* instances of this deceitful practice are rare.[16] Far more common is a recycling of old news that does not lie about its currency.

Reflecting on Trundle's plagiarized headless bear narrative, Anthony Parr surmises that "Topical stories were presumably less easy to re-hash than the popular tales of calamities and monsters" (*Staple* 97). Monsters and other marvels, that is, could be inconspicuously relocated in space and time in a way that battles, treaties, and royal proclamations could not be. A survey of disguised news pamphlets bears this out, for known instances of the practice skew toward the sensational: possession, murder, divine judgment, and prophecy, for example. Such sensational tales were, in theory, evergreen because they lent themselves to timeless morals in a way that military skirmishes often did not. The former were both marvelous and formally complete. The latter were mundane and still unfolding.[17] Still, it seems surprising that a tale of demonic assault

[16] Joad Raymond lists only two examples in his *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* of a "cynical reissuing under a new title," one being Trundle's reprinting of the headless bear; Shaaber lists three examples, one of which was also Trundle's poached headless bear.

[17] On the formal difference, see Pettegree, *News* 184, 260-61, and 364-70.

by headless bear—complete with memorable woodcut—could be so shamelessly pawned off on the early modern reading public, and multiple times at that. As Simon Davies writes:

> The economic logic for the practice of reprinting old news [while presenting it as fresh news] is clear: none of the expenses unique to a first edition (obtaining copy, license, registration) but—if the gamble pays off—the benefits of a first edition: a brand new book (always more vendible than an old book, especially when it comes to news). It is the memorable nature of the [headless bear] narrative that makes it so surprising to us that such a work would be chosen to be reprinted as a new piece of news, but clearly both Trundle and Thomas thought they would get away with it. (15)

Consequently, one of Davies' conclusions is that the memory of early modern reading audiences was apparently short: "Events that we might consider shocking and memorable could be comfortably passed off as new—and as forgotten—a generation later…Thirty years[18] could be as long a time in publishing in the seventeenth century as it is now" (31). Perhaps some printers assumed that the ephemeral nature of pamphlets, combined with the shifting, dynamic population of London would indeed make for a reading public with a short memory. But as we saw in chapter one, such was not the case with Trundle's long-mocked Sussex Serpent: contemporaries had a long memory for the dragon. Was a dragon then memorably unusual and outrageous whereas the devil in the form of a headless animal was not? As discussed below, accounts of demons in animal forms were relatively common, and headless ghosts were also, relative to English dragons, common. It would seem that cheap print so abounded with monsters that all but the most memorable marvels were recyclable.

The dishonest recycling of newsprint is especially noteworthy, given that newness is an essential element of the modern conception of news. Reprinting news pamphlets was not in itself uncommon or deceptive; the act could be explicitly acknowledged and justified in new paratext.

[18] As Charles Rahter rightly notes, it is possible that Trundle was himself working from a reprint or pirated edition of Nelson's pamphlet, no longer extant; other headless bears may have existed in print between Nelson's 1584 pamphlet and Trundle's 1614 pamphlet.

Andrew Pettegree argues in *The Invention of News* that "The news events recorded in pamphlets often preserved their interest for some time. Many were published or reprinted a long while after the events described. They did not need to be rushed out; they left time for reflection and judgment" (260). This was at least in part because pamphlets typically described events that highlighted timeless religious truths: preeminently, man's sin and God's judgment. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, "all news had a moral shape" (Pettegree, *News* 255).

But as Pettegree also argues, over the course of the early modern period there was an increasing emphasis on timeliness in the reporting and reception of newsprint. Previously, when people looked to printed news for illustrations of eternal verities or for more extensive descriptions of events that had already been reported orally, contemporaneity had been a less urgent concern. An account of flood, murder, or demonic possession could entice whether it occurred last week or last century, whether locally or in a distant land. Its moral force was in this respect timeless. But when news was regarded less as a key to God's purposes and more as a catalyst for action, then timeliness became critical (Pettegree, *News* 369).

Pettegree is no doubt right about the general course of news. But we should not overlook that a tension, a concern for both timelessness and timeliness, is often present in the news pamphlets that would eventually give way to the news serials and newspapers. This tension is especially evident in the disguised news reprints. For Trundle retains Nelson's conventional insistence on the religious significance of the headless bear narrative, while at the same time re-dating two of the three narratives contained in his *Miracle, of Miracles*. Clearly, Trundle did not trust the expression of eternal verities alone to sell his pamphlet: currency, not to mention a sensational woodcut, was also needed. Stale news, of which contemporaries never ceased to complain, was still stale news, no matter its undying moral force. This was a culture that prized

imitation, adaptation, translation, and creative recycling in literature, but there was no relish for news that was not fresh. Sandra Clark concludes her brief discussion of Trundle's pamphlet plagiarism with these words: "The fact that old stories could be retold and republished in this way [i.e. essentially verbatim] shows that news was of interest as much for its moral and didactic value as for is contemporaneity" (97). But the fact that both Trundle and others re-dated their stolen stories to make them appear contemporary surely indicates something like the opposite, that stationers did not put much faith in the power of evergreen moral verities to move copy. Current meant vendible. Old monsters might still sell, but old monsters repackaged as new monsters would sell better.

The Critical History of Headless Bears

The headless bear is the deceitful news reprint example *par excellence* for several reasons: its relative rarity as clear-cut mendacious reprint, its two memorable woodcuts, the story's innate charm, and Trundle's notoriety. What is not clear is how notorious or well-known the headless bear narrative was among Shakespeare's contemporaries. For though the story was printed, at minimum, four times over a sixty-year period, and the concept of a headless bear found its way into works by Shakespeare, Robert Burton, and Richard Baxter, the pamphlet narrative is not referenced in any surviving works by contemporaries as Trundle's infamous dragon repeatedly is. Trundle's *True and Wonderful: A Discourse relating a strange and monstrous serpent (or dragon) lately discovered* was published in 1614, the same year as his headless bear plagiarism. As chapter one detailed, Trundle's dragon became a byword for print imposture, acquiring "a name and reputation which lasted nearly eighty years after its first media appearance" (Harte

104). But for all Trundle's notoriety, no contemporary complains of his headless bear as an invention or re-dated theft. The contemporary record is silent.[19]

The headless bear's popularity with modern antiquarians and early modern scholars is easier to gauge. Antiquarians have reprinted the narrative since at least the nineteenth century. With her 1861 collection *Witch Stories*, Elizabeth Linton continued the early modern tradition of the ghost-story anthology, albeit with the skeptical bent typical of her time. Of the pamphlet narrative, she writes:

> As for the bear, I confess I think he was nearer akin to man than devil; that he was known about Rockington in Gloustershire [i.e. the town Margaret Cooper visited on business]; and that Margaret Cooper understood the conduct of the plot from first to last. But then this is the skeptical nineteenth century, wherein the wiles of human cunning are more believed in than the power of the devil, or the miracles of supernaturalism. Yet this was a case which, in spite of all its fraud and folly so patently displayed, was cited as one of the most notorious and striking instances of the power of Satan over the bodies as well as the souls of those who gave themselves up to the things of the world. (225)

Unfortunately, Linton does not name the work, or works, citing the pamphlet narrative as a "most notorious and striking" example of Satan's power to assault the physical body. No mention of the headless bear is made in the 1877 work *The Customs, Superstitions, and Legends of the County of Somerset*, though it includes sections on ghosts and witchcraft, and the first two pamphlet accounts of the headless bear (Nelson's and Trundle's) place the narrative squarely in Somerset county. In his 1886 antiquarian reprint of Nelson's pamphlet, Ernest E. Baker calls the work an "almost extinct and unknown tract." Baker is trying to sell his reprint, so stressing its

[19] Inspired by the demonology of Joseph Glanvill and Henry More, Richard Bovet published his study *Pandaemonium, or, The devil's cloyster being a further blow to modern sadduceism, proving the existence of witches and spirits* in 1684. Though Bovet hailed from Somerset and "drew his [supernatural] cases largely from the county and its close neighbours," according to Jonathon Barry, he makes no mention of his county's headless bear legend, perhaps because the case was by then too old for his purposes (186).

obscurity suits his purposes perhaps, but his claim is clearly at odds with Linton's suggestion of notoriety.

As for modern scholarly attention, a handful of Shakespeareans have considered the pamphlet in the context of emending Puck's curious speech. Two critical editions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* footnote the pamphlet narrative by way of glossing Puck's reference to a headless bear: the 1994 Oxford edition, edited by Peter Holland, which also reproduces the Nelson and Trundle title pages, and the 2017 Arden edition, edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson cite Thompson's theft of Trundle in their 1950 Ben Jonson commentary as an example of the pamphlet re-dating of which Jonson complains. In his 1988 Revels edition of Jonson's *Staple of News*, Anthony Parr also cites the headless bear thefts, with Parr noting correctly that before Thompson stole his headless bear from Trundle, Trundle stole his from Nelson.

The print history of the headless bear pamphlets has been traced by Percy Simpson (1955), Charles Rahter (1964), Gerald D. Johnson (1986), and, most recently and exhaustively, by Simon F. Davies (2015). A few historians of news and cheap print—Mathias Shaaber (1926), Sandra Clark (1983), Alexandra Walsham (1999), and Joad Raymond (2003)—have noted the pamphlet as an example of piracy. Four historians of the occult—Keith Thomas (1984), Darren Oldridge (2010), Brian P. Levack (2013), and Tom Webster (2016)—have cited the case in passing, without any mention of the piracy issue, as yet another example of possession (or obsession) and/or the curious forms the devil could assume. Marion Gibson (1999) cites the first two headless bear pamphlets when tracking the rise and fall of possession pamphlets, and James Stokes (1996) discusses Nelson's pamphlet in connection to Somerset parish records of bear-baiting. Finally, Jacqueline Pearson (2013) offers the sole reading of the narrative itself,

interpreting the pamphlet story as a coded tale of domestic discord. Her reading is suggestive but flawed by its highly speculative nature, as I discuss below. Save for Pearson's essay, the pamphlet narrative remains un-discussed.

In an article which originally appeared in 1932, Percy Simpson was perhaps the first to connect Shakespeare and Burton to Trundle's 1614 reprint. But because Percy was unaware of Nelson's pamphlet, and because Trundle's pamphlet followed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but preceded *The Anatomy of Melancholy,* Simpson was left with a question: Did Shakespeare invent the headless bear? Simpson recognized that the one extant copy of Trundle's *The Miracle, of Miracles*, now in the Bodleian, originally belonged to Robert Burton; it contained Burton's "initials and his mark, apparently three double-stemmed *r*'s" (94).[20] Burton then seems to have gotten his headless bear from Trundle's pamphlet narrative. But what of Shakespeare?

In a 1964 article (later included in a 1989 volume), Charles Rahter built upon Simpson's work by bringing Nelson's pamphlet into the equation. Puck's "headless bear," he writes, was neither a compositor's error nor the invention of Shakespeare's unbridled imagination:

> Here, then, is the source of Puck's headless bear. In circulation long before the composition of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, Nelson's pamphlet with its delightful title page must surely have caught the omnivorous eye of Puck's creator, who stored it away in his memory against the day when he needed just such an image. That of all the monstrosities and prodigies recounted in the popular press of the late sixteenth century the headless bear was a favorite is indicated by Trundle's reprinting almost thirty years after the appearance of Nelson's pamphlet. (159)

Though Rahter looks to have solved the immediate textual mystery of Puck's "headless bear" comment, further questions arise that Rahter and later critics have yet to answer: Why was the story of Margaret Cooper so popular and recyclable? How typical of possession narratives was it? What was the symbolic significance of a headless bear, if any? And was a headless bear a

[20] These can be seen on the EEBO copy, which is identified as a digitized version of the Bodleian copy.

type of apparition deriving from folklore older than Nelson's pamphlet? For critics like Simpson and Rahter, the headless bear is primarily a Shakespearian textual crux, and secondarily a portal onto the world of pamphlet printing; the monster and the possession narrative are more or less ignored. This chapter will do what has yet to be done: give a close reading of the pamphlet narrative itself that contextualizes it among other possession accounts, and interrogate the headless bear as an apparition type by detailing the symbolic significance of bears and headlessness in the early modern period. Once this is done, we are better placed to reevaluate the headless bear of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Reckoning with Headless Monsters

What are we to make of the pamphlet narrative's ursine demon? The early modern scholar is accustomed to all manner of specter, but few as bizarre as a headless bear. In his delightful 1594 pamphlet *The Terrors of the Night, or A Discourse of Apparitions*, Thomas Nashe noted many types of reputed apparitions: "this slimy melancholy humor…engendereth many misshapen objects in our imaginations. Sundry times we behold whole armies of men skirmishing in the air, dragons, wild beasts, bloody streamers, blazing comets, fiery strakes [i.e. streaks of light], with other apparitions innumerable" (C2v). Battles in the sky seem to have been the UFOs of their day—a dime a dozen. And, strange to say, being attacked by a devil in the form of a beast, namely black dogs and great cats, was not so uncommon in the pamphlet literature that dealt in apparitions. The prolific Abraham Fleming described the following scene in *A Straunge and Terrible Wunder Wrought Very Late in the Parish Church of Bongay* (1577), wherein an apparition appears during a fierce storm:

> there appeared in a moste horrible similitude and likenesse to the congregation then & there present, a dog as they might discerne it, of a black colour: at the sight wherof,

> togither with the fearful flashes of fire which then were seene, moved such admiration in the mindes of the assemblie, that they thought doomes day was already come.
> This black dog, or the divel in such a likenesse (God knoweth al who worketh all) running all along down the body of the Church with great swiftnesse, and incredible haste, among the people, in a visible fourm and shape, passed between two persons, as they were kneeling uppone their knees, and occupied in prayer as it seemed, wrung the necks of them bothe at one instant clene backward, in somuch that even at a moment where they kneeled, they strangely dyed….the same black dog, stil continuing and remaining in one and the self same shape, passing by an other man of the congregation in the Church, gave him such a gripe on the back, thet therwithall he was presently drawen togither and shrunk up, as it were a peece of leather scorched in a hot fire: or as the mouth of a purse or bag, drawen togither with a string. (A4-A5)

The folklorist Theo Brown concludes that the black dog, sometimes called Black Shuck, was—and remains—a "ubiquitous" species of apparition in England, including in the early modern period ("Black Dog" 175). Relevant to our study of the pamphlet narrative, Brown records that a headless black dog was one recurrent variant of the apparition, among many others, e.g. a dog with multiple heads, a woman's head, etc. ("Black Dog" 180-1).

The black dog looks to have been a pamphlet sensation more than once. *The Discovery of the Black Dog of Newgate* appeared in pamphlet form multiple times in the seventeenth century and also found its way onto the stage.[21] Two lost plays of the era, recorded in *Henslowe's Diary*, are titled *Black Dog of Newgate, Part 1* (1602) and *Part 2* (1603). It is unclear whether the titular Black Dog of the plays refers to the apparition or the famed criminal who described the apparition, however Henslowe suggestively records among several macabre stage props (e.g. "One ghost's crown; one crown with a sun. One frame for the heading [i.e. decapitation illusion] in *Black Joan*…One cauldron for the Jew") the suggestive entry "One black dog" (Henslowe 21).

[21] The title-page woodcut features a large black dog with snakes in its hair, medusa-style.

Assaults by demonic dogs existed then, in print and oral tales if not in reality. And attacks by escaped flesh-and-blood bears were not unheard of in a country obsessed with bear baiting.[22] But headless bears? Were demonic headless bears also a type of apparition akin to the formidable black dog? There is some, albeit scant, evidence suggesting that the headless bear was indeed a kind of monster that predated Nelson and the rest. Before Nashe and Burton, Reginald Scot catalogued the many types of "vaine apparitions" or "bugges" in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Scot lists:

> bull beggers, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylvens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfes, giants, imps, calcars, conjurors, nymphes, changelings, *Incubus*, Robin good-fellowe, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hell waine, the firedrake, the puckle, Tom thumbe, hob goblin, Tom tumbler, boneless, and such other bugs… (86)

Scot looks to have listed everything *but* a headless bear, though one gets the impression, given his concluding "and other such bugs," that he could have gone on for some time still. However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* conjectures that *bull-beggar* is a form of *bull-bear*, a term with the same meaning as *bugbear*, and which may in fact be an alteration of *bugbear*. If the *OED* is correct, then Scot's "bull beggers" *are* bugbears. But what were bugbears? The term is, frustratingly for our purposes, not clearly associated with a specific physical form, though obviously it combines *bug*, in the sense of goblin, with *bear*. As the *OED* and Tilley's collection of early modern proverbs both show, *bugbear* was used in Shakespeare's time much as it is today: like a boogeyman, a bugbear was a vain or foolish fear of something imaginary. But the inclusion of the bugbear in multiple lists of apparitions indicates that the bugbear was a somewhat defined type of ghost or monster in addition to being a term for a childish fear. Like

[22] Bearbaiting was "London's first organized sport with paying spectators," and it "proved so popular among all classes in society that by the sixteenth century bears were long extinct in England and had to be imported" (Velten 99). Margaret Cooper could not have been trailed by a native, wild bear; but because of the popularity of baiting, both in the city and countryside, bears were never far away.

Scot's *Discoverie*, the sixteenth-century comedy *Buggbears* (c1570) includes an immense inventory of "spirtes [sic] of sondry natures…gastly monsters" (3.3.44, 75). Within the ranks of "yll" spirits, are the following:

> hob Goblin, Rawhead, & bloudibone the ouglie
> hagges Bugbeares, & helhoundes, and hecate the nyght mare… (3.3.72-3)

Like Rawhead and Bloodybones, whose names survive but little more, the bugbear may well have been an established monster of the early modern period that is now half-forgotten. Indeed, like Rawhead and Bloodybones, the bugbear looks to have transformed from real apparition to fictional boogeyman. As Fletcher and Massinger write in their play *Prophetesse*, "But now I look like bloody bone, and raw head, to fright children" (4.5). From the ranks of the monsters, the bugbear was demoted to an imaginary terror.

But was a headless bear a bugbear, and vice versa? There are two tantalizing pieces of evidence that suggest that they were one and the same. In the ninety-fourth epigram of his 1560 collection, John Heywood writes:

> *Of fraying of babes* (94)
> When do mothers fray their babes most from duggs.
> When they put on black scarfs, & go lyke beare buggs. (B8v)

Bugbears (or bear-bugs, a variant) proverbially scare children, of course,[23] but why would wearing a black scarf suggest the appearance of a bugbear? Black scarves were worn as mourning veils.[24] The association with death would, of course, be lost on nursing babies. So did black scarves, worn as veils, make mothers "go lyke beare bugges" because they made mothers appear headless? That is, I believe, the best interpretation of Heywood's poem, inconclusive as it is.

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[23] See Tilley's proverbs on bugbears (70).

[24] Alamodes, i.e. light silks, "were often dyed black and used for mourning scarves, ladies' hoods, mantles and linings" (Kerridge 130).

The second clue comes nearly seventy years later from Robert Burton. Detailing the melancholic's mental symptoms, Burton writes that "Some…dare not be alone in the dark for fear of hobgoblins and devils: he suspects everything he hears or sees to be a devil, or enchanted, and imagineth a thousand chimeras and visions, which to his thinking he certainly sees, *bugbears*, talks with *black men, ghosts, goblins*, etc." (i.387, italics mine). As already cited, in the prefatory poem he composed for the third edition (1628) of his *Anatomy*, Burton writes:

> Methinks I hear, methinks I see
> *Ghosts, goblins*, fiends; my phantasy
> Presents a thousand ugly shapes,
> *Headless bears, black men*, and apes,
> Doleful outcries, and fearful sights,
> My sad and dismal soul affrights. (12, italics mine)

In the same company of "black men," "ghosts," and "goblins," Burton looks to have substituted *headless bears* for *bugbears* as if the two terms were synonymous. Heywood's epigram and Burton's two, similar lists suggest that bugbears were indeed headless bears. If so, this would mean that the bugbear-headless bear was a defined type of apparition pre-dating Nelson's 1584 pamphlet.

Unknown to most scholars familiar with the Margaret Cooper story, one headless bear possibly predates the Nelson pamphlet. Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* cryptically refers to a W. Webbe, who was "grieuously disquieted" during the reign of Henry VIII, and who suffered "Because hee set the Image of a headlesse Beare in the Tabernacle of S. Roke" (1207). "This reference," as Simon Davies writes, "was printed later than the possession pamphlet, but it describes an earlier event" (35). The meaning of this image is not defined. "Most likely a broken piece of stonework," W. H. Summers conjectures (169). If the headless bear was indeed equivalent to the bugbear, then the act of putting an image of a bugbear in a church would

suggest an atheistic symbolism. Atheists often referred to hell as an idle bugbear, or so moralists imagined. For example, in his *Call to the Unconverted*, Richard Baxter refers to "Hell, that before did seem but as a bug-bear to frighten men from sin, doth now appear to be a real misery" (qtd. in Tilley 70).

The headless bear also reappeared after Thomas' 1641 pamphlet. In *The Certainty of the World of Spirits Fully Evinced* (1691), Baxter provides two tales involving headless human ghosts. Baxter also writes that one Simon Jones,

> a strong and healthful man of Kederminster (no way inclined to melancholy, or any fancies), hath oft told me, that being a souldier for the king in the war against the parliament, in a clear moon-shine night, as he stood sentinel in the Colledge Green at Worcester, something like a headless bear appeared to him, and so affrighted him, that he laid down his arms soon after, and returned home to his trade, and while I was there afterward, which was fourteen years, lived honestly, religiously, and without blame, and I think is yet living. (24)

In this work, Baxter collects tales of the supernatural not to entertain but to demonstrate, as the title has it, the "certainty of the world of spirits." As with Margaret Cooper, the encounter with the demonic in the form of a headless bear chastens the beholder.

Headless men have long held a place in the Western imagination. Pliny the Elder had written that the "Blemmyae are reported to have no heads, their mouth and eyes being attached to their chests" (qtd. in Oldenburg 44-5). Likewise, Herodotus had written that Libya included both dog-faced monsters and "creatures without heads" (qtd. in Oldenburg 45). More recently, *Mandeville's Travels* had reported that "in another Yle, toward the Southe, duellen folk of foule Stature and of cursed kynde, that han no Hedes: and here Eyen ben in her Scholdres" (qtd. in Oldenburg 44). Sir Walter Ralegh explicitly mentions Mandeville when he writes in his own *Discovery of Guiana* (1596) that he was told credible reports of headless Amazonians, a claim he did not get the chance to confirm with eyewitness proof: "Such a nation [of headless people] was

written of by *Maundeuille*, whose reportes were held for fables many years, and yet since the *East Indies* were discovered, wee finde his relations true of such thinges as heretofore were held incredible (qtd. in Daston and Park 219). Shakespeare, perhaps with Ralegh's *Discovery* in mind, twice refers to headless men in his plays. Indeed, in *The Tempest* the reference to headless men is used to drive home a point about credibility and corroborating reports that recalls the above Ralegh passage. After marveling at the banqueting spirits, Gonzalo remarks,

> If in Naples
> I should report this now, would they believe me—
> If I should say I saw such islanders? (3.3.27-9)

But a moment later, Gonzalo can claim that an accumulation of reports and evidence are now confirming travelers' tales of marvels:

> Faith, sir, you need not fear [the spectral food]. When we were boys
> Who would have believed that there were mountaineers
> Dewlapped like bulls, whose throats had hanging at 'em
> Wallets of flesh? Or that there were such men
> Whose heads stood in their breasts? Which now we find
> Each putter-out of five for one will bring us
> Good warrant of… (3.3.43-49)

Othello also includes a passing reference to headless monsters, as Othello includes the acephali among the list of wonders and incidents that he relates to Desdemona and her father Brabanzio: "The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (1.3.143-44). A race of headless creatures would likely have elicited a different reaction among early modern Europeans than an individual headless monster. The species was wondrous and possibly symbolic of general spiritual or moral truths; the prodigy was a terrifying portent—a specific, local sign. As Daston and Park write:

> Temporary deviations from the natural order, [monstrous individuals] were deliberate messages, fashioned by God to communicate his pleasure or (much more frequently) his displeasure with particular actions or situations (such as the loss of the Holy Land to

> infidels, in James of Vitry). Most monsters functioned solely as signifiers; for this reason, according to Isidore of Seville, they usually died immediately after birth. They presaged divine punishment, which could be forestalled only by rapid repentance. (52)

Headlessness is so suggestive that scholars have had no trouble seeing a political significance in both the headlessness of a race of Amazonians and the headlessness of individual monstrous children. Ralegh's headless Amazonians were primitive tribes who also wanted a political head: a monarch. As Scott Oldenburg argues in "Headless in America: The Imperial Logic of Acephalism," "Part of the imperial fantasy of acephali in the Americas is that the Native Americans, who might otherwise complicate colonization, lived in a headless body politic; they were 'headless' literally and politically. This is in part why Ralegh attempts to bring about admiration for his 'great casique of the north,' Elizabeth I, by showing inhabitants a miniature of her head" (52).

Headlessness is most prevalent—in the context of marvelous news—among pamphlet accounts of monstrous babies. A headless body and a severed head were always potent images. The severed heads of traitors lined London Bridge. The headless body took on new power in the wake of Charles I's beheading in 1649. There was no way for English men and women not to connect the deposed, decapitated king with a headless state. Headless and multi-headed monsters thrived in the unconstrained pamphlet press of the Interregnum. David Cressy, William E. Burns, and Julie Crawford have all written about the political and social significance of pamphlet depictions of headless monsters during the English Civil War.

> All sides in the political conflicts of the 1640s used charges of monstrosity against their opponents. Although a wide variety of monstrous images were employed in the polemics of the Civil War, some particular types of monstrosity were characteristic of the time. A great many of them represented a form of monstrosity based on boundary crossing, whether of gender or species divisions. Most prevalent of all, however, were monstrosities characterized by a missing or deformed head. Monsters of this kind

> metaphorically expressed the condition of the state and church as "headless" or multiheaded. (Burns 189)

Julie Crawford adds a social dimension to the political use of headlessness, as described by Cressy and Burns, in the turbulent civil war years. In her essay "Heedless Women, Headless Monsters, and the Wars of Religion," Crawford argues that "the privileged figures of the 1640s [teratologically speaking] were headless monsters" (114). Such figures "simultaneously registered the absence of a head, of either church or state, and their mother's refusals to subject themselves, and their religious beliefs, to patriarchal and ecclesiastical authority" (v). Headless children were thus apt emblems of their mothers' rebelliousness. Margaret Cooper, on business for her ill husband, does not seem a model of female rebellion, but perhaps her accidental assumption of household headship—if that is what it is—entitles her to the attention of a headless devil. Or perhaps the temporary absence of her husband makes her vulnerable to demonic attack.

In addition to the legendary race of headless men, headless ghosts also make semi-regular appearances in apparition literature. The phenomenon of headless ghosts was noticeable enough for the author of an essay in *Longman's Magazine* (1902) entitled "Richard Baxter's Ghosts" to remark:

> We moderns could have wished that the Edson Hall apparition had had a head on its shoulders, decapitated ghosts being apt to be connoted with young Hamilton Tighe and the Saracenic flagellant who, on Candlemas Eve, used to chase '*ci-devant* Bray' round the walls of Ingoldsby Abbey. In pre-Barhamite times [i.e. before Richard Harris Barham's *Ingoldsby Legends*, published in 1837], however, people had not grown shy of the headless variety. In fact, they favoured it, and Baxter's small book contains three specimens (Parsons 149).

Like the black dog, the headless ghost looks to have been a recognizable type. "The headless or acephalous ghost is one of the classic ghost stereotypes, present in folk traditions across Europe,"

writes Owen Davies in his social history of ghosts, and includes "many headless animal ghosts" (23, 25). Davies reckons this species of apparition to be "the rarest of firsthand ghost sightings, based more on legend than experience" (23-24). As for the headless ghost's significance in the early modern period, Davies sees no clear conclusions to be drawn: "It remains an enigmatic recurring motif" (25). Theo Brown, likewise, can only speculate on the "folk fantasy" of the acephalous ghost (*Fate* 40). If the winged cherub head of the same period represents something like "aspiring spirituality, rising arrogantly above its earthbound body of flesh and blood," Brown conjectures, then the headless ghost "seems to imply the shadow of that earthbound side of humanity left stranded without its informing and spiritual centre" (*Fate* 41). Perhaps headlessness was no more than a kind of shorthand for the uncanny.

And what of the ursine headless ghost? In "Bull and Bear Baiting in Somerset: The Gentles' Sport," a 1996 article that usefully summarizes parish data on bearbaiting in Somerset, James Stokes rather startlingly asserts:

> Imagery associating bears, *especially headless ones*, with the devil was common in the rhetoric of puritans, who condemned baiting as a heathen activity, saying "the Deuill is the Maister of the game, bearward and all" [quoting Philip Stubbes]. The most vivid example of *baiting so used metaphorically* in Somerset occurs in a sermon, published in 1584, concerning a woman's encounter with a headless bear in Ditcheat, Somerset. (77, italics mine)

Stokes' claim does not hold up. He mischaracterizes the Nelson pamphlet in several ways, most egregiously by suggesting it has anything to do with bearbaiting or Puritan anti-baiting rhetoric.[25]

[25] Stokes also calls the moralizing pamphlet a "sermon" twice (though the line between sermon anecdote and moralized pamphlet narrative could be blurry), says husband and son (rather than husband and brother) rebuke the apparition, and rather bizarrely states that "[Margaret Cooper] claimed [the bear] to have been the devil, caused to appear for her sins, and she was thereafter protected by many learned men" (77). Stokes refers to the conclusion of the pamphlet, which simply states, "And so God be thanked she [Margaret Cooper] hath ever since [the ordeal] beene in some reasonable order [of mind], for there hath beene with her many godly learned men" (A7v-A8). These godly men include a number of ministers. The assertion that sage authorities have spoken with the victim—a common claim in sensational narratives—does not mean that Margaret Cooper, former demoniac, is now shielded by powerful men.

The pamphlet deals with the demonic, but is in no way a reflection on bearbaiting, metaphorically or otherwise. To make his connection between headless bears, the devil, and Puritan anti-baiting rhetoric, Stokes' invokes Philip Stubbes. But Stubbes singles out the human activity of bearbaiting, not bears, as demonic—"And to be plaine, I thinke the Devill is Maister of the Game, Beareward and all" (P2v). This is because baitings—often held on Sundays—profaned the Sabbath, were an idle use of time, and abused the animals. Stubbes refers to the bears of the baiting pits as poor beasts: it is the gambling men, not the animals, who reek of sulfur.[26] For Stubbes, bears and dogs are "the good Creatures of God" (P1v). The devil is the master of the idle and cruel game of bearbaiting, not of bears. Finally, Stokes provides scant support for his claim that "Imagery associating bears, *especially headless ones*, with the devil was common in the rhetoric of puritans" (77, italics mine). Indeed, the only example he offers is the Margaret Cooper narrative. And the only example of a headless bear described by someone who may reasonably be termed a Puritan is Baxter's account of a headless bear, cited above. Nevertheless, Stokes is right to assert that bears were associated with the demonic, though he himself offers little to buttress this claim. Stokes cites an 1886 reprint of the Margaret Cooper pamphlet narrative, an edition prefaced with the following remarks by Ernest E. Baker:

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[26] Stubbes writes:

> These heathnicall exercises upon the Sabbaoth daie, whiche the Lorde would have consecrated to holie uses, for the glorie of his Name, and our spirituall comforte: are not in any respecte tollerable, or to be suffered. For the baitying of a Bear, besides that it is a filthie, stinkyng, and loathsome game, is it not a daungerous, and a perilous exercise: wherein a man is in danger of his life, every minute of an houre which thing though it were not so, yet what exercise is this meete for any Christian: What Christian harte can take pleasure to see one poore beast to rent, teare, and kill an other, and all for his foolish pleasure: And although thie be bloudie beasts to mankind, and seeke his destruction, yet wee are not to abuse them, for his sake who made them, and whose creatures thei are. For notwithstandyng that thei be evill to us, & thirst after our bloud, yet are thei good creatures in their own nature and kind, and made to set forth the glorie, power, and magnificence of our God, and for our use, and therefore for his sake wee ought not to abuse them. It is a common saiyng amongest all men, borrowed from the Frenche: Qui aime Jean, aime son chien, *Love me, love my Dogge:* so love God, love his Creatures. (P1v-P2r)

> The form of a bear was a very popular and favourite shape for the Devil to assume, and many instances might be given: thus, in "The famous history of Doctor Faustus," published about the same date as this tract, Faustus saw Belial, in form of a bear with curled black hair to the ground, and also another devil, as a great rugged black bear all curled. *The object of the Somersetshire bear appearing without a head was of course simply to pile up the agony*. (n.p., italics mine)

Baker's explanation for the odd headlessness of the bear is rather dismissive, but his larger point is correct.[27] In *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus* (1592), translated by P. F. from the anonymous German version (1587), we do encounter a pair of demonic bears. And though this is Baker's only example of the bear as "a very popular and favourite shape for the Devil," the Devil had indeed appeared in ursine form more than once. And more than that, as Michel Pastoureau's cultural study of bears demonstrates, bears in the West were at times associated with the demonic. "The bear is the Devil," as St. Augustine put it succinctly. Like the pig and the monkey, the bear "found a place in the Devil's bestiary" (Pastoureau 61).

Bears haunt the European imagination. In medieval Christian thought, the bear was the animal that most resembled man—a closeness that in theory allowed both sexual congress and cross-species fertilization between bears and humans—and this similarity was unnerving. As Pastoureau writes, "although doctors knew that the pig was anatomically a cousin to man, they did not declare that fact too openly and allowed clerics to assert that the animal that most resembled humans was neither the pig nor the monkey, but the bear" (61). And because bears were considered both humanlike and lustful, they were thought to be sexually aggressive toward

[27] Baker also notes in his brief preface to the narrative that the parochial town was an ideal place to stage such a story: "Ditcheat [was] a very fitting place for the strange occurrence. The Parish Registers reveal the fact that a family of Cooper resided in the village in or about the year 1580, but they throw no further light on them or on their doings. The Parish Clerk, who so frequently used to convert the Registers into a diary for momentous events, has passed over in glum silence the visit of the Devil to his village. Mrs. Cooper had a fit, and the credulous country churls imagined the rest" (Baker, n.p.).

women. In his *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts* (1607), Edward Topsell writes that "A Beare carried a young maide into his denne by violence, where in a venerous manner he had the carnall use of her bodie" (37). Citing Topsell, Michael D. Bristol argues that the "bear is also a symbol of bold and aggressive sexuality…connected with violence, rape, and destruction" (160).

Bears costumes featured prominently in European pageants. Animal disguises had been prohibited by the Church from the Carolingian period to the beginning of modern times:

> bishops, councils, and theologians constantly condemned any practice involving the adoption of an animal appearance for a performance, masquerade, or a seasonal festival. They saw these practices, not without reason, as survivals of idolatrous rituals that it was absolutely necessary to eradicate. But they also saw them as a dangerous confusion between human and animal nature, that is, an intolerable violation of the order intended by the Creator….Until the thirteenth century, the animal most often condemned for this reason by bishops, the central figure in the bestiary of prohibited disguises, remained the bear. Disguising oneself as a bear, "acting the bear" (*ursum facere*) as the Latin texts say, was in the eyes of the clergy even more reprehensible than disguising oneself as a donkey, a stag, or a bull because…[quoting Augustine] "the bear is the Devil." (Pastoureau 132).

Dressing up as a bear seems to have been especially connected with festivals, carnivals, and the spirit of misrule. The question is whether headless bears were also impersonated. One wonders, for instance, if a headless bear was one of the "Antiques" or "monsters," as Stubbes puts it, that the revelers included in their Lord of Misrule pageant:

> Thus all thynges sette in order, then have thei their Hobbie horses, Dragons, and other Antiques, together with their baudie Pipers, and thunderyng Drommers, to strike the Devilles Daunce withal, then marche these heathen companie towards the Churche…their Hobbie horses, and other monsters skirmishing amongest the throng: and in this sorte they goe to the Churche" (92-3).

In sum, in our period the bear remains symbolically suggestive; headlessness too, including monstrous headlessness, is suggestive. The political meaning of headless humans—headless children, especially—seems easier to fix. But a headless bear proves an unusual and indeterminate image. Still, there are clues. The bear was manlike, lustful, prone to anger, and

associated with the demonic. Bears raged, and in this way represented the vice of anger. A baited bear, driven furious by mastiffs, was an animal that figuratively lost its head. Margaret Cooper, having seen a headless bear, begins to go mad and is finally assaulted by the headless fiend. Headlessness often signified a toppling of the natural order, a lack of proper authoritarian control. The furious bear of the baiting pits was an uncontrolled, uncontrollable force. The headless bear, even more so.

Reckoning with the Possession Narrative

Jacqueline Pearson gives the only close reading of the Margaret Cooper narrative itself in an essay (2013) that examines three early modern supernatural narratives from a Freudian, feminist perspective. Attending to what the text leaves unsaid in order to discern its "hidden meanings," Pearson argues that the narrative is really about why Margaret Cooper was grieved at the farm and consequently fixated on the groat and her wedding ring (64). Pearson speculates that the coin and ring indicate familial trouble, especially of a financial kind, and potentially adultery and inheritance issues as well. The pamphlet story, in Pearson's imaginative reading, is really then about how Margaret Cooper's voice is ignored, until that is she uses the ostensible demonic threat to make her voice heard (67-69). Claims of possession and witchcraft did sometimes give a platform to early modern society's voiceless. But Pearson brushes aside not only the supernatural events but the surface narrative entirely to make room for her symbolism, and her reading mixes intense speculation with breezy self-assurance. She seems unaware that the headless bear apparition appears in other early modern sources. For her, the possession story is fundamentally a coded narrative about marital and psychological discord and the headless bear purely symbolic: "we can I think be confident that the supernatural events at Ditcheat reveal family and marital conflicts expressed through metaphor" (69). Ultimately, I think we can be

confident about very little when it comes to interpreting the pamphlet narrative, but I will venture that Shakespeare picked up more than just the image of the headless bear from Nelson; he acquired a certain symbolism as well, a symbolism far different that what Pearson divines. To understand this symbolism we must first situate the pamphlet within the genre of the possession narrative.

The Margaret Cooper narrative features several novel spectacles: the devil in the form of a headless bear, a vision of a fiery snail, and a levitating woman half outside of a window. Less originally, the narrative features fits, weirdly burning candles (a stock element of ghost stories of the period), and an angel. What the story lacks, *qua* possession story, is Margaret Cooper cursing and blaspheming, speaking in languages she shouldn't know, and vomiting up foreign objects like pins. These last three were the well-worked tropes of possession stories. "There was an established pattern to possession," as James Sharpe writes; "it was something which people knew about….Many of the elements which were to recur with such regularity in later cases were already present [in a 1574 case of possession simulation]: the fits and trances suffered by the two girls, the devil speaking through them in a strange voice, their vomiting of foreign bodies" (192-3). In his study of possession, Brian P. Levack argues that "There was no single model of demonic possession in early modern Europe. Rather there was a large repertory of signs that could appear in different combinations" (6). In detailing the range of symptoms, Levack asserts that "most distinctive features of early modern possessions" were muscular rigidity or flexibility, the vomiting of alien objects, and speaking in unlearned tongues (17-18). Many symptoms, such as swelling, "straddled the borderline between the natural and the unnatural," unlike the ability to suddenly speak in languages previously unknown to the demoniac, which "provided the most persuasive evidence that a demon, not the afflicted person, was the speaker" (Levack 9, 11).

Levitation, another seemingly clear proof of the supernatural, looks to have been relatively rare, and most reports of it "came from Catholic convents" (Levack 8).

Conventional tropes and unusual details could both affect the credibility of strange tales. The bizarre and improbable (outlandish, that is, by the standards of supernatural narratives) could not only sell copy but potentially buttress the tale's credibility. As Frances Dolan writes:

> stories of witchcraft compelled belief in part by conforming to a well-known plot. Narratives of witchcraft, however terrifying, simultaneously offered the reassurance that even the most incredible, preternatural events might unfold according to predictable plots. On the other hand, narratives grabbed attention through extraordinary occurrences and distinctive details. In *Pandaemonium,* [Richard] Bovet argues that one should not be put off by descriptions of 'unaccountable' events and improbable transactions.…since those who want to gull you make their stories seems as probable as possible, it is the improbable that is more likely to be true. (61)

As the author of a famous possession narrative put it, "strange circumstances stand not idle in miraculous stories, but are very effectuall to perswade beliefe" (qtd. in Dolan 61). The devil was known to appear in animal forms (and headless human ghosts were not uncommon) but a headless bear was both bizarre and memorable. A flaming snail apparition, a woman rolled like a hoop by the Devil, and a woman levitating out a window were also "strange circumstances." It is because the Margaret Cooper narrative has such bizarre, memorable details—not least the bear—that Simon Davies can express surprise at the brazenness of Trundle and Thomas: for who would think an infernal headless bear attack could be passed off as fresh news again and again?

What are we to make of Margaret Cooper's possession?[28] Parsing *possession* from *bewitched* from *melancholy fit* from *madness* is a difficult, perhaps hopeless, task. The terms overlap in the period. Burton writes:

[28] The fortunes of possession theories were tied to the vicissitudes of the belief in spirits. In his chapter on the decline of witchcraft, Keith Thomas writes: "The metaphorical interpretation of the demonic possessions in the New Testament was also [like reinterpretations of evil spirits as psychological phenomena] gaining ground. 'To have a devil', explained a writer in 1676, 'was a kind of phrase or form of speech'" (572). Hobbes, skeptic that he was,

> The last kind of madness or melancholy, is that demoniacal (if I may so call it) obsession or possession of devils, which Platerus and others would have to be preternatural: stupend [stupendous] things are said of them, their actions, gestures, contortions, fasting, prophesying, speaking languages they were never taught, etc. Many strange stories are related of them, which because some will not allow…I voluntarily omit. (1.143)[29]

Burton later notes that many people cannot stand to see the "labour of any fearful disease, as possession, apoplexies, one bewitched" (1.337). "In seventeenth-century England," Keith Thomas writes, "the epithets 'possessed' and 'bewitched' came very near to being synonymous" (478). Nor do pamphlet writers as a class seem to distinguish *obsession* (an external assault by a devil) from the internal *possession*. *A woman possessed with the Devill* is the phrase that adorns the title page of Nelson's pamphlet, despite the physical nature of the monster's assault. And though the word *bewitched* is also used—Cooper acts as if she were "bewitched or haunted with some euill spirite" (A4v)—there does not seem to be any suspicion that a witch is involved in the possession of Margaret Cooper. Levack briefly discusses the Nelson pamphlet in the context of parsing possession from obsession:

> Despite the theoretical distinction between obsession and possession, the two categories have often been confused, possibly because *obsession* was sometimes used to identify both external and internal attacks by the Devil. In the late sixteenth century, an English pamphlet reported how the Devil, taking the form of a small bear having neither head nor tail, lifted a Somerset woman out of her bed, rolled her like a hoop through three rooms and down a high set of stairs before her husband and his brother demanded that the demonic intruder depart in the name of God. Although this was clearly a case of obsession, the published narrative referred to the woman as having been 'possessed with the Devil.' In similar fashion Father Surin, the exorcist at Loudon who was reportedly possessed by the demons he had expelled from the possessed nuns, has been interpreted as an instance of obsession rather than possession, mainly because Surin never allowed the Devil to control his mental faculties during the entire experience. (17)

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claimed to "see nothing in the Scripture that requireth a belief that demoniacs were any other thing than madmen" (46). Marion Gibson argues that a decline in the printing of possession and witchcraft pamphlets, beginning in the 1610s, both registers and contributes to a decline in possession and witchcraft belief (186-191).

[29] Here it is not clear to me whether this is the specialized use of "preternatural" as an occult occurrence in between the natural and supernatural, or a synonym for "supernatural." Also unclear is whom Burton is referring to when he says that "some will not allow" strange stories of possession. Does he mean some listeners will not tolerate such stories or that some censors will not permit such stories to be printed?

That the obsession-possession divide can indeed be fuzzy is evidenced by the fact that, even by Levack's own terms, one could argue that the narrative of Margaret Cooper *is* an example of possession. For Margaret Cooper does seem to lose her mental faculties to the Devil—she is distracted, dazed, and cannot repeat the Lord's Prayer. Though she is not mentally influenced to the extent that she ever blasphemes or speaks in foreign tongues, this does seem to be a case of both external and internal assault.

Possession could be portrayed as a process, much like a medical condition, even in a highly compressed ballad narrative. In an undated ballad in the EBBA collection titled "The Distressed Gentlewoman; Or, Satan's Implacable Malice," we read of the titular character:

> Now while she was Religiously inclin'd,
> Satan, the Enemy of all Mankind,
> He study'd how he might her soon Possess,
> And blast that sweet Celestial Happiness.
> The which he thus endeavour'd by degrees,
> First Melancholly did her Sences seize;
> Which did her former Glory soon expell,
> But yet what was the cause she could not tell.
> At length it did to strange Distraction grow,
> While her dear friends beheld with grief and woe.

In the chapter immediately following that on melancholy-induced delusions, Reginald Scot gives a psychologically astute portrayal of a so-called possession case. Here, the wife of one Simon Davie becomes convinced that she has forfeited her soul to the devil. She falls into a deep despair, so that "she sawe not anie one carrieng a faggot to the fier but she would saie it was to make a fier to burn her for witcherie" (32). Her husband consoles her, and she slowly recovers, "shamed of hir imaginations, which she perceiveth to have growne through melancholie" (32).

By contrast, the narrative of Margaret Cooper does not, at first glance, seem one of great psychological subtlety, though her fixations and distracted state of mind are gestures in this

direction. She "uses idle talk" (A4), "vaine speech" and "much idle talk" (A4v) and voices "vaine imaginations" (B1). Both adjectives are stronger than they might appear to modern readers: *vain* could mean senseless; *idle*, delirious.[30] Margaret Cooper thinks she has seen a bear "which to her thinking had no head. Then her husband and friendes wished her to leave those vaine imaginations, perswaded her that it was nothing but lightness of her braine, which was idle [delirious or light-headed] for want of rest" (B1). Her "idle talk," distraction, and fixation are sufficient to suggest that she has been bewitched: "Thus she continued [i.e. to use idle talk] (as it were one that had beene bewitched or haunted with an evill Spirit)" (A4v). Indeed, this is the *only* evidence of demonic assault until the headless bear himself arrives for all to see.

If Margaret Cooper's weakened mental state is not the first sign of demonic assault, it may instead invite or allow that assault. The line between mental illness and possession was further muddled by the fact that some demonologists believed that melancholics were most vulnerable and prone to demonic assault. After quoting one authority to this effect, Burton writes:

> Agrippa and Lavater are persuaded that this humor [i.e. melancholy] invites the devil to it, wheresoever it is in extremity, and, of all other, melancholy persons are most subject to diabolical temptations and illusions, and most apt to entertain them, and the devil best able to work upon them. But whether by obsession, or possession, or otherwise, I will not determine; 'tis a difficult question. (i.200-201)

The pamphlet narrative is highly compressed in form, and Margaret Cooper has little time to comment on her state of mind, before or after the physical assault. But though they are not highly developed, the psychological elements of the narrative are important, precisely because the threat of madness—of possession proper—is a live danger in the story. And the threat of possession, the loss of one's mental faculties, is underscored, I would argue, by the headlessness of the

[30] A point Pearson fails to recognize: thus she interprets this moment as a patriarchal silencing of a woman's voice when it fact Margaret's family and friends are trying to calm someone they consider delirious, not untoward.

offending devil. Margaret Cooper, whose mental faculties are under threat during the narrative, is in danger of losing her head. Furthermore, in addition to the threat of madness and/or possession, the headlessness of the bear could underscore the irrationality of the attack. For though Cooper confesses that it was for her own sins that she was thus afflicted, the narrative includes no account of her wrongdoing. Indeed, Margaret Cooper is afflicted just after she has dutifully served her ill husband, the symbolic head of the household. Much as the froward women of pamphlet literature reject the authority of husbands and fathers and consequently give birth to headless babies, it may be that the tale of Margaret Cooper implicitly teaches that a "headless" woman, however well-meaning, only invites the attention of the devil. In this reading, Stephen Cooper is wrong to ask his wife to carry out a duty that only he as the head of the household should perform. In his illness, he asks Margaret to momentarily assume household headship, the natural order is upended, and ruin follows.

Rereading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Shakespeare's use of the headless bear in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* remains to be reckoned with. Four qualities of the pamphlet bear are key to our reading of his theatrical usage: size, diabolism, headlessness, and transfiguration.

What exactly is the headless bear meant to be? Here the issue of size—of the pamphlet bear being "halfe a yarde in length and halfe a yarde in height"—is potentially critical. A diminutive demonic bear is not merely goblin-like but exactly the kind of creature apt to be labeled as a *bug* or *puck*. Recall that the diminutiveness of Titania's fairies is emphasized not only by their names but in lines such as: "And there the snake throws her enameled skin / Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in" (2.1.255-56), and when Titania orders her servants to kill cankerworms and bats "for their leathern wings / To make my small elves coats" (2.2.3-5). Is

Puck proposing another goblin form? Or is this a *large* headless bear—half of a linear yard—and thus more reminiscent of the black dog and other accounts of devils attacking men and women in beast form?

In his famous speech on imagination, Theseus remarks "How easy is a bush supposed a bear" by one with a "strong imagination" (5.1.22). As Tilley's collection of proverbs shows, sometimes a bugbear, not a bear, featured in this commonplace, e.g. "You take every Bush for a Bug-bear" (qtd. in Tilley 72). Shakespeare himself had already written in *The Rape of Lucrece,* "Let…the dire thought of his committed evil / Shape every bush a hideous shapeless devil" (971-973). Theseus' line resonates ironically—as so much does in this speech since Theseus is seemingly the voice of reason but is in fact wrong, for supernatural acts have occurred left and right—with Puck's boast about turning into a bear: "I'll follow you…through bush…a headless bear" (3.1.94-97). In the fairy forest, perhaps the bush *is* a bear-bugbear-shapeless devil. The bear-shaped bush could be anything. To Theseus' mind, the madman "sees more devils than vast hell can hold" (5.1.9). Little does he realize, the forest teems with bugs.

Peter Holland's 1994 Oxford Shakespeare edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of only two editions to note the existence of the headless bear pamphlets, and the only edition to comment on the potential significance of this source. As Holland argues in a footnote, "The headlessness of the bear is significant…This clear association of Robin with the attested activities of the devil [in the pamphlet narrative] reflects the diabolic origins of pucks" (184). Shakespeare's use of Nelson's pamphlet is significant, in Holland's reading, because it strongly associates his Puck with the demonic, over and above the merely pagan or whimsical. Even if the headlessness of the pamphlet bear is cryptic, the headlessness of Shakespeare's bear serves a clear function, for Holland: to connect Puck to the infernal.

Simon Davies offers a different interpretation of Puck's headless bear form:

> The resonance here is not mere horror, and what necessity there is for the bear to be headless is not clear…Peter Holland, suggests it evokes diabolic associations, but that would surely only be the case if audiences knew of the pamphlet, and it does not seem obvious that this would have been the case. More likely mere weirdness is the intended resonance. (37)

It seems odd to entirely discount authorial intention—that is, to insist that the diabolic association is not made unless "audiences knew of the pamphlet," when this feasibly may have been what Shakespeare intended. As I have argued above, there are reasons to think that the headlessness of the pamphlet bear is more than just a bizarre touch: it potentially underscores madness, irrationality, and the unnaturalness of female headship. Madness and irrationality are both apposite to Shakespeare's purposes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for unhinged passion transforms the young lovers more thoroughly than fairy magic translates Bottom—for the latter loses his head but keeps his wits. Love may be magical, but the magic of the fairy forest is capricious.

Associating his Puck with the headless bear of the pamphlet narrative might have suited Shakespeare's purposes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* because the pamphlet monster was an example of a shapeshifting devil. Darren Oldridge includes several of Trundle's pamphlet title pages, including the irresistible headless bear woodcut, in *The Devil in Tudor and Stuart England* (2010). "One of the most striking features of the Devil in popular literature," he writes, "was his tendency to appear in the form of an animal. The characteristic was almost entirely absent in godly autobiographies, where his physical appearance was normally that of a man or a monstrous beast" (80). Oldridge cites Fleming's devil-dog and Trundle's headless bear (Oldridge is unaware of Nelson's earlier version) as two of his animal examples. Of Trundle's headless bear pamphlet, Oldridge writes only: "In 1614 the Devil appeared in Somerset as 'a strange thing

like unto a snail,' and then transformed himself into a bear" (81). It is worth noting that the pamphlet never explicitly claims that the same devil first took the form of the snail and then transformed into the headless bear; the flaming snail is the first horrific thing Margaret Cooper sees, and at this point in the narrative none of the other witnesses have themselves seen anything supernatural. But Oldridge's assumption seems sound, for, as he details, the popular conception of the Devil had him assuming numerous animal guises, sometimes appearing "like a man with a grey beard, sometimes like five cats, sometimes [like] ravens and crows" as one girl described it in 1574 (qtd. in Oldridge 80). John Darrell's pamphlet account *A True Narration of the strange and Grevous Vexation by the Devil* (1600) is rife with shapeshifting demons. One devil "came like a beare with fyer in his mouth" (12). His temptation resisted, the same devil then "came agayn like an ape" (12). To another victim this devil "came like a great bear with open mouth…& and presently turned it selfe into the similytude of a white dove" (12). In the early modern period the devil appeared in all manner of "questionable shapes," as one nineteenth-century scholar put it (Moth 421). Without mentioning the Margaret Cooper pamphlet by name, this author surveys Satan's repertoire, including his occasional penchant for ursine forms: "But these shapes [i.e. a red rat and a toad] are but a few of [the Devil's] disguises. He comes 'lyk a deer or a rae'; facetiously, as 'a dog playing on a pair of pipes'; miraculously, 'as a headless bear'; or mischievously, 'as a polecat'; in a shape prudently calculated to provoke curiosity without unduly exciting alarm, 'in the shape of a bear, but not so big as a coney'" and this is only the start of an extensive list (Moth 422). As Burton wrote in his *Anatomy*, "thus the devil reigns, and in a thousand several shapes" (i.196).[31] Like Puck—who boasts of his ability to transform

[31] To give another example, this time from Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphtatus* and also set in Somerset, Elizabeth Style confessed that the devil appeared to her "in the garb of a handsome man, and afterwards in the shape of a black dog…And ever after he often appeared to me in the shape of a man, dog, cat, or fly" (qtd. in Poole 61).

into a filly, crabapple, stool, horse, hound, hog, headless bear, and fire—the Devil was a skilled shapeshifter (2.1.42-57, 3.1.94-99).

As I've suggested, the demonic headless bear of the pamphlets does more than affect our reading of Shakespeare's Puck. Transformation, including headlessness, is a major preoccupation of the play. Characters are transformed by love and magic—made headless (irrational) by love and magic. Puck boasts of his ability to transform into a headless bear just after Bottom has magically lost his own head and received an ass head in its place. Bottom enters, as the Folio stage directions have it "as Pyramus with the ass head." Perhaps because of that definite article—*the* ass head—a footnote to one modern edition of the play remarks that the ass head "presumably refers to a standard stage property" (Paster and Howard 43). Certainly the players had access to both animal heads and costumes: Henslowe's costume lists record "'i bears head' and 'i bears skin,' as well as a bull's head and a head of Cerberus, 'i lions skin' and 'ii lions heads'," among other fantastic costumes for fairies, giants, and ghosts (Gurr 200). It would seem that headless bears, bulls, and lions could have easily been impersonated on stage, if there was in fact ever a need for such monsters, in addition to ass-headed men. Presumably an actor could tuck his head inside the bear skin without wearing the headpiece, and voila: instant headless bear.[32]

While it seems a mistake to suggest, as Simon Davies does, that the meaning of the headless bear allusion is largely dependent on audience recognition, Davies' caution is understandable, for much remains unclear, and audience recognition of the allusion underscores the most intriguing and outstanding issue: Is the headless bear a type of demonic terror in early

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[32] Reginald Scot, whose tale of an Englishman turned into an ass may have influenced Shakespeare's transformation of Bottom, discussed decapitation illusions at length, as well as the creation of animal-head molds, in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*.

modern popular culture with wide currency or not? If the headless bear was an established kind of apparition, as I believe it was, Puck's headless-bear form would have considerable meaning for Shakespeare's contemporaries whether or not they knew Nelson's (or later, Trundle's and Thomas') pamphlet account of Margaret Cooper. In referencing a headless bear, Shakespeare may be alluding to folklore rather than Nelson's possession account. It is also possible that Shakespeare's Puck boasts of transforming into a headless bear because a headless bear *was* a bugbear, and the bugbear itself a type of apparition. But, as I have argued, even if the headless bear was a popular terror, there are reasons to believe that elements of the pamphlet narrative itself would have made the headless bear association appealing to Shakespeare. Rahter supposes that what stuck with Shakespeare was Nelson's crude woodcut image of a frog-like headless bear. Davies suggests that the weirdness of this form suited Shakespeare's portrayal of Puck. But elements of the pamphlet narrative itself—madness, irrationality, otherworldliness, and transformation—suited the themes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The headless bear of early modern culture remains in a liminal space: somewhere between supernatural threat and baseless fear (bugbear). It seems fitting then that the headless bear is one form of the antic *and* dangerous Puck. Shakespeare takes this symbol of supernatural (and slightly whimsical—hoop rolling!) menace and adapts it into a symbol of lover's madness (including a lover's sudden transformation). Headlessness thus becomes symbolic of irrationality and heedlessness. The devil's shapeshifting becomes evocative of the young lovers' sudden reversals of affection.

Conclusion

Though the headless bear story is now known to news historians as a case of dishonest news recycling par excellence, and though *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ruminates on the issue of

credibility—especially the credibility of marvelous reports—there is little evidence, internal to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to suggest that Shakespeare would have associated the headless bear with false news or the discredit of newsprint as a whole. Trundle's and Thomas' reprints post-date *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and, unlike Trundle's dragon in *True and wonderfull*, there is no contemporary record that readers considered the headless bear an outrageous imposture. Indeed, the fact that the headless bear was reprinted with altered dates suggests that the bear was less memorable that the dragon and more credible. An English dragon was too absurd: "it were more than impudence to forge a lie so neere home," as the writer of *True and wonderfull* put it, and readers seemed to have agreed (A3-A3v). But an assault by the devil in the form of a headless bear was less incredible, given that demons were widely thought to assume many forms and tales of obsession and possession were not uncommon. Additionally, like the black dog, the headless bear looks to have been a flexible but established apparition type. Indeed, a headless bear may well have been the standard form of the bugbear, and the bugbear a species of apparition. But the headless bear's origin and identity ultimately remain uncertain.

Shakespeare used Nelson's headless bear—shape-shifting, dangerous, and yet antic—as a symbol of lover's madness, rather than as an emblem of news discredit. In *The Winter's Tale*, however, Shakespeare gives us a sharp satire of the nascent new industry, especially its wondrous strange news and its compromised methods of authentication. In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare skewers the falseness of printed news; it is an irony then that he unwittingly employs a potential emblem of fake news in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for very different ends.

CHAPTER THREE

WAITING FOR THE TRUTH: THE PROBLEM OF VERIFICATION IN *THE WINTER'S TALE*

> Although it bee true, that a Prince can never without secrecie doe great things, yet it is better ofttimes to try reports, then by credulitie to foster suspicion upon an honest man…since suspition is the Tyrants sickness, as the fruites of an evill conscience.
>
> –James VI and I, *Basilicon Doron*

> I have learned by the perfect'st report…
>
> –William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1.5.2)

> Experience, O, thou disprov'st report!
>
> –William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* (4.2.34)

> "Many things" (saith Penottus) "are written in our books, which seem to the reader to be excellent remedies, but they that make use of them are often deceived, and take for physic poison." I remember in Valleriola's observations, a story of one John Baptist a Neapolitan, that finding by chance a pamphlet in Italian, written in praise of hellebore, would needs adventure on himself, and took one dram for one scruple, and had not he been sent for, the poor fellow had poisoned himself. From whence he concludes out of Damascenus *2 et 3. Aphoris*., "that without exquisite knowledge, to work out of books is most dangerous: how unsavoury a thing it is to believe writers, and take upon trust, as this patient perceived by his own peril."
>
> –Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* ii.20

As early modern contemporaries were fond of pointing out, suspicion and rumor flew while truth plodded along behind. "Stay a little, and news will find you," went one proverb in George Herbert's collection *Jacula Prudentum* (232). "Stay till the lame messenger come, if you will know the truth of the thing," was Herbert's very next proverb (232). "He that comes halting,

brings the truest News" went another version of the same idea (Tilley 550). Verification was slow, and that delay created dangers. For as Thomas Lushington said in a 1624 Easter sermon, "False News follows true at the Heels, and oftentimes outstrips it," such that news was often "variously and contrarily related, till the false controls the true" (A3v-A4).[1] Jonathon Swift phrased the same idea more famously in 1710: "Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived, it is too late; the jest is over, and the tale hath had its effect: like a man, who hath thought of a good repartee when the discourse is changed, or the company parted; or like a physician, who hath found out an infallible medicine, after the patient is dead" (195-96). The speed of rumor and false report formed a robust constellation of early modern proverbs, from "A false report rides post" to "The nimblest footman is a false tale" (Tilley 550). Richard Corbett mocked the vacillating verity of news in his poem "A Letter: To the Duke of Buckingham, Being with the Prince in Spain." Buckingham's reported spat with the Count of Olivares "was reported strongly for one tyde, / But, after six houres floating, ebb'd and dyde" (61-62).[2] *New* worked against *true* in news, as contemporaries understood. But there was no great appetite for stale news. "What's the newest grief?" asks Malcolm, seeking the latest ill tidings out of Scotland. Ross replies, "That [bad news] of an hour's age doth hiss the speaker; / Each minute teems a new one (*Macbeth* 4.3.175-77). Ross is hyperbolic, but the underlying truth was that old news prompted scorn, whereas new news was highly desirable. But the freshest report was the most likely to spoil.

[1] Lushington's sermon was itself newsworthy, for he was forced to apologize for it because it commented on domestic news, albeit obliquely. His remarkable sermon was discussed in newsletters several years after it was preached. See Frank L. Huntley's article "Dr. Thomas Lushington."

[2] The punning possibilities of *tide*/*tidings* were not lost on poets. Corbett uses the pun to figure the mutability of news. Shakespeare uses the same pun in *King John* (4.2.137-38) to suggest the ungovernable flood of news.

The true report arrives slowly and at considerable cost in *The Winter's Tale*. It is a play of starts and stops, of quick self-deceit and sluggish confirmation. Leontes' jealousy flares up fully formed in an instant, but the oracle's pronouncement takes twenty-three days to arrive, and that is with excellent travel weather. By the time Leontes' account is definitively corrected, the fates of Mamillius and Antigonus are sealed. The delivered oracle is the true report that corrects Leontes' false account, but by then, to adapt Swift, the patients are dead. Leontes, of course, solicits the oracle to verify his own account. And as Hermione complains, he has "published" (i.e. publicly proclaimed) his slander of her; she is "on every post / Proclaimed a strumpet" (2.1.100, 3.2.99-100). The false report of her infidelity has flown and flourished. Court news gallops at a breakneck pace at the end of the play as well, when events just occurred are almost instantly recounted. Most famously, the middle of the play "slide[s] / O'er sixteen years" (4.1.5-6).What befell Antigonus and Perdita takes sixteen years to emerge; likewise, the truth of Hermione's fate. The figure of Time will not "prophesy" for us what "ensues"—we must wait and "let Time's news / Be known when 'tis brought forth" (4.1.26-27). Proof takes time. As I will discuss, Shakespeare's dramatizations of news verification typically compress time, fitting a report (often broken piecemeal into several reports) and its confirmation or overturning into a single scene. But the truth of certain issues—namely, the fates of Perdita, Antigonus, and Hermione—must wait sixteen years in *The Winter's Tale*.

This chapter analyzes *The Winter's Tale*—a play preoccupied with evidence, parentage, faith, and credit—through the lens of news verification and details how early modern news reports were authenticated. My reading of the play focuses on two scenes: Autolycus' ballad-selling in 4.4 and the unnamed gentlemen's news-reporting of recent events in 5.2. The former is Shakespeare's most explicit satirization of newsprint and news readers and comments wryly on

evidence, testimony, and faith. The latter, a scene of dutiful exposition, has received less critical attention but it too comments on these same themes, as well as the role of news. Critics have often neglected to connect the vending of news-ballads in 4.4 to the news reporting in 5.2. But these two scenes, I argue, must be understood together, for 5.2 prompts us to reevaluate our reaction to Autolycus' news-vending in 4.4.

In the first of these two scenes, Shakespeare satirizes both the dubiousness of news and the credulity of news readers: "I love a ballad in print, alife," Mopsa, an uneducated character says in all sincerity, "for then we are sure they are true" (4.4.251-52). As my first chapter details, there was in fact considerable mistrust of printed news. But the authors and vendors of sensational news had one ace up their sleeve: eyewitness verification in the form of signatures and affidavits. This was their counterpunch to incredulity. But in 4.4 Shakespeare comically undermines these very guarantors. For the scene clearly implies that printed guarantors of reliability and authenticity could be counterfeit no less than news stories. Printed news could be both false and falsely supported. The potential fraudulence of newsprint's authenticating evidence resonates throughout the play. That Autolycus sells sham stories with sham guarantors of truth intensifies the epistemic crisis that haunts the entire play, and, indeed, much of Shakespeare's work.

In the second of the two scenes considered here, inconsequential characters narrate the tearful reunions of Leontes, Polixenes, Camillo, and Perdita. What became of Antigonus and Leontes' lost heir is revealed, but "This news which is called true is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion" (5.2.25-26). The scene reprises Autolycus' ballad-vending: "a deal of wonder is broken out," but the strange news comes armed with supporting evidence (5.2.21-22). The first scene touts the sufficiency of printed reports to capture the truth, but is rife

with lies; the second scene stresses the insufficiency of report yet is all true. Most tellingly, Autolycus—the cony-catching seller of fraudulent news, who preaches wariness, who praises his keen nose—hears the strange news in 5.2, and believes.

This chapter does four things: first, it details how news reports were verified in early modern England; second, it details how Shakespeare *stages* the process of news verification; third, it examines Autolycus' ballad-selling in 4.4; and last, it examines the gentlemen's discussion of recent events in 5.2. These two scenes form a diptych. The first scene sharpens our skepticism of news, especially printed news, only for the second scene to call us to faith. Furthermore, by reading the two scenes together, we see that, though *The Winter's Tale* is an epistemologically haunted play, it does not abandon us to skepticism.

News Verification

How were news reports verified? As we saw in chapter one, newswriters were their own greatest critics. They consistently complained about the credibility of their medium by attacking the credibility of other news reports. Captain Thomas Gainsford, who became the most recognizable English newswriter of the 1620s, was no different in this regard. As the editor of the 1622 coranto *The strangling and death of the Great Turke*, he mocks other news reports in this way:

> As for set Battails [between Turks and Poles], or one dayes tryall by equall agreement of both parties, it never came to so formidable a busines, or remarkable adventure: and therefore I can but wonder at the shamelesse reports of strange men, and weake Certificates by *Corantes* from Foraine parts, especially to have them Printed, to talke of so many Thousands slaine, the Prince kill'd, *Sigismond* defeated, and the whole Army put to flight, when yet as I said, there was never any such matter, nor any set Battaile fought. (B4v)

There were skirmishes, as Gainsford details, but reports of massive battles and routs were the gross exaggeration or pure invention of the "dreaming *Gazettes*, and *Corantos*" that also sensationally portrayed all of Western Christendom as overrun by Turks (A3).

Gainsford preached caution to his readers, as the verification of news was almost always an ongoing process. He claimed to exercise a similar caution as a news editor. A month before he died of "spotted feaver" (likely typhus),[3] Gainsford wrote in the preface to *Late Newes or True Relations* 30 (1624):

> I think it not unfit to resolve a question which was lately made unto me viz. wherefore I would publish any tidings which were only rumoured without any certainty: I will answer that I doe it to shew both my love and diligence to the unpartiall Reader. And that I rather will write tidings only to be rumoured, when I am not fully sure of them, then to write false tidings to bee true, which will afterwards prove otherwise. (A3)

Gainsford would indeed print imperfectly verified news, but he would also err on the side of skepticism. His "unpartiall Reader" likewise bore a similar burden: to carefully weigh each news report, given that truly novel news was likely to be in evidentiary flux. News readers had their own responsibility, for if they wanted fresh news it would necessarily be uncertain. Indeed, the corantos turned uncertainty into a marketing device. The confirmation of a report was always wanting for total assurance and so readers were often directed to the next issue.[4] As a 1620 coranto put it, "because there is different writing & speaking there uppon [i.e. "a great Battel about Prage"], so cannot for this time any certainety thereof be written, but must wayte for the next Post" (qtd. in Randall, *Credibility* 1). Confirmation took time and the purchase of more news.

Gainsford's customers must have fallen short of his expectations, for in a 1623 coranto he satirized the fickleness and shortcomings of his own readers. The newswriter was often mocked in the period; here he was striking back in kind:

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[3] The letter writer John Chamberlain wrote on September 4, 1624, that many were "carried away by this spotted feaver," including "Captain Gainsford, our newsmonger or maker of gazetts" (qtd. in Eccles 259).

[4] As Marcus Nevitt writes, "the end of each issue [of serially printed news] thus willfully left its customers unsatisfied, pitched uncertainly on the edge of a singly sourced or unconfirmed report, having little choice but to acquire the next number in the series which would either confirm or deny the earlier stories they had already bought" (57).

> Gentle Readers; for I am sure you would be knowne by that Character, how comes it then to passe, that nothing can please you? […] If we afford you plaine stuffe, you complaine of the phrase, and peradventure cry out, it is Non-sense; if we adde some exornation, then you are curious to examine the method and coherence, and are forward in saying the sentences are not well adapted: if the newes bee forcible against the Emperorour, you breake…it is impossible and is all invention; if it tend to the dejection of the Country, you seeke to commiserate and wonder at misfortune; if we talke of novelty indeed, you make a doubt of the verity; if wee only tell you what we know, you throw away the booke, and breake out, there is nothing in it, or else but a repetition of the former weekes newes. (*The Affaires of Italy* A3v)

The newsman was in a bind, Gainsford clearly implies. The first pair of contradictory complaints he remonstrates deal with how the corantos were translated: if "plain[ly]" and without commentary, readers complained they were both uncouth and difficult. If translated with "exornation"—both stylistic embellishment and commentary—readers quibbled. If the news was good, they disbelieved; if bad, it threw them into passions. Most damningly, breaking news ("novelty indeed") was roundly doubted but well-verified news was dismissed as stale.

For Gainsford, newsreaders were not only fickle; they twisted newsprint to suit themselves: "In a word, whatever we [coranto writers] endeavour is wrested by…passion; and whether good or bad, is fashioned to strange forms by the violence of humour, and overswayings of opinion" (A3v). A year later, Thomas Lushington made this point even more forcefully in an Easter sermon preached at Oxford titled *The Resurrection Rescued from the Soldiers Calumnies*. Lushington's sermon is a probing reflection on the news culture of its time, including the issues of false news and culpable credulity. The text for his sermon was Matthew 28:13, in which the soldiers guarding Jesus' tomb falsely claim that "His Disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept." The good news of the Gospel was put at peril by a false report. Lushington preached:

> And the News goes not as Things are in themselves, but as Men's Fancies are fashion'd, as some lust to report, and others to believe: The same Relation shall go for true or false,

> according to the Key wherein Mens minds are tun'd; but chiefly as they stand diverse in Religion, so they feign and affect different News. By their News ye may know their Religion, and by their Religion foreknow their News. (A3-A3v)

Wanting different outcomes to prove true, Catholic and Protestant "cross and countertel each others News" (Lushington A3v).[5] In sum, readers faced the danger of their own self-constructed, partisan *news bubble*—to use a modern term—on the one hand and the confusion of contradictory news reports on the other. For news, as Lushington noted, was "variously and contrarily related, till the false controls the true" (A4). Biased news-writing was yet another issue contemporaries complained about, but biased reception was an acknowledged problem as well. For Lushington as well as for Gainsford, the reader of news had to evaluate all reports carefully and impartially. The newsreader had responsibilities.

Well before the corantos of the 1620s, news pamphlets had also emphasized the newsreader's own discretion. The translator of *A true and plaine report of the Furious outrages of France* (1573), a work written in the wake of the St. Bartholomew Day Massacre, writes in his address "To the Reader" that "my purpose is…to set before you a storie as I found it, referring the confirmation thereof to truth and proves [proofs], as in al historicall cases lawfully used" (A2). He continues, "the burden of proving resteth upon the author, the judgement pertaineth to the reader…Bokes [on the events in France] are extant on both parts. The very treatises of divinitie are not al warranted that be printed, you must take it [this report] as it is, onely for matter of reporte on the one parte, so farre to binde credit as it carieth evidence to furnish your understandings" (A2-A2v). *Judge for yourself, good reader* was a not infrequent refrain.

But what could readers do to confirm or discount reports? The epistemic crisis of news was brought about in part by its expanding scope. A great deal of news was foreign, and this was

[5] Ben Jonson's fictional news business organizes its reports along confessional lines, e.g. "the Reformèd news, Protestant news— / And Pontificial news" (*Staple of News* 1.5.14-15).

naturally hard to confirm. David Randall writes that "for Englishmen the establishment of credibility was uniquely difficult," given that they were physically separated from the source and subject of so much of their news: the Continent (*Credibility* 10). As Lindsay O'Neill writes in her study of newsletters, "Most Britons longed for an eyewitness report, but those were hard to find, especially as their interests grew to encompass a greater area of the globe" (182). Contemporaries in England also noted the reporting and verification problems that such distance introduced. As the writer of the pamphlet *Newes out of France* (1591?) put it in his Epilogue:

> the newes being not inacted in our own Countrey, coming from farre, as also wee our selves not present, or *oculati testes*, but relying on letters, bare reportes, and heresay, like *testes auriti*, wee must need needs misse of much of the matter, & sometimes happily (or rather unhappily) either in too much, or too little commit an absurditie. (C2)

Foreign news often could only produce earwitnesses (*testes auriti*), not eyewitnesses (*oculati testes*). For like the newsreader, the newswriter was limited: "thinke, that neither his [the newswriter's] eares, nor his eyes are so large, as to heare and see all things done in his owne country, much lesse over Sea in a forrayne climate (*Newes out of France* A4v). The solution to the limited credibility of single report, particularly an incredible secondhand report from afar, was more news.

In theory, newsreaders could verify newsprint accounts of local wonders "to some extent, either by talking with witnesses, or by comparing the reported events to similar events in their own experiences" (Randall, *Credibility* 10). One could also attempt to verify a report via letters. Public news was often discussed in private letters, and private letters began to play a new role in the expanding world of printed news: they verified or disproved public news (O'Neill 170-78). As the self-described "novellante" (newswriter) Joseph Mead wrote in a newsletter to a client in 1623, "I sent you a Coranto but it is nothing but an old repetition of the Holland conspiracy"

(qtd. in Randall, "Mead" 302). "Letters were ideal places to evaluate news" (O'Neill 182), and letters and printed news pamphlets "were often sent together" (Woolf 88).

Letters could *publicly* set the record straight on a printed report. The corantos of the 1620s were not averse to correcting their own earlier reports.[6] One sharp-eyed reader spotted a false report and sent in a letter to the offending coranto. The news serial included the reader's corrective letter in one of their following issues. The title of this issue even highlighted the letter: *Our last nevves containing a relation of the last proceeding…At the end annexed by a reverend divine an admonition touching a relation lately published of the birth of antichrist in Babilon.* 50 (Oct 2, 1623).[7] In letter-to-the-editor fashion, the newsreader complained:

> Master B. [presumably Nathaniel Butter]: Give me once leave to beare a part in your weekely newes: A late Booke of yours reported to us the strange birth of Antichrist, to the stair[t]ing of the haire of the simple, the insultation of the superstitious, the derision of the wise. Indeed who cannot be affected in some way to see this wonder pretended to fall from the pen of an Ambassadour? Now let it be my newes to the world by you, that the Elder Brother of this very same Antichrist was borne in Babylon, in the yeare of our Lord God, 1532. That credulous soules may not be gulled with these sycophancies, let any Reader but call at your shop for Sir Richard Barkleyes Booke of the *Felicitie of Man*, Printed at London for William Ponsonby, in the yeare 1603. There (p.227) hee shall finde this very Story cited from Lycosthenes de Prodigiis; which when he shall compare with the present hee shall either scorne the fraude, or pitty the devotion of the late Relator…See now, honest Reader, what flyes the blind man swallowes, and judge whether this Babylonian Antichrist be any other than an old tale new furbusht; and smile at the shifts of the guiltie imposters, who whiles they tell us of a new Antichrist raising up the dead, have themselves revived an old Antichrist, of some fourescore and ten yeres agoe…Laugh at the teeth, and feare the tongue…M.D.H. (20)

With wit and considerable thoroughness, this reader correctly points other newsreaders to two earlier sources of the re-dated story, with Lycosthenes' account of the anti-Christ—in his encyclopedic *Prodigiorum*—nearly a century older than the newsbook's "news." The reader calls

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[6] On this point, see Marcus Nevitt, 57-58. In addition to correcting earlier news stories, the corantos of the 1620s would sometimes note in subsequent issues when an additional letter or report *confirmed* a story they had already run.

[7] The titles of early news serials were not always consistent; the same coranto could vary in name, issue to issue.

attention to the fact that this "fraude" was all the more powerful for seemingly coming ("pretended to fall") from "the pen of an Ambassadour."

The ominous 1623 report of the Antichrist born in Babylon was a clear fraud. Stories of monsters and prodigies—precisely the kind of stories that Autolycus also sells—evoked particular suspicion, perhaps because, as the pamphlet writer of *The Wonderfull Battell of Starelings* (1621) put it, "so many poeticall fictions have of late passed the print that [readers] have some cause to suspect almost every extraordinary report that is printed" (A3v). The author of the pamphlet *A Wonder Woorth the Reading* (1617) anticipates both the usual skepticism toward newsprint and a more specific skepticism directed toward accounts of monstrous children:

> I will briefely relate a most strange and monstrous accident in nature, which, howsoever in mans apprehention, it may seeme unpossible. Therefore, lest any should meet my discourse with a scoffe, and rivilingly say? This is an usuall tricke put upon the world for profit: and that his monstrous childe birth (whereon my present subject is chiefly grounded) was begotten in some monster hatching brayne; produced for a Barthlemew faire babie; and sent at this time (for order sake) to be nursed at the common charge of the newes affecting multitude; let them know, that not one syllable shall be added to the making up of an untrueth: but as it is approved to be true, by the attestation of many godly, honest, and religious women, so no lesse faithfully & truly will I relate it…And in briefe, thus it happened. (A3)

The pamphlet writer attempts to preempt the scoff that a report of "monstrous childe birth" is "an usuall tricke put upon the world for profit"—a Bartholomew Fair fraud "begotten in some monster hatching brayne"—by naming eyewitnesses who swore under oath that the story was true (A3). This, as we have seen, was the standard evidentiary tactic of newsprint.

Some pamphlets of prodigies went even further. They not only named sworn eyewitnesses but listed where those eyewitnesses lived, so that they could be contacted by incredulous readers. *Strange Newes out of Kent of a Monstrous and misshapen Child* (1609)

provides us with the London residences of six eyewitnesses. *A true Discourse Declaring the damnable life and death of one Stubbe Peeter* (1590) claims, "That this thing is true" [i.e. the murderous career of Peter Stubbe, werewolf] "Maister Tice Artine a Brewer dwelling at Puddle-wharfe, in London…is able to justifie" (B1v/14). Maister Artine, a native of Cologne where the incredible events took place, could "justifie" the report not because he was an eyewitness but because he has received numerous credible letters avouching the events.

In addition to inquiring letters then, curious newsreaders could investigate strange news in person, sometimes by seeking out eyewitnesses named in the newsprint. Ben Jonson mocked the attempted verification of sensational news, not because verification *per se* was misguided but because the attempted verification of the newswriter's inventions was idiotic:

> Cymbal: No more shall [the gentle reader] be abused, nor country parson
> O'the inquisition, nor busy justices
> Trouble the peace, and both torment themselves
> And their poor ign'rant neighbors with enquiries
> After the many and most innocent monsters,
> That never came i'th'countries they were charged with. (*Staple of News* 1.5.36-41)[8]

Not all newsreaders were as cynical as Jonson, however. Entries by diarists demonstrate efforts to verify sensational reports, sometimes by travelling to the purported location of a wonder. Joseph Mead, for example, "ran around Cambridge to authenticate some of the stories sent him from London" (F. Levy 33).

The reaction to a pamphlet already cited, *The Wonderfull Battell of Starelings* (1621), provides an instructive case of news verification. That year at least one pamphlet and ballad (and likely several others, no longer extant) related a strange occurrence in Ireland: giant flocks of starlings had fought one another over the city of Cork. Dead birds had fallen in heaps on the city

[8] Jonson also refers to "the serpent in Sussex" as a "printed conundrum," an example of "news that, when a man sends them down to the shires where they are said to be done, were never there to be found" (*News* 43-47).

streets. *The Wonderfull Battell* adopts the usual rhetoric of a pamphlet of strange news. It leads with an apologetic preface to the "Gentle Reader"—"To report strange and admirable accidents, is subject both to danger and disgrace: to danger, in that they may bee held as prodigious, or ominous: to disgrace, in that that may be reputed fabulous" (A3)—that scoffs at other news reports while asserting its own well-established authenticity:

> I need not to feare disgrace in reporting so strange an Accident to be reputed fabulous, being able to free my selfe from suspition of such an imputation by certificate of Letters, from Right Honorable persons in Ireland where the accident fell out…as also by the testimony of Right Honorable and Worshipfull persons, & others of good reputation now in London, who were eye-witnesses…Notwithstanding so ample proofe of what I write, yet I doe confesse that so many poeticall fictions have of late passed the print that they have some cause to suspect almost every extraordinary report that is printed: but now that abuse done to the Common-wealth is utterly taken away: for no Currantos, no reports of History, with the like, may now passe the print, without strict examination, and sufficient approbation,[9] as in experience and tryall will be found hereafter (A3v).

The author's account is not so much tardy as well vetted, for as he concludes his preface, "These strange newes out of Ireland had beene printed before this time [referring to pamphlets or ballads or both], but that it hath been stayed till the truth were fully certified and examined" (A3v). Belatedness could be acknowledged but spun as a virtue, for, as the proverb went, the lame report was truest.[10] Later in the pamphlet the newswriter gives us further evidentiary assurances:

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[9] This is, needless to say, an unduly optimistic (and self-serving) claim.

[10] To spin belatedness as guarantor of veracity was not an uncommon rhetorical tactic. In its prefatory address "The Printer to the Reader," a 1594 pamphlet succinctly informs us that its account is: written by a well-placed author, true, not tardy but well-vetted, and that all other accounts of the event are "false, counterfait, and rashly published" (*The Order of Ceremonies observed in the anointing and Coronation of the most Christian King for France and Navarre, Henry the IV* A2). The author of *Newes out of France* (1591?) writes in his preface (the title of this prose preface is "A Poem touching the credit of *this Newes, with an item to them,* that takes felicitie in publishing Lies," but the running title on the verso of this page is the standard "To the Reader") that whereas an ancient historian like Julius Caesar gave us "truth polished with Eloquence,"

> some in these days, who either for that they know not, or care not for truth, or wil not inquire after the truth, wil be sure to publish nothing but untruth, misspending their pen, no lesse foes to themselves, then back friends to the welminded. I speak this (Gentlemen) for that this Pamphlet had many days sithence come to your view, had not these apish Pamphleters neither left waie for themselves, no other, any further to thrust out their heads: But whereas this obortive Pygmey dare peepe out, and shew his face to the world, understand that it is but under sureties, on condition, that he neither mutter, speake, nor write any thing but

"for the most assured proofe of this fight…there are at this time in *London* divers persons of worth and very honest reputation, whom the Printer of this Pamphlet can produce to justifie what they saw, as cause shall require, upon their oaths" (B3). Witnesses of the avian wonder could be located and interrogated.

As luck would have it, Cork experienced a great fire the following year, which was also widely reported in newsprint. After Cork burned, the prodigy of the starlings was interpreted in subsequent pamphlets and ballads as a providential warning to repentance that had clearly gone unheeded. An extant ballad account, titled *The lamentable Burning of the Citty of Cork*, ends by directing readers to a news pamphlet: "You shall see the full Relation at large in the Booke newly printed," a reference perhaps to the extant 1622 *Relation of a Most lamentable Burning* (qtd. in Rollins, *Garland* 160). This pamphlet account of the fire exultingly referred back to *The Wonderfull Battell of Starelings*:

> There was this last yeare *1621*. in October last, published a report of a wonderfull battell fought betwixt certain birdes, called *Stares*, or *Sterlings*, at and neare a Cittie in *Ireland* called *Corke*, which was so strange and admirable an accident, as the like hath seldom or never bin heard of, or registred in any History in modern or former ages. This report being so strange, was of some censured as an untrue and idle invention; Of others, which understood, and by enquirie were resolved of the truth, it was imagined to prognosticate some strange and dreadfull accident to follow…Sithence which time, namely this last of *May 1622*. the *Omnipotent Majestie* of heaven hath not onely reproved their vanitie, who would not beleeve so strange a Relation, but hath further by a most dreadfull and lamentable demonstration of his power and justice, resolved what the battell of Birds might or did prognosticate…(A3-A3v)

Skeptical readers were called to awake their faith, for though the report of the birds was "so strange" that its verity had been doubted, its truth had been readily confirmed.

> truth, or at the least that whereof he can alleadge sufficient authoritie: who although hee hath been staied, but not brought to a blancke, therein taketh so much more the heartie grace, because he knoweth some of these counterfeites will be driven to a Nonplus. (A4-A4v)

Rash lies and rumors, in the form of swarms of news ballads and pamphlets, blocked the way of the truth-tellers. Or so the complaint went.

What was ill luck for Cork residents was a boon to the diarist Richard Shanne. Shanne sought out refugees from Cork, fleeing their burnt city, to inquire whether there really had been a great battle fought in the sky by starlings the year before, as the news pamphlets and ballads had claimed. Shanne wanted eyewitness confirmation, and he got it. He writes:

> The 30 daie of may was the Cittie of Corke in Ireland Burned with fyre from heaven, over which Cittie the yeare befor, the great battell of Shepsternells [starlings] was fought, as ye may reed in the yeare An. Do. 1621 [*i.e*. on fol. 53 of his own diary]. There was verie manie pore people of Ireland came into this Cuntrie A begginge, which was utterlie vndune by reasone of the said fyre. I my owne selfe did talke with divers of those people that dwelled in the Cittie of Corke, and did enquire of them whether of A trueth there was such A battell of Shep-starnell as reporte went, and whether the Cittie was burned as is aforesaid. A[nd] they ail agreed and tould me that there was whole Cart-lodes taken up of those Shepstares that was slayne in the fight. (qtd. in Rollins, *Garland* 156)

The news factor Joseph Mead, however, received a different kind of confirmation. In a 1622 letter, he writes:

> If the Wonder of the Starlings be a fable, my greatest loss is but threepence, which I paid for the book I sent you. I heard as much before, but not so peremptory as yours. For the prince, inquiring of a knight out of Ireland concerning the truth of it, he assured him that, as for any wonder or miracle, it was a mere tale; but there is in the suburbs of Cork an old house or abbey, where starlings, in time of year, used to build, and whither they flocked, as their wont is, at the time mentioned; and, being many together, fell to fighting, so that some were taken up upon the ground either hurt or maimed. And this, he affirmed, was all, and the ground of that report. But, howsoever, the very report of strange things, though false in some men's judgment, is not to be contemned, because it hath been observed that prodigious reports are sometimes as ominous as the truth, if they were real. (qtd. in Birch 302-3)

Shanne's efforts verified the report; Mead's disproved it.[11] In this manner, in conversations and in letters, the verity of a report was hashed out, if imperfectly. A report was weighed against other reports.

[11] The news diarist Walter Yonge also records the report of the starlings' battle. Yonge seems to regard the report as well-established and appears to take no steps to confirm it (45). This entry is never updated with the *True* or *False* he sometimes retroactively appended to news items.

Many newsreaders then, neither gullible as Mopsa nor cynical as Jonson, endeavored to consider newsprint in a circumspect manner. “Multa vera, multa falsa, sed omnia vere utilia” [much is true, much is false, but all is truly useful], as a manuscript annotation put it on the title page of the Huntington Library’s copy of *Doome warning* (1581), a catalogue of prodigies both ancient and contemporary. The view of John Pory is also instructive. Pory was both a professional news factor (i.e. a writer and seller of manuscript newsletters) and an editor of corantos (he replaced Thomas Gainsford). In a newsletter to one of his customers, he writes a measured estimation of newsprint:

> a man that reads those toyes [corantos] every week as they come forth is like one that stands in a fielde of Archers, where though hee sees not the marke, but observing how the arrowes fall, some short, some gone, some on the right and some on the lefte hand, he hath a near guesse where about the marke is; so that hee that reads those bable for a year or however will be able very handsomely to conjecture at the general state of Christendome. (qtd. in Atherton 45)

News had to be read carefully and comparatively. No single report was likely to hit a perfect bullseye. But many reports—“toyes” and “bable”—when considered together, enabled a reader to “handsomely…conjecture” the truth of things. Reading the news well took work. *Multa vera, multa falsa*.

One can see then from Pory’s metaphor how an individual report became credible: other reports needed to hit a similar mark. A single report needed the corroboration of other reports. As O’Neill writes in her study of newsletters, “Instead of basing trust on the news source, the British built it on the processing of that piece of news. A report became credible when multiple hands confirmed it. Many news reports included some version of the phrase ‘confirmed from all hands’” (182). Randall reaches a similar conclusion in his study of early modern military news in print: what came to carry the most weight with readers by the end of the seventeenth century was

not the (ostensible) word of a known man of credit so much as a unified chorus of anonymous voices (*Credibility* 95-150). Credibility, detached from personal honor, came in numbers, in the consensus of many.[12] Before they could safely say the news was confirmed, newswriters—and readers—had to gather and compare multiple reports (O'Neill 184). Of course, by the time a report was confirmed by many hands, it was typically no longer novel, thus Gainsford's complaint that readers wanted credible news yet scoffed at it for being stale.

New and *true*: these two qualities were the key desiderata of all printed news and thus the qualities emphasized by the newswriters themselves. The titles of news pamphlets, ballads, and corantos loudly proclaimed that the wonders they recounted were both new and true. But novelty and verity were often antithetical, for a news account's veracity was typically well-established only through corroboration, and that took time. The lame messenger was more likely to bring true news than the swift one. By demanding news that was fresh and verified, newsreaders, as Gainsford griped, wanted two incompatible things. True credibility took time.

News Verification on Stage

Eyewitness testimony and the corroboration of "many hands" (ideally themselves all eyewitnesses) emerged in the early modern period as the gold standard of news verification. Seeing was believing, and if newsreaders could not see everything themselves, they wanted to hear from those who had seen and corroborate their accounts with others.

The introduction to this work surveyed how and to what ends Shakespeare stages moments of news transmission. It is now time we consider how Shakespeare stages the process of news verification. News verification in Shakespearean drama mirrors how news reports of the

[12]O'Neill and Randall both contrast this many-hands-confirm standard in news with the gentlemanly code of conduct/honor standard in experimental science, as described by Steven Shapin in his *Social History of Truth*. The dubious world of anonymous printed news pushed readers to require greater amounts of confirmation.

day were actually vetted. The credit of a news source, the immediacy of a news source (eyewitness versus earwitness), and the corroboration of a report by other reports are all concerns that Shakespeare stages. When news is delivered, the news receivers often ask two sorts of questions: *How certain is this?* (or: *Is this really true?*) and *How do you know this is true?*[13] Messengers sometimes preempt such questions by immediately declaring the source and certainty of their intelligence. In *King John*, during a scene of news bombardment, the Messenger is careful to distinguish the certain report of the death of King John's mother from the report of Lady Constance's death: "but this [latter report] from rumour's tongue / I idly heard; if true or false I know not" (4.2.123-24).

The opening act of *2 Henry IV* stages a decidedly early-modern dilemma: the crisis of conflicting reports. Lord Bardolph brings "certain news" of victory; Travers, news of defeat (1.1.12). Bardolph claims that his news must be correct, for his informant was noble whereas Travers', he claims, was lowborn, and thus of less credit. But Travers' bad news is soon confirmed by the arriving Morton, himself an eyewitness. The supremely confident Lord Bardolph has been duped by a rumor or false report.

In *Coriolanus,* an Aedile reports that a "slave…Reports the Volsces, with two several powers, / Are entered in the Roman territories" (4.6.40-42). "Go see this rumourer whipped," replies an incredulous Brutus. Menenius cautions Brutus first to question the slave to vet his report. But before this "information" can be weighed, the slave's report is "seconded, and more"

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[13] To give two examples from a single play, in *Coriolanus* we have:

> Sicinius: What's the news?
> Second Messenger: Good news, good news. The ladies have prevailed […]
> Sicinius: Art thou certain this is true. Is't most certain?
> Second Messenger: As certain as I know the sun is fire. (5.4.34-40)

And:

> Menenius: What news? What news? […] What's the news? What's the news? […]
> Brutus: But is this true, sir? (4.6.84, 88, 106)

by a Messenger who confirms that "many mouths" report that Coriolanus has joined with Aufidius, though the Messenger cannot himself confirm "how probably" these reports are true. The ominous report appears to be corroborated by many, but Brutus and Sicinius still resist it, assuming that the slave's rumor has simply spread. A Second Messenger then appears with the same dire report. Finally, Cominius enters as a fourth, decisive messenger—a known man of credit and an eyewitness to the invasion (4.6.48-106). The report of Coriolanus' league with the Volscians is thus confirmed beyond all doubt.

In *Othello*, the Venetian Duke and Senators debate the credibility of certain military news reports. They have received multiple letters about the Turkish fleet, and in the course of the scene they receive two more conflicting reports, one brought by a Sailor from Signor Angelo and one brought by a Messenger from Signor Montano.

> Duke: There is no composition in these news
> That gives them credit.
> First Senator: Indeed, they are disproportioned.
> My letters say a hundred and seven galleys.
> Duke: And mine a hundred-forty.
> Second Senator: And mine two hundred.
> But though they jump not on a just account—
> As, in these cases, where the aim reports
> 'Tis oft with difference—yet do they all confirm
> A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus.
> Duke: Nay, it is possible enough to judgment.
> I do not secure me in the error,
> But the main article I do approve
> In fearful sense.
> …….
> Sailor: The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes.
> …….
> First Senator: This cannot be,
> By no assay of reason—'tis a pageant[14]
> To keep us in false gaze.

[14] Suggestively, the First Senator's metaphor for a false report is theatrical .

Multiple accounts agree on the "main article" if not the details: "all confirm / A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus." "Many mouths"—to use the phrase from *Coriolanus*—tellingly report the same thing (4.6.66). There is then, despite the Duke's own words, considerable "composition in these news / that gives them credit." A conflicting report ("The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes") then creates an upheaval, but the intrinsic unreasonableness of Rhodes as a target (as detailed by the First Senator) combined with the many mouths reporting "Cyprus" proves persuasive. A final messenger (much like the decisive eyewitnesses described above) at last enters and proclaims Cypress as the true target.[15]

Shakespeare repeatedly stages these scenes of news confusion, wherein overwhelmed auditors (or auditor-readers, as in *Othello*) must wade through multiple conflicting accounts. But Shakespeare's dramatizations typically compress a report's delivery and authentication into a single scene. The truth of the matter is soon confirmed by a decisive eyewitness in *2 Henry IV* and *Coriolanus*. In *Othello*, we as readers do not know if Cypress or Rhodes is indeed the Turks' true military target, though the Venetian Duke and senators are confident by the end of the scene that "'Tis certain then for Cyprus" (1.3.43). Still, they could be confident and wrong, as Bardolph was. Shakespeare does not keep us in suspense for long, however, for the very next scene establishes the truth of the matter, as news reaches Cypress that a Venetian ship (Cassio's), just arrived, sighted the wreckage of the Turkish fleet:

> Third Gentleman: News, lads! Our wars are done
> The desperate tempest hath so banged the Turks
> That their designment halts. A noble ship of Venice
> Hath seen a grievous wrack and sufferance
> On most part of their fleet.
> Montano: How, is this true?
> Third Gentleman: The ship is here put in (2.1.20-26).

[15] This scene of information assessment is then followed by the informal trial of Othello, with the decisive testimony of Desdemona clearing him of any romantic wrongdoing.

Cassio arrives an eyewitness to confirm the report, and anxiety over the true target of the Turkish threat morphs into anxiety over whether Othello's ship has weathered the storm or not. Othello, arriving last, reaffirms the report, echoing the gentleman's words: "News, friends, our wars are done, the Turks are drowned" (2.1.199). Othello, the Venetians, and all of Cypress have their "ocular proof" that the Turks, despite the false report, did indeed intend for Cypress (3.3.365), and this same evidence (the wreckage of the Turkish fleet) as conveyed by trustworthy eyewitnesses establishes that the threat of war has passed. A herald announces that Cypress should celebrate, "*upon certain tidings* now arrived, / importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet" (2.2.2-3, italics mine). "Ocular proof" establishes the truth of this happy report, but ocular proof can be manipulated, as Iago demonstrates. The Turkish ruse fails; Iago's does not. The news peddler of *The Winter's Tale,* likewise, manipulates evidence, and it is to him and his cheats that we now turn.

Why Should I Carry Lies Abroad?: Scene 4.4

Autolycus' frequent deceiving, disguising, and thieving all work, of course, to undermine his overall trustworthiness. His deceptions, disguises, and thefts also undercut the trustworthiness of the news ballads he sells. This point was not lost on Simon Forman, who recorded in his diary in 1611:

> Remember also the Rog that cam in all tottered like a coll pixci and howe he feyned him sicke & to have been Robbed of all that he had and howe he cosened the por man of all his money, and after cam to the shep sher with a pedlers packe & ther cosened them Again of all their money And howe he changed apparel with the kinge of Bomia his sonn, and then how he turned Courtier &c. Beware of trusting feined beggars or fawning fellouss. (qtd. in *Norton Shakespeare* 3338).

To Forman's mind, Autolycus "cosened" both when he filched money and when he sold goods from his "pedlers packe." For even though the buyers received goods for their money in the latter

case, Forman implies that this proved yet another example of cozening.[16] Forman, I'd argue, is on the mark. The word *cozen* echoes just before the vending of the ballads, in which claims of truth and trustworthiness repeat. Autolycus warns his prospective buyers, "And indeed, sir, there are cozeners abroad, therefore it behoves men to be wary" (4.4.245-46). The rustics take this as a warning to be on guard against pickpockets, but fail to regard Autolycus' ballads with a similar wariness. Indeed, in one of the passage's many comic misinterpretations, the Clown takes Autolycus' caution as a statement of fear; the Clown kindly reassures Autolycus that *he* and his wares are safe. What the Clown fails to perceive is that both Autolycus and his ballads cozen.[17] Indeed, in the figure of the book-selling Autolycus, writing and con artistry are collapsed, for both gull. Shakespeare's Autolycus takes inspiration from Robert Greene's cony-catching rogues, and, as Stephen Mentz notes, Greene's *Defense of Cony-Catching* (1592) had explicitly described writing as a form of cony-catching (77).[18] As the character Cuthburt Cony-catcher puts it in that work, Greene also was "a Conny-catcher in his kinde" (qtd. in Mentz 77).

Here then is Shakespeare's most extensive, explicit scene of news satire:

> Clown: Have I not told thee how I was cozened by the way, and lost all my money?
> Autolycus: And indeed, sir, there are cozeners abroad, therefore it behoves men to be wary.
> Clown: Fear not thou, man, thou shalt lose nothing here.
> Autolycus: I hope so, sir, for I have about me many parcels of charge.
> Clown: What hast here? Ballads?

[16] It is possible of course that Forman is referring to the pickpocketing Autolycus commits just *after* selling his counterfeit trinkets.

[17] Suggestively, Forman twice uses the word *feigned* of Autolycus ("feyned him sick," "feined beggars"), a word also used at this time to describe false news.

[18] Shakespeare draws not only on Greene's romance *Pandosto*, as has long been recognized, but also on Greene's six cony-catching pamphlets and three posthumous repentance pamphlets (Mentz 73-74).

Mopsa: Pray now, buy some. I love a ballad in print, alife, for then we are sure they are true.[19]
Autolycus: Here's one to a very doleful tune, how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burden, and how she longed to eat adders' heads and toads carbonadoed.[20]
Mopsa: Is it true, think you?
Autolycus: Very true, and but a month old.
Dorcas: Bless me from marrying a usurer![21]
Autolycus: Here's the midwife's name to't, one Mistress Tail-Porter, and five or six honest wives' that were present. Why should I carry lies abroad?
Mopsa: Pray you now, buy it.
Clown: Come on, lay it by, and let's first see more ballads. We'll buy the other things anon.
Autolycus: Here's another ballad of a fish that appeared upon the coast on Wednesday the fourscore of April, forty thousand fathom above water, and sung this ballad against the hard hearts of maids.[22] It was thought she was a woman and was turned into a cold fish for she would not exchange flesh with one that loved her. The ballad is very pitiful, and as true.
Dorcas: Is it true too, think you?
Autolycus: Five justices' hands at it, and witnesses more than my pack will hold.
Clown: Lay it by, too. Another. (4.4.243-274)

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[19] Mopsa may be dull, but she was not alone in her assessment. In Jonson's *Staple of News*, Pennyboy notes, "See men's diverse opinions! Unto some, / The very printing of them, makes them news, / That ha' not the heart to believe anything / But what they see in print" (1.5.51-54). Pennyboy repeats what the Printer declared in Jonson's earlier *News from the New World*: "It is the Printing of 'em makes 'em news to a great many, who will indeed believe nothing but what's in print" (57-59). F. J. Levy detects in this contrast a class difference: letters were generally more credible to the upper class; print more authoritative to the lower class. Despite the low status of print, especially cheap print, among many early modern contemporaries, printing still potentially conveyed a sense that the information it contained had been authenticated. The idiom "in print" at this time meant "to perfection."

[20] On the verification of monstrous births, see Cressy and Daston and Park. Daston and Park argue that, because prodigies like monstrous births held such import for the local community in which they occurred, such accounts were held to a high standard of proof.

[21] As chapter one detailed, many contemporaries satirized the duplicity of news, avarice of newsmongers, and credulity of newsreaders. Shakespeare does as well in this passage, but he is almost unique in also satirizing the moral interpretation of news reports. Dorcas fails to see the monstrous moneybag babies as a judgment against usury; she comically perceives instead marriage advice. Likewise, Autolycus reads the fish-woman story as a caution *against* chastity.

[22] J.H.P. Pafford notes in the Arden edition of the play (second series) the existence of a 1604 ballad about a monstrous fish-woman (Pitcher, *Arden* 277). The 1609 pamphlet *Strange Newes out of Kent of a Monstrous and misshapen Child* suggestively refers to a "huge deformed fish" lately seen in London "that would groane and roare contrary to his kind, which by many people was seene" (B4). While not as common as monstrous children, extraordinary sea creatures (e.g. with runes on their scales, books in their bellies, of incredible size, etc.) were also a staple of sensational pamphlets.

Two qualities are stressed here: novelty and truth. The ballads are fresh, not stale recycled works—"but a month old" was fresh, given that this was the countryside.[23] Rollins' *Index* lists at least 179 ballad titles beginning with *new* or *news*, and Rollins notes that "all ballads were made to insist upon their newness" for "people were so well aware of the printer's habit of re-issuing old ballads that the first question they asked the singer was usually, 'Is it new?'" (*Ballad* 315; see also Davis 49). "Ballads! my masters, ballads! Will ye ha' any ballads o' the newest and truest matter in all London?" as a character asks in a 1669 comedy (qtd. in Rollins, *Ballad* 308).[24] But *new* news was also *true* and *certain*, though *most strange*, as titles frequently proclaimed. More than novelty, Autolycus stresses the truth of his ballads. As Stephen Wittek notes, there is an "almost choric" quality to the passage's emphasis on veracity: *then we are sure they are true…Is it true, think you?...Very true…very pitiful and as true…Is it true too, think you?* (48). The question—*Is it true?*—is often asked of news messengers on the early modern stage; indeed, Mopsa cannot resist asking the question even though she has just declared that we can be confident that printed ballads, as a class, "are true."

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[23] In his portrait of ballad-mongers, Braithwait jokes that old city news is fresh country news: "Ballad-newes, like stale fish, when it beginnes to smell of the Panyer, are not for queasie stomacks. You must therefore imagine, that by this time they are cashier'd [discharged from] the Citie, and must now ride poast for the Country: where they are no lesse admir'd than a Gyant in a pageant" (B4v/12).

[24] The unfinished work, titled *The Exchange in its Humors*, is "a delightful burlesque of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*" (Rollins, *Ballad* 308). The play *Wit in a Constable* (1639) affords another example:

> Boy: Please you hear a good song Gentlemen? […]
> A very new song and please your worships gentlemen.
> Busie: There you lye boy; I doubt it is some lamentable stuffe,
> Oth' Swine-fac'd gentlewoman, and that youle grunt out
> Worse than a parish Boare when he makes love
> Unto the Vicars sow; her story's stale boy,
> 'T has beene already in two playes. (4.1)

Busie undoubtedly refers to the story of Tannakin Skinker, as recorded in the 1640 pamphlet *A Certaine Relation of the Hog-faced Gentlewoman called Mistris Tannakin Skinker*. Skinker was the subject of numerous ballads, now lost. It is not clear to me whether the Tannakin-alluding plays Busie refers to are extant.

Autolycus, ever the conman, disingenuously asks, "Why should I carry lies abroad?" The answer, of course, is money, and this truth is underscored not only by the fact that he pickpockets but also by the fact that he sells other wares, including "counterfeit stone[s]" (4.4.586). Autolycus sells his news ballads along with clothes and trinkets. For him, news is a commodity like any other. "My traffic is sheets," as he says—that is, his business is bedsheets, broadsides, and bawdry (4.3.23). This meant that the salability, not verity, of news was what mattered above all. As Braithwait says of the newswriter, "hee and his Stationer" aim to make his news reports appear "more credible" only to make them "more vendible" (B7/17-B7v/18). "He is the very *Landskip*[25] of our age. He is all *ayre*; his eare always open to all *reports*; which how incredible soever, must passe for *currant*, and find vent, purposely to get him *currant money*, and delude the vulgar" (Braithwait B9/21). The news had to *pass* for new and true, because, of course, it had to sell.[26] "Come buy, come buy," Autolycus sings (4.4.224).

What are we to make of Autolycus' mock news ballads themselves? Clearly Shakespeare ridicules a certain type of ballad, the news ballad, for the satirical jokes end when the characters purchase and sing the third ballad, which makes no pretense of providing trustworthy information.[27] This third ballad—"a passing merry one"—deals not in names, dates, specifics,

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[25] That is, *landscape*, probably in the sense of *epitome*, which would predate the first such recorded usage in the *OED* by two decades.

[26] In Jonson's masque *News from the New World*, the Printer confesses he does in fact "think there's nothing good anywhere but what's to be sold": "Indeed I am all for sale, gentlemen, you say true. I am a printer, and a printer of news, and I do hearken after 'em, wherever they be, at any rates; I'll give anything for a good copy now, be't true or false, so't be news (12-17).

[27] Davis writes that "Ballads made up from one-quarter to one-third of all publications listed in the Stationers' Company from 1560 to 1650" and that "the journalistic ballad far outnumbered all other types. For example, in the year 1569, three-quarters of all licensed ballads in England dealt with the Northern Rebellion" (47). In her essay "The Gazet in Metre," Angela McShane Jones argues that the term "news ballad" is anachronistic as well as misrepresentative, given that, as she says, ballads commented on news more than they disseminated it. Braithwait tellingly refers, however, to "Ballad newes" in his 1632 work (B4v/12). Contemporaries understood that some ballads strove to provide current intelligence, as the emphasis on novelty and truth underscored. They believed that

and witnesses but a generic love triangle, and Autolycus stresses not its newness and verity but its well-established popularity as a song (4.4.275-296). The hallmarks of authentication in Autolycus' first two ballads identify them as news ballads, just as their topical content and ostensibly factual specifics do. Wittek notes quite rightly that these parodic ballads call to mind not only sensational news ballads of the time but also "pamphlets of news." Wittek argues that, because the guarantors of truthfulness in Autolycus' ballads are actually more typical of news pamphlets than ballads, Shakespeare is parodying not ballad entertainments but printed news in general: "as part of their authentication apparatus, [news pamphlets] regularly included the names of corroborating witnesses—a salient aspect of Autolycus's ballads that was *not* a typical feature of actual ballads in the period (it is rather difficult to make a list of witnesses rhyme)" (49). I would note here that, while not perhaps typical, it was not atypical for ballads to use the same "authentication apparatus" as news pamphlets. Ballads usually lacked the space to list a half-dozen eyewitness names, as featured in the headless bear pamphlet, but they still often followed the principle. Hyder Rollins cites several instances of ballads that ended with eyewitness names: for example, a ballad concerning "the form and shape of a monstrous child" born in 1568 provides the names of three eyewitnesses (Rollins, *Ballad* 330). A wonder in Southampton, recorded in a 1602 ballad, was "verified by the magistrats and officers of the same towne" (qtd. in Parr, *Staple* 96). Given Mopsa's trust in print, this ballad guarantor is especially apt:

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newsprint delivered news, despite the fact that newsprint nearly always lagged behind oral news in the period. Tessa Watt draws a useful distinction between "broadside balladry" and more traditional "oral ballads." She writes, "The broadside [ballad] could satisfy a demand for news and information, for veracity and detail" (37). On the desire to buy newsprint despite its inability to break news, see Pettegree, *Book* 146. The term "news pamphlet," moreover, is not anachronistic, as Burton and Jonson both referred to "pamphlets of news" as a distinct subgenre. The delineation *ballads of news*, I would argue, would have been just as clear a division to contemporaries. To insist that contemporaries recognized some cheap print as *newsprint* is not to impose a modern conception of news on the early modern understanding of news.

> The truth of this strange accident men need not far to look,
> For 'tis confirmed by good men's hands, and printed in a book. (qtd. in Rollins, *Ballad* 330)

Still, Wittek's larger point is correct: the affidavit and collection of eyewitness names are more typical of and extensive in news pamphlets than news ballads. Shakespeare ridicules newsprint and newsreaders, as the scene's emphases on "facts," truth, novelty, and credulity all underline. The target of scorn is printed news, not balladry. Autolycus' third ballad has its innuendoes, but it does not cause us to laugh at the rustics for being dupes.[28]

In addition to his trade—"My traffic is sheets"—Autolycus' name further ties him to the concept of news rather than song and balladry. The Autolycus of classical antiquity was the son of Mercury—under whom Shakespeare's Autolycus has been "littered"—the god of thieves and cheats, but also, just as relevantly, the gods' messenger (4.3.24-25).[29] By the time Shakespeare wrote *The Winter's Tale*, newsprint had already appropriated the name *Mercury* because of its association with messages—thus the newsprint titles *Mercurius Gallobelgicus* (c. 1590), and, later, *Mercurius Britannicus* and the rest. That the patron figure of printed news was the champion of both information delivery and lying was an irony probably not lost on early modern contemporaries.

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[28] As Rollins, a passionate defender of ballads writes:

> There is hardly a play written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that does not mention the "ballet," and always with ridicule; but the distinction which playwrights made between the pure lyrics and the journalistic ballads should be taken into consideration. It was to the news-ballads that all of Shakespeare's contemptuous references were made. Autolycus and his monstrosities of land and sea, Trinculo and his wonderful fish, are pictures of but one class (even if the largest) of ballad-mongers. On the other hand, few plays of Shakespeare's fail to show a real appreciation of lyrical ballads written by Elderton, Deloney, Johnson, and others whose very names are now unknown. With all their contempt for Mopsas and Nightingales, playwrights spent many a penny in buying ballads and many a half hour in memorizing them. Jonson, Fletcher, Heywood, Middleton, Marston, Chapman, as well as Shakespeare, knew dozens by heart and quoted them in almost every play. (*Ballad* 333)

[29] On the mythological associations of Autolycus, see Barbara Mowat, "Rogues, Shepherds, and the Counterfeit Distressed," 60-61.

But what makes Autolycus' two news ballads so risible? Specifics, those hallmarks of the newsy ballad, are the key. Numbers and names are the giveaways of the conman and thus an integral part of the passage's humor. The midwife's name is highly suggestive: Tail-Porter—a teller of tales, a bearer of gossip, and a handler of penises (tails).[30] The numbers are even more outrageous. The usurer's wife gives birth to an impressive "twenty money-bags." The date of the fish-woman sighting is impossible, "Wednesday the fourscore of April" being April eightieth. (The fantastic date suggests two types of dishonest news: the outright invention, à la Trundle's Sussex Serpent, and the re-dated plagiarism, à la Trundle's headless Somerset bear). Just as outrageous, the fish-woman sings from a height of "forty thousand fathom above water," putting her levitation height at forty-five miles high. The poor fish-woman is in the frigid mesosphere and well on her way to achieving low-earth orbit. Needless to say, a modern understanding of the earth's atmosphere is not required to perceive that no one at such a distance, not even a fish-woman, could be either seen or heard. Her sad song, sung on a non-existent day, is impossible to hear.

All of this absurdity naturally puts us on guard. But numbers and names are doubly important in this passage, for they are the key elements of the reports' authentication: Mistress Tail-Porter the witness, five or six honest midwives the witnesses, five justices' affidavits, and innumerable testimonials (i.e. "witnesses more than my pack will hold"). Indeed, the overabundance of Autolycus' "witnesses more than my pack will hold" aligns it with the three numerical absurdities: "twenty money-bags," "fourscore of April," and "forty thousand fathom above water." The outrageously large numbers taint the credibility of the small numbers by association. Autolycus' testimonial of endless supporting testimonials is thus doubly damned by

[30] As Pitcher notes, a bawd was called a *midwife* (*Arden* 277). The sexual innuendo is not unimportant, for once again it shows the play connecting sexual fidelity and sexual issue to print fidelity.

association: association with Autolycus the con artist (who has already sung that, if arrested, he would "avouch" himself a tinker and not the vagabond he was) and association with numerical absurdities. His multitude of witnesses was no more real, it is strongly implied, than the "fourscore of April;" his modest "Five justices' hands" just as airy as his forty-five-mile-high monster. Names and numbers are everything here: they are the jokes and the elements of authentication. Indeed, the spurious authentication of the fantastic pamphlets is itself the biggest joke. The slapstick collision of tall-tale figures with meretricious legalistic evidence releases a delightful comic energy.[31] As the rustic servant puns, the peddler (Autolycus) has "points more than all the lawyers in Bohemia can learnedly handle" (4.4.202). He is, that is, well-provisioned with both laces ("points") and legal points, an apparent reference to the affidavits that Autolycus produces later in the scene to authenticate his ballads. The legal register muddles with the chapman's dubious newsprint, and is consequently tainted. That is, newsprint marshals evidence (such as would be admissible in court) to support itself, but it is evidence that suffers. Autolycus, in disguise as the injured man, claims that a rogue named Autolycus was once a "process-server," that is, a bailiff who served legal summonses. A *process* was also a term for *tale* or *tidings*, as in the Ghost's complaint in *Hamlet* that Denmark was deceived by a "forgèd process," false news. Autolycus delivers legal points, legal documents, and news bolstered with the

[31] As Roger Chartier comments, the ballads' "marks of authenticity, which all belong to the register of the written (affidavits and signatures), are comically contradicted by the references to [the] oral culture of storytelling," that is, the date and suggestive name (51). Chartier seems to suggest that there is an instability in the pamphlet medium itself: the oral contaminating the written. The pamphlet is a monster: often oral in source, tropes, and genre (a tall tale, a winter's tale) *yet* fixed into print, complete with written guarantees of authenticity: the signature and affidavit. On the hybrid nature of pamphlets, see Alexandra Halasz, who argues that "The pamphlets' ephemerality associates them with the orality of gossip, their printedness with authoritative texts that they materially resemble. Yet it is their printedness that allows them to circulate like gossip" (3). Though oral news was sometimes perceived as more trustworthy because it was more direct and personal (and likewise manuscript news), a sense of orality could work against cheap print. Ephemera like the news pamphlet was tainted by its orality, for cheap print whiffed of rumor and gossip-mongering. "Oh, they are men worthy of commendations; they speak in print," as a character, referring to "newsmakers," jokes in Shirley's *Love Tricks* (1.1.43). Anxieties about the print medium seem most concentrated in these critiques of newsprint. On the status of newsprint, see chapter one.

apparatus of legal evidence. The "true" and truly authenticated news ballads he presents, however, are so clearly false that it works to undermine the value of evidence itself. Proof was a sham. As real as the Bohemian coast.

The dubiousness of these two ballads is reinforced by Autolycus' disguise—he is in disguise throughout the play—and by the fact that he sells, by his own admission, "counterfeit" goods and "trumpery":

> Ha, ha! What a fool honesty is, and trust—his sworn brother—a very simple gentleman! I have sold all my trumpery; not a counterfeit stone, not a ribbon, glass, pomander, brooch, table-book, ballad…to keep my pack from fasting…'Twas nothing to geld a codpiece of a purse. (4.4.585-97)

Autolycus has literally played the cutpurse after peddling all his goods, but the disguised conman has already picked pockets by selling trumpery. As discussed in chapter one, early modern contemporaries referred to "false news" (i.e. fake, invented news) as "counterfeited news."[32] Disguised in Florizel's fine clothes, his third disguise, Autolycus cozens the Clown yet again by presenting himself as a courtier. "He seems to be of great authority," the Clown misjudges, much as the ballads' disguise ("Five justices' hands at it") lends them a borrowed, but false, authority (4.4.772-73).

As we saw in chapter one, contemporaries complained that reports were sometimes invented out of whole cloth. The "newsmaker" "will write you a battle in any part of Europe at an hour's warning, and yet never set foot out of a tavern," as a character in Shirley's *Love Tricks* marvels (1.1.22, 50-52). But the guarantors of those reports, they recognized, could also be feigned. Eyewitness testimony could be invented, authorities could be invented, and signatures and affidavits could be counterfeited. His "owne *Genius* is his intelligencer," as Braithwait

[32] Fake news was variously described as *false*, *counterfeited*, *forged*, *coined*, *devised*, *invented*, *cogged*, *feigned*, and *made* in the parlance of the time.

grumbled of the "curranto-coiner" (B6/15).[33] The newswriters themselves incessantly begrudged and warned of the feigned, counterfeit, and cogging reports of their competitors. And as discussed in the previous chapter, stationers such as John Trundle and John Thomas did not scruple to re-date the account of the headless bear, with Thomas going so far as to alter the location and names of the original (supposed) eyewitnesses. If some stationers did not scruple to effectively invent eyewitnesses, why would they refrain from forging the entire report? Clearly, as in the case of Trundle's Sussex Serpent, that was a thought some contemporaries entertained. A dragon, a dragon's eyewitnesses, and the eyewitnesses' examining and authenticating judge could all be counterfeit. Autolycus' con job on the rustic simpletons plays on these news anxieties, for the audience knows that the joke is that he lies and cozens, and thus part of his lie *is* the apparatus of authentication he sells. The newsman lies and then swears a false oath about his lie. Shakespeare satirizes the news, the newsman, and the credulous news consumer—the same three subjects of mockery in early modern character books—but Shakespeare also targets the ostensible guarantors of truth. This jab is not incidental, given that this is a play (and from a playwright) obsessed with verification and proof. As Stephen Orgel says, "Autolycus' ability to produce documentary confirmations of the most fantastic of claims provides a wry commentary on the questions of evidence that fill the play" (50). Evidence could be counterfeited, making Autolycus' warning all the more pointed: "there are cozeners abroad, therefore it behoves men to be wary."

[33] The term "newsmaker" is prominently used in the Shirley passage to further underscore that the newswriter invented his news, and thus only "a consumption of wit" would hinder his productivity (1.1.23). Likewise, Braithwait refers damningly to the "curranto-coiner" in his portrayal of newswriters. Compare also Jonson: "We not forbid that any news be made [invented] / But that't be printed" (*Staple* 1.4.46-47). Nathaniel the news clerk can both sort news "and for a need can make 'em" (*Staple* 1.5.102). Tom, the aspirant news clerk, is qualified for the job by having "a neat / Quick vein in forging news" (*Staple* 1.5.133).

Here it is worthwhile to note that counterfeit proof and forged documents are mainstays of the English stage, and of Shakespeare's work in particular. *Hamlet* features arguably the most famous forgery: Hamlet's modification of his own death warrant. He manages, in his words, "to unseal / their grand commission," replace it with his own, and seal his "changeling" with his "father's signet," which was "the model of that Danish seal" (5.2.14-56). We should recall that our melancholy prince seeks to avenge a murder that was disguised with a "forgèd process," that is, a false account:

> Ghost: 'Tis given out that, sleeping in mine orchard,
> A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
> Is by a forgèd process of my death
> Rankly abused. (1.5.35-38)

Early modern audiences, alive to the distinction between ghost and demon in disguise, might very well have suspected the Ghost's own account to be a "forgèd process," until that is Claudius' prayer in 3.3 confirms his guilt.[34]

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, a play full of deceitful tricks, Helen fakes her own death and the false report of it is amply authenticated, "justified" and "faithfully confirmed" by a supposed rector, who is either an invention or in league with the righteous Helen (4.3.53, 57). Bertram receives the "intelligence" of his wife's death along with "the particular confirmations, point from point, to the full arming of the verity" (4.3.59-60). His wife's death is well-verified, and completely untrue.

In *Cymbeline*, Giacomo gives a false account of Posthumus to Imogen. Imogen is inclined to take Giacomo at his word—he comes armed with a letter of commendation from Posthumus himself, after all—until she perceives "the end [he] seek'st" through his defamatory

[34] Keith Thomas argues that, "Despite the truth of the tale the ghost had to tell, every firm Protestant in the audience would have been justified in regarding the apparition as a devil in human form" (590).

report—namely, to bed her (1.6.145). Giacomo's false report to Posthumus of Imogen's unfaithfulness comes buttressed by ostensibly ironclad "ocular proof" in the form of "corporal sign[s]" and "voucher[s] / Stronger than ever law could make"—namely, Imogen's bracelet and an intimate description of her body (2.4.119, 2.3.39-40). These "particulars…justify" Giacomo's report, which he seals with a false oath (2.4.78-79).[35] Giacomo thus wins the bet by providing, as he had promised, "sufficient testimony" (1.5.131). Evidence could be completely forged, as in the report of Helen's death. Evidence could also be authentic—the bracelet *is* Imogen's; Giacomo *has* seen her naked—but used deceptively to prompt false conclusions. Giacomo's false account nearly costs Imogen her life. Later, mistakenly believing that Pisanio has tricked her and decapitated Posthumus, Imogen declares

> To write and read
> Be henceforth treacherous! Damned Pisanio
> Hath with his forgèd letters—damned Pisanio—
> From this most bravest vessel of the world
> Struck the main-top! (Cymbeline 4.2.318-322)

False reports, forged accounts, counterfeit documents, and equivocal evidence were all hazards of the Shakespearean stage. Carrying a forged death warrant, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to their own execution.

Autolycus' ballad scene mocks the reliability of printed news accounts, for the conman-cum-newsman sells ridiculous (not to mention, impossible) lies, and if stories could be counterfeited so too could the supposed guarantors of their truth. Autolycus thus intensifies, in a comic manner, the epistemic crisis that haunts the play. Evidence could be untrustworthy. Authorities could be invented. More scandalously, perhaps, authorities could be wrong. Leontes

[35] Paroles also does not scruple to "swear the lies he forges" (*All's Well* 4.1.21). As Diana comments to an idly swearing Bertram, "'Tis not the many oaths that makes the truth" (4.2.22). *All's Well* has a singular concern with credit and oaths. Helen has no credit with the King as physician. Paroles lacks credit with everyone but the senseless Bertram.

forges ahead with no proof but his own deranged intuition, claiming he can simply see, feel, and smell what others cannot. It is worth recalling then that Autolycus' counterfeit news greets us after we have already witnessed a crazed king who thinks all evidence (save his own intuition) is counterfeit.

But Autolycus' ballad scene reflects back not only on questions of evidence but also on women. Tellingly, Autolycus presents not only "Five justices' hands…and witnesses more than my pack with hold" as corroborators, but also one named midwife, Mistress Tail-Porter "and five or six honest wives' [names] that were present" (4.4.272-73, 4.4.259-60). The honesty of wives is precisely what was in question in the first half of this play. Leontes deems that "Women…will say anything" and he considers, albeit hypothetically, that the testimony of women is "false / As o'erdyed blacks, as wind, as waters, false / As dice are wished to be (1.2.132-35). When Paulina presents the infant Perdita to Leontes, he suggestively calls Paulina, whom he takes for a liar, a "midwife" and the baby a "bastard" (2.3.160-61). The words *midwife* and *honest wives* and the salient issue of verifying parentage (whether moneybags or royal heirs)—these commonalities serve to connect the satirization of newsprint in 4.4 to the larger themes of the play. Babies and ballads and babies *in* ballads are all in question.

The guarantors of news reliability could be counterfeit no less than the reports themselves. One's sexual "issue" could be counterfeit too, as Leontes muses, for there was "No barricado for a belly" (1.2.205). Nothing but a woman's own honor guaranteed paternity. There was no perfect proof. A husband relied on her word, yet "Women…will say anything" (1.2.132). Leontes thus nervously plays with the word *issue,* a word that echoes throughout the whole of *The Winter's Tale*. Shakespeare played this same game months earlier in *Cymbeline,* where another jealous man declares:

> Is there no way for men to be, but women
> Must be half-workers? We are bastards all,
> And that most venerable man which I
> Did call my father was I know not where
> When I was stamped. Some coiner with his tools
> Made me a counterfeit; yet my mother seemed
> The Dian of that time: so doth my wife
> The nonpareil of this. (2.5.1-8)

No barricado for a belly. Not only was there no way to prevent a woman from cuckolding you, there was no way to confirm your progeny were truly your own. Lineage had neither safeguard nor method for authentication. You depended on your wife's honor in both regards.

The vexed verification of both progeny and texts intertwines throughout the play. In 4.4 the question "Is it true" is twice asked of Autolycus' ballads. In 1.2 Leontes, meditating on Hermione's fidelity, asks Mamiliius "Art thou my boy?...Art thou my calf?" (1.2.122, 129). Leontes then uses four words with strong book connotations: *copy*, *page*, *lines,* and *issue*. Mamillius' nose, he says, is "a copy out of mine" (1.2.124). More subtly, Leontes jokingly calls his son "sir page" and considers "the lines / Of my boy's face" (1.2.137, 1.2.155). Last, Leontes puns on *issue*—outcome, offspring, and actor's exit—a word not then used in its noun form of books and pamphlets, but used in its verb form of writs and proclamations: "Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I / Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue / Will hiss me to my grave" (1.2.188-190).[36] Terms that blur printing with parentage resound throughout the play, with women's wombs conflated with printing presses.[37] Antigonus opines that "every dram of woman's flesh is false / If she [Hermione] be," such that he would "geld" his young daughters

[36] The word *issue* occurs fifteen times throughout the play, continually conjuring both "outcome" and "offspring," as when Camillo speaks of "the issue doubted" (1.2.261). The phrase could serve as an epitome of the play, for the first half of the play deals with the trouble resulting from a doubted heir, and the second half is given over to the unknown outcomes of Antigonus, Perdita, and Hermione.

[37] On the metaphorical conflations of sexual/textual reproduction and legitimacy, see Thompson and Thompson, esp. 70-83.

before they "bring false generations" and "issue" (2.1.140-52). When Paulina brings the infant Perdita before the mad king and his court, she says, "Behold, my lords," exhibiting the babe, "Although the print be little, the whole matter / And copy of the father" (2.3.99-100). A Lord cautions Leontes that his command to burn the infant will "Lead on to some foul issue" (2.3.153). Leontes again picks up the word, "No, I'll not rear, / Another's issue" (2.3.192-93). Leontes rejects the infant Perdita as a forgery, precisely as he rejects the delivered oracle, despite its "holy seal" and the sworn oath of Cleomenes and Dion that the document had neither been tampered with nor ever out of sight (3.2.122-29). (The word "seal" is repeated three times here and calls to mind Leontes' worry that there was "No barricado for a belly.") Later, Polixines rejects Perdita because of her low birth, not knowing that she is, as the Clown says, "a changeling, and none of" the Old Shepherd's "flesh and blood" (4.4.669-70, 3.3.109). A changeling was a fairy child left in place of an abducted human child. Like one of Autolycus "counterfeit" goods, it was an imposter (4.4.586).[38] Perdita is taken for an illegitimate copy, when she is in fact a true copy of her royal father. When a reformed Leontes meets Florizel, he remarks,

> Your mother was most true to wedlock, Prince,
> For she did print your royal father off,
> Conceiving you…
> Your father's image is so hit in you (5.1.123-26)

Childbearing and printing, their vexed authentication, and the honesty (faithfulness, truthfulness) of women and books are conflated throughout the play. Autolycus' dishonest newsprint, complete with false testimonials, also calls into question the honesty of women's bodies. Indeed, it calls into question all things, as if, even in the happy land of Bohemia, the play tottered back towards Leontes' overwhelming suspicion. Autolycus leaves us laughing, and skeptical.

[38] Thus Hamlet refers to the death warrant that he forges and substitutes for his own as a "changeling" (5.2.54).

This News Which Is Called True: Scene 5.2

As I suggested at the outset of this chapter, scene 5.2 should prompt us to reevaluate our reaction to Autolycus' ballad-selling in 4.4, particularly our skepticism. Here I will try to make good on that claim.

Scene 5.2 is a curious one, for the climactic dramatic events are all reported to us instead of shown.[39] Shakespeare stages the reporting of the emotional reunions, rather than the reunions themselves. The question must be asked: Why is all this reported? At the end of *Cymbeline* characters pile onto the stage. Amidst emotional reunions and revelations, a long recapitulation of the plot unfolds. The problem is that the audience knows everything, and so, though there are undoubtedly beautiful moments—Postumus' suplex-turned-embrace of Imogen—it all runs long and tedious. Nothing knew is learned. *The Winter's Tale* has nearly the opposite dramaturgic problem. A crucial scene of reunion and revelation is unseen. Shakespeare practically taunts us on this point:

> Third Gentleman: Did you see the meeting of the two kings?
> Second Gentleman: No
> Third Gentleman: Then you have lost a sight, which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of…which lames report to follow it, and undoes description to do it. (5.2.36-39, 51-52)

But why? Did Shakespeare have no stomach for redoing such a scene so shortly after writing congested reunions in *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*? Perhaps. But there is a clear dramaturgic reason for not showing this reunion: it leaves us fresh for the greater wonder of the reunion with Hermione. The reunion of Leontes with Perdita, Polixenes, and Camillo would have sapped energy from the wonder of this second reunion. Consequently, it is the second reunion that bears

[39] Andrew Gurr deems the conclusion of the play "unorthodox Shakespeare, and indeed unorthodox drama, since all the reunion and comedy pairings take place before the final scene and are merely reported by a gathering of irrelevant courtiers" (Gurr, "Bear" 420).

the emotional weight of the play, not the first.[40] The reunion in 5.2 is described as emotionally taxing, "joy waded in tears," veering from extremes of happiness to sorrow (5.2.41). Of the onlookers, we are told "Some swooned, all sorrowed. If all the world could have seen't, the woe had been universal" (5.2.81-83). Shakespeare spares us, leaving us ready to weep and swoon at the play's final scene.

Yet, and most apropos to this study, there is another reason for not showing the first reunion scene. For even more important than the climactic setup it allows is the thematic work that 5.2 is able to accomplish by virtue of it being a report. The strongest effect of this staging—dramatizing the *report* of the reunion rather than the actual reunion—is to heighten the play's preoccupation with report, evidence, testimony, and faith. John Pitcher writes that "the reunion of Leontes and Perdita…is the culmination of many overturnings in the play of the proverbial 'seeing is believing'…*Not* seeing yet still believing is what is asked of the audience" (*Arden* 327). Reporting the news of the first reunion allows Shakespeare to once again comment not only on news but also on the play's predominant themes of evidence and faith.[41]

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[40] Cf. Frank Kermode's observations in *Shakespeare's Language*:

> The long concealment of Hermione is very audacious, and it has often been remarked that in no other play of Shakespeare's is information of this importance kept from the audience. Indeed, the concealment of vital elements of the story is foreign to the conventions of the Elizabethan-Jacobean stage generally. Obviously the recognition was of the highest importance, and in the design of the play all the elements must serve it. Another practical problem in dramaturgy was that the story actually contained two distinct Recognition scenes: Perdita's with her father, Hermione's with both Leontes and Perdita. Having encountered a similar difficulty in *Pericles*, Shakespeare now sought a better solution: with the same boldness that enabled him to make Time a principal character, he transformed the Perdita recognition into a mere report by anonymous though lively gentlemen (V.ii), which allowed him to concentrate intensely on the second recognition, the Statue scene. (272)

[41] Shakespeare used this technique in other works, of course. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, the king's miraculous recovery is reported rather than staged, and, as in *The Winter's Tale*, this allows for a reflection on reports, specifically wondrous news:

> Lafeu: I may truly say it is a novelty to the world.
> Paroles: It is indeed. If you will have it in showing, you shall read it in [*pointing to the ballad*] what-do-ye-call there.
> Lafeu: [*reads*] 'A showing of a heavenly effect in an earthly actor.'
> Paroles: That's it, I would have said the very same. (2.3.19-24)

To convey the news of the congested first reunion, Shakespeare uses anonymous characters—anonymous like the newsprint writers of the day—rather than serviceable, known characters like Dion and Cleomenes or the assorted lords of the play's first half. The First Gentleman knows a little. The Second Gentleman knows more. And the Third Gentleman knows all. As he often does in scenes of news transmission, Shakespeare breaks up the report of what has happened between multiple characters to create a more frenetic, unfolding effect. As the First Gentleman says in this gossipy scene, "I make a broken delivery of the business" (5.2.8). His report is confused and incomplete, and this is emphasized by the fact that two other gentlemen must "piece" his account (5.2.97). Shakespeare consistently stages news in this piecemeal fashion, sometimes parceling a unified narrative between multiple messengers, sometimes giving us multiple messengers or letters with competing accounts. Often, as here, the last messenger is a decisive eyewitness. This time it is Autolycus who asks for the news:

> Autolycus: Beseech you, sir, were you present at this relation? […] I would most gladly know the issue of it.
> First Gentleman: I make a broken delivery of the business. […] Here comes a gentleman that happily knows more. The news, Ruggiero!
> Second Gentleman: Nothing but bonfires. The oracle is fulfilled. The King's daughter is found. Such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour, that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it.
> *[Enter another Gentleman]*
> Here comes the Lady Paulina's steward. He can deliver you more. –How goes it now, sir? This news which is called true is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion. Has the King found his heir?
> Third Gentleman: Most true, if ever truth were pregnant by circumstance. That which you hear you'll swear you see, there is such unity in the proofs. The mantle of Queen Hermione's, her jewel about the neck of it, the letters of Antigonus found with it which they know to be his character; the majesty of the creature in resemblance of the mother; the affection of nobleness which nature shows above her breeding, and many other evidences proclaim her with all certainty to be the King's daughter. Did you see the meeting of the two kings?
> Second Gentleman: No.

Staged news tends to be oral or epistolary news. Here we have a case of printed news.

> Third Gentleman: Then have you lost a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of. […] I never heard of such another encounter, which lames report to follow it, and undoes description to do it.
> Second Gentleman: What, pray you, became of Antigonus, that carried hence the child?
> Third Gentleman: Like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse though credit be asleep and not an ear open. He was torn to pieces with a bear. This avouches the shepherd's son, who has not only his innocence, which seems much, to justify him, but a handkerchief and rings of his, that Paulina knows. (5.2.1-60)

In 4.4 Shakespeare mocks ballads of strange news and those gulled by their "old tale[s]" only to then stage a moment of news reporting in 5.2 that asks us to believe in wonders that out-ballad the balladeers—"that ballad-makers cannot be able to express" (5.2.22-23). As with Autolycus' ballads, accompanying these extraordinary reports are proofs that they are "Most true": "If ever truth were pregnant by circumstance [evidence]. That which you'll hear you'll swear you see, there is such unity in the proofs" (5.228-30). The reports and their evidence are so convincing that they can make us eyewitnesses of the event. We have seen a similar irony in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Toward the conclusion of the play, Theseus sounds the voice of reason, remarking how "strange" tales are nothing more than "antique fables" and "fairy toys" (5.1.1-2). To the credulous, a bush is easily supposed a bear (5.1.22). Yet we the audience *have* witnessed wonders, including a fairy who can transform himself into a headless bear. In *The Winter's Tale*, ballad wonders are mocked, only for Shakespeare to draw attention to the fact that he shows us multiple true wonders. As Stephen Orgel comments, Autolycus' dubious ballads "serve as indices to the nature and capacity for belief, rustic models for all those events that are said to be like incredible old tales—Antigonus' fatal encounter with the bear, Perdita's reappearance, Hermione's restoration, *The Winter's Tale* itself—but must nevertheless be believed" (50).

Scene 5.2 consists of *oral* news, of course: the direct news of eyewitnesses who can be questioned. It is not Autolycus' printed ballad news with the names of supposed eyewitnesses who cannot be found. But we should keep in mind that Leontes had rejected the sworn testimony of both his friends and the written oracle. We should also bear in mind that the play has conflated, via the words *copy* and *issue*, uncertainty over parentage with uncertainty over print. All this is to say that it is not merely *oral* news that is being, to some degree, redeemed in 5.2. New reports, testimonials, and evidence are all uplifted in this scene. In the first half of the play, Leontes scoffed at oaths, visual evidence, and Hermione's good report, but he was crazed; our sympathies, and trust, remained with Hermione. But in 4.4 Autolycus makes us reassess our confidence in reports, oaths, and evidence, for we are reminded that all three can be counterfeited. At the end of the play, however, we are lifted out of skepticism. Testimony and evidence in general are redeemed from Autolycus' forgeries and Leontes' skepticism, a skepticism that allowed for no evidence beyond his own intuition.

Autolycus listens to the news in 5.2 and cozens no one. He picks no pockets and sells no fraudulent news ballads. This venting of news reports is untainted by any association with the vagabond's toolset of tricks. More significantly, Autolycus—who knows how easy it is to forge a report and swear a false oath in support of it—believes. At the conclusion of *The Winter's Tale*, we too are called to believe in things not seen—the joyous reunions and discoveries—and we are told there is ample evidence to justify our belief. It is easy for us, however, as an audience to give credence to the gentlemen's reports, for we have already beheld the supporting evidence. We have missed the reunions but glimpsed the foundations of the "old tales": the lost baby found, the fardel, the man chased offstage by the bear. What is telling is that our news charlatan, Autolycus, believes. He has seen the closed fardel, but that is all.

The audience is rewarded with their own surprise: the restoration of Hermione.[42] "That she is living," Paulina says, "Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale. But it appears she lives" (5.3.116-18). Paulina has required "You do awake your faith," and that faith is rewarded with ocular proof: Hermione does spring to life before our eyes. But the unspoken implication of Paulina's remark would seem to be Jesus' words to doubting Thomas, *blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*. Within that number—they who have not seen and yet believe—will be Autolycus, should be choose to credit the bruited wonder of a statue come to life.

Conclusion

Mopsa, Dorcas, and the Clown are foolishly credulous. They take Autolycus at his word, and they take his ballads' testimonials at their word. Gripped by jealousy, Leontes plays the skeptic: he doubts his wife's faithfulness despite her oaths, the testimony of his trusted friends, and even the evidence of his own eyes—he admits that he and Mamillius resemble one another: "yet were it true [despite women's lies] / To say this boy were like me" (1.2.136-37). His extreme doubt is coupled with, or enables, an equally extreme credulity: namely, he believes his own intuitions are right in spite of all evidence to the contrary. He rejects all contrary evidence as flawed. Shakespeare thus suggests that extreme skepticism leads not to wisdom but delusion: a solipsistic certainty more credulous and foolish in its way than anything the rustics evince. The rustics believe what others confirm with testimony, and because testimony can be falsified they are sometimes deceived. Leontes, on the other hand, is worse. He believes he perceives a truth that others cannot—"You smell this business with a sense as cold / As is a dead man's nose. But I do

[42] It is of course possible, as with the many invented reports of death discussed above (e.g. Helen's fake demise in *All's Well*), that Paulina lied and Hermione never died. A drug that gives a woman the appearance of death is another Shakespearean trope.

see't and feel't" (2.1.153-54)—and is so certain of himself that he declares that knowledge is not truly possible if he errs in his assessment of Hermione (2.1.102-105). The rustics are gullible, but they are not grandiosely mad. Unlike Descartes, Leontes is unable to train his skepticism upon himself. Faith in others leads to being occasionally gulled, but the extreme suspicion of others (and their oaths, testimonials, and affidavits) leads to foolish self-aggrandizement.

The unreliability of good-faith news and the specter of false reports (complete with false affidavits) are key but neglected elements of the broader epistemic unease that haunts much of Shakespeare's work. But Shakespeare does not leave us in epistemic despair in *The Winter's Tale*, nor does he abandon us to news-cynicism. We are encouraged to use our noses, as Autolycus does, but we are also called to faith, especially faith in the testimony of others. As Paulina says, "It is required / You do awake your faith" (5.3.94-95). We are called to amend our cynicism (about news, testimony, and evidence)—for it leads not to wisdom but to Leontes' solipsistic lunacy—much as Autolycus, the character most familiar with deceit, is called to amend his ways by the simple Clown. The Clown will even swear to Florizel on Autolycus' behalf that the conman is "as honest a true fellow as any is in Bohemia," even though he knows this is "false" (5.2.140-41, 146). Like Mistress Tail-Porter and the imaginary justices of Autolycus' own ballads, the Clown will swear a falsehood. The Clown will give a "good report to the Prince"—Autolycus is honest, brave, and not inclined to drunkenness (5.2.133-151). Touched, Autolycus responds, "I will prove so, sir, to my power" (5.2.152).

If Autolycus can prove honest in character, he will also prove the Clown's false report true. An eleventh-hour redemption is possible for all in the world of the romance—for Autolycus, for news reports, for evidence writ large. All can be righted at the last minute, and counterfeits made honest.

CHAPTER FOUR

NECESSITY COMMANDS ME NAME MYSELF: RUMOR, REPORT, FAME, AND THE THREAT OF THE "MULTITUDINOUS TONGUE"

All tongues speak of him.
–William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* (2.1.191)

Shakespeare repeatedly stages unpleasant news scenarios, often the bombardment of bad news or the anxious navigation of conflicting, or otherwise dubious, reports. As the previous chapter argued, cultural anxieties about the reliability of news stoke the larger epistemic anxieties (regarding evidence, proof, and certainty) that run throughout much of Shakespeare's work. These epistemic news anxieties are prominently represented in Shakespeare's plays, and in early modern drama broadly, which is unsurprising, given that contemporaries complain the most about the discredit of commercial news. As chapter one detailed, however, not all forms of news anxiety were epistemic in nature. Shakespeare's final tragedy, *Coriolanus*, dramatizes two other kinds of news anxiety. One, the fear that news meddled with matters of state, thus undermining good government. The second, a more personal terror: the fear that fame could consume a man. *The Winter's Tale* stages epistemic news anxiety; *Coriolanus*, political and existential news anxiety.

Coriolanus begins and ends in noise. The play opens with the uproar of the Roman citizens and ends with a funeral march. Trumpets and drums resound throughout the work. Coriolanus is "whooped" out of the city; he dies at the hands of a shouting mob. Throughout it

all, Coriolanus thrives on the discord, as if antagonism and anger were his meat and drink, as if the blood of his own wounds, as Volumnia's metaphorical conflation suggests, were his mother's milk (1.3.35-38). The same image is later invoked by Coriolanus when he says to Aufidius, "I have…drawn tuns of blood out of thy country's breast" (4.5.97-98). Nourished as he is by conflict, Coriolanus proves physically invulnerable. Yet he remains strangely vulnerable to language throughout the play: Coriolanus has been "clucked" off to wars by his mother since he was a boy (5.3.163), and in the course of the play he is "grieve[d]" by praise, "shouted" and "hooted" out of the city, formally banished, stripped of his nominal addition, threatened by Volumnia with the afterlife of his name, forced to break his silence and capitulate at the sound of her words, and finally betrayed by the incendiary slander of Aufidius, who accuses Coriolanus, with some warrant, of being a forswearer, a promise-breaker, a changed man.

Words are powerful in this world. "Do not cry havoc when you should but hunt / With modest warrant," as Menenius says to the citizens' tribunes (3.1.274-75). The cry of *havoc* was the devastating signal for an army to pillage and slaughter a captured town. Later, when Coriolanus is preparing to sack the gates of Rome, Menenius describes the man-turned-dragon as if his very language were monstrously potent: Coriolanus "talks like a knell, and his hum is a battery" (5.4.17-18). When Coriolanus makes peace with Rome, the people must "Unshout the noise that banished Martius" (5.5.4). Coriolanus himself is predicated on action and, to use J. L. Austin's term, performative utterances: words that are actions. To swear by and swear at, to curse, to praise, to vote, to banish, to cry *havoc*—these are expressions that do things. For Coriolanus, politics is a despised world of words; war a world of actions. He thus favors language that is performative, often in the form of invective or oath. Better yet is silence. Even

Coriolanus' metaphors for capitulation to the political, rhetorical sphere are militaristic: "The smiles of knaves / Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up / The glasses of my sight!" (3.2.116-18). He refers to the acts of encampment (tent) and occupation (take up) of siege warfare.

Coriolanus' desire for invulnerability and his wariness of language have drawn substantial comment from critics. He longs to be self-authored, kinless, a war machine whose only nourishment is violence. His struggle to cast off all human vulnerability is strongly connected to his attempts to shrug off civic language. Coriolanus notably resists others' attempts to affect him with performative utterances (e.g. votes, honor, and banishment), but he also resists reports and representations of himself throughout the play. His attempt at self-sufficiency thus extends into the linguistic sphere.

Many critics have discussed Coriolanus' resistance to civic language, but none has fully reckoned with his specific *refusal to be reported*. To adapt Cominius' complaint, *why* is Coriolanus "cruel" to his own "good report" (1.10.53-54)? In this chapter I argue that the early modern cultural context of news anxiety clarifies a perplexing part of Coriolanus' character, for he expresses an extreme form of the view that news and news-hunger are maladies. It is not merely, for him, that people talk too much, are too hungry for news, and are too affected by it—their hearts shaken by "every feeble rumour," as he says (3.3.129). News, rumor, public opinion, and fame are unreliable, wavering, dishonest, and tainted. But even more than that, for Coriolanus, news in whatever form—word of mouth, letter, or written chronicle—poses both national and existential threats. News poses a national threat for him because the impertinent public opinion it fosters undermines social order, as Coriolanus' speeches to the patricians make clear. And news poses an existential threat because the emphasis on the importance of report

implies that identity is dependent on representation, honor underwritten by acclaim. If *fama* is debased and mutable, so too then is virtue and identity.[1]

Coriolanus' great weakness, as Brutus rightly diagnoses, is that "he speaks / What's in his heart" (3.3.28-29). And what fills his heart is anger. Thus, he can only speak "with a throat of war" (3.3.112).[2] But as Volumnia's advice to him makes clear (to speak "words / That are but roted in your tongue…Bastards and syllables of no allowance / To your bosom's truth") such honesty—a correspondence of words and meaning and character—has little place in the polis (3.2.55-57). The plebs, on the other hand, seem to mean what they say, but what they say is so mutable, as Coriolanus scorns, that their language is even less trustworthy: "With every minute you do change a mind, / And call him noble that was now your hate" (1.1.171-72). His complaint proves prophetic, for the citizens vote Coriolanus consul only to immediately undo it. And Coriolanus dies at the hands of a shouting Volscian mob that moments before welcomed him with fanfare.

Is Coriolanus' glaring fault—his truculent refusal or inability to follow societal norms, especially the norms of civic discourse—his own, or is it owing to his society? That is, is his behavior a mad resistance to the world and its public life and language, or a clear-eyed mockery of a mad world? How justified is his linguistic truculence? The issue divides critics. We might be tempted to attribute such truculence to Plutarch, who did, as North translates it, portray Coriolanus as "churlishe, uncivill, and altogether unfit for any mans conversation" (Bullough

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[1]The classical conception of *fama* was a rich conflation of fame, news, rumor, and report. The classical *fama* underwrote the early modern conflation of fame and news, as when Francis Bacon uses "fame" to describe the amalgam of rumor and report in his essay "Of Seditions and Troubles," where he writes that "fames…are no less indeed the preludes of seditions to come" (391).

[2] As Paul Jorgensen writes, "Probably in no other Shakespeare play is the hero's flaw so conveniently, so frequently, and so monotonously explained. The same misfortune befalls the general again and again, and it is explained repeatedly in one way: bred to the wars, Coriolanus bears himself awkwardly, and is ungratefully used, in time of peace" (235).

506).[3] Yet Plutarch's Coriolanus is also a man of "excellent witte" and "thought no lesse eloquent in tongue, then warlike in showe," to the point that Aufidius fears he must kill Coriolanus before the Roman can skillfully defend himself before the Volsces, "bicause emongest other things he had an eloquent tongue" (Bullough 531, 543). Plutarch's Coriolanus is also a man of considerable craftiness, and is suspected of instigating war between the Romans and Volsces via a "false reporte."[4] Shakespeare's Coriolanus is unable or unwilling to conjure expedient craft and eloquence.

Some critics have emphasized the defect in the man, and have thus interpreted Coriolanus' prickly sensitivity to language as the negative outgrowth of some psychological defect. In *Suffocating Mothers*, Janet Adelman argues that Coriolanus rejects public discourse (with its mutual bonds and dependencies) as a displaced form of revenge on his un-nurturing mother. Likewise, Stanley Cavell sees in Coriolanus' verbal pugnacity a wounded inability or unwillingness to accept love and thus integration into the polis. Kenneth Burke also sees an arrested development, describing Coriolanus' invective as infantile rage, a radically free form of language "that must soon be subjected to control, once articulacy develops" (93). Stanley Fish, on the other hand, argues that Coriolanus' behavior owes to a serious misunderstanding of the

[3] Early on his account, Plutarch highlights the ambiguous nature of Coriolanus: "This man also is a good proofe to confirme some mens opinions: That a rare and excellent witte, untaught, doth bring forth many good and evil things together: like as a fat soil bringeth forth both herbs and weeds that lieth unmanured. For this Martius naturall wit and great harte dyd marvellously sturre up his corage, to doe and attempt noble actes. But on the other side, for lacke of education, he was so chollericke and impacient, that he would yeld to no living creature: which made him churlishe, uncivill, and altogether unfit for any mans conversation" (Bullough 506).

[4] In North's Plutarch we read that "apon some suspition or *false reporte*, they [the Romans] made proclamation by sound of trumpet, that all the Volsces should avoyde out of Rome before sunne set. Some thincke this was a crafte and deceipt of Martius, who sent one to Rome to the Consuls to accuse the Volsces falsely, advertising them howe they [the Volsces] had made a conspiracie to set upon them [the Romans] whilest they were busie in seeing these games, and also to set their cittie a fyre." (530 italics mine)

communal nature of language, especially performative language. Coriolanus makes excessive demands on civic language in this reading.

Other critics have stressed that there is a defect in the language of society which Coriolanus intransigently mocks with some justification. D. J. Gordon sees within Coriolanus' linguistic truculence an insightful critique of fame and an awareness of its danger, a recognition that outside the polis is a wordless wilderness while within it "to speak is to be guilty" (219). James Calderwood sees Coriolanus' verbal resistance as a failed but heroic attempt to establish a private language distinct from the polis' mendacious language, an effort to create "a private verbal standard in which he gives his own value to words" (217). Carol Sicherman argues that an attempt at private language is not really ventured, but that Coriolanus' verbal truculence is an understandably guarded response to the emptiness of language, a recognition that this world is one where words, meanings, and feelings are frequently "out of tune" (206). John Plotz, likewise, sees in Coriolanus' behavior a trenchant critique of the fraudulence of all civic language. The play thus leaves us as readers in a state of linguistic anxiety, he argues, for it veers from absolute freedom ("the licentious use of language without regard to truth") to "attempted absolutism (Coriolanus's imperial arrogation of meaning-making to himself) back into a state of persistent anxiety about negotiating a world in which neither of these alternatives quite works" (829). Kenneth Gross also discerns a moral element in Coriolanus' contempt, an awareness that "other speakers do not know the cost of their words" (141).

This latter group of critics (Gordon, Calderwood, Sicherman, Plotz, Gross) rightly sees that, whatever his own ample faults, Coriolanus resists the norms of civic language because he perceives, to some degree, that the civic language of Rome is tainted with mendacity, expediency, and fickleness. But it is not only civic language broadly that Coriolanus loathes. He

is especially provoked and resistant to acts of report. Volumnia not only shames her son into dishonestly appealing to the plebs in 3.2 ("I'll mountebank their loves / Cog their hearts" as he says 3.2.134-35), she shames him into an act of self-report.

Coriolanus' "cruel[ty]" to his own "good report" remains the issue with which critics have insufficiently reckoned. Critics incisively anatomize Coriolanus' contempt for civic language, yet are unable to fully explain its cause. Kenneth Gross meditates more than any other critic on why, to Coriolanus' ears, even acclaim from his friends rings of defamation:

> *Coriolanus* presents us with a civic hero for whom all public praise, all language of public 'election,' seems strangely equivalent to slander, nothing but empty and contaminating public wind—against which Coriolanus can only aim self-wounding vituperation, a style of rage that echoes what is for him the purer, more candid noise of the battlefield. (3)

Yet Gross, too, comes up short as to why this is. Early modern news anxiety, I argue, fills this gap. For whether Shakespeare realized it not, his Coriolanus is an extreme reaction against the nascent news culture in England. And unlike other Shakespearean works that satirize the duplicity of news (e.g. *The Winter's Tale*), *Coriolanus* is a war play with a distinct lack of false reports (unlike, say, *2 Henry IV* or *Othello*) that consequently attacks not the mendacity of news but its general debasement, as well as its existential threat to both government and individual.

"All tongues speak of him," Brutus notes jealously of Coriolanus, and this play does indeed present us with a tragic hero who, though little given to introspection and soliloquies, is constantly discussed and interpreted by others (2.1.191). But Coriolanus does not "aim" at Fame, as Brutus believes (1.2.254).[5] He is the opposite of a fame-seeker like Falstaff, who spreads

[5] Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that Coriolanus *no longer* seeks fame. He was clearly taught by his mother to seek a "good report," which would have recompensed her had he died. And he rouses the soldiers in 1.7 with these words: "if any fear / Lesser for his person than an ill report," then let him follow me (1.7.69-70). Perhaps then part of Coriolanus' anger stems from the fact that he has risked his life for the acclaim of the patricians but is now aware that even the patricians' words are deeply instrumental and expedient. This growing disenchantment fuels his fury.

rumors about himself and is solicitous about how he is chronicled and balladed (*2 Henry IV* 4.2). Instead, Coriolanus suggests that to be in others' mouths is a horror, an infection. His attitude calls to mind Hubert's almost pathological description of news transmission in *King John* 4.2, in which mechanics all discuss the just-deceased Arthur.[6] The Roman war hero abhors the tongues and reeking breath of the rabble—pictured as a monstrous Hydra, a common emblem for the masses—as both a political and personal threat. And his intense aversion to the language of others, his fear of being "monstered" and controlled by others' accounts**,** can only be fully understood in the context of early modern news anxiety. For Coriolanus' family, friends, and enemies all insist on his report. "But had he died in the business [of war], madam, how then?" Virgilia asks her mother-in-law. "Then his good report should have been my son. I therein would have found issue," is Volumnia's reply (1.3.16-18).[7] It is precisely this substitution—name for man—that horrifies her son.

Fighting Words

Shakespeare's culture had a deep respect for the power of words. Slander, loose talk, and rumor—ruinous both to state and individual—were all deeply feared, and the growth of newsprint must have only intensified those fears.[8] As Noah Millstone writes, "the notion that unchecked negative representations could lead to the collapse of states underwrote Elizabethan theories of libel" (64). In his essay "Of Seditions and Troubles," Francis Bacon argued that "Libels, and licentious Discourses against the state, when they are frequent and open; And in like

[6] Stephen Wittek discusses this scene incisively in *The Media Players*, p. 30-32. Note that Brutus' speech in *Coriolanus* mirrors Hubert's—in both cases the people are overly taken with a news spectacle to their professional distraction and the news leads to a social mixture of "variable complexions" (*Coriolanus* 2.1.191).

[7] The print connotations of Volumnia's *issue* is further realized when she considers Coriolanus' future "chronicle" (5.3.146) and when Coriolanus considers how he is recorded in Volscian "annals" (5.6.114).

[8] See Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander in Early Modern Europe*; Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise*; and Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses*.

sort, false Newes, often running up and downe, to the disadvantage of the State, and hastily embraced; are amongst the signs of [national] *Troubles*" (391).[9] But the personal danger of libel was also keenly felt. The threat of being "balladed" is a long-running joke on the early modern stage, unsurprisingly enough given the period's deep concern with reputation.[10] As a character jokes in Chapman's *Monsieur d'Olive* (1606), "I am afraid of nothing but I shall be balladed" (3.1). After being tricked, Falstaff threatens Hal and company with "And have I not ballads made on you all, / and sung to filthy tunes, let a cup of / sack be my poison" (*I Henry IV* 2.2.40-41). Euphanes proclaims in Fletcher's *Queen of Corinth* that if anyone

> Can with unthankfulness assoil me, let him
> Dig out mine eyes, and sing my name in verse,
> in Ballad verse, at every drinking house,
> and no man be so charitable to lend me
> a Dogg to guide my steps. (3.1)

Here, being balladed is hyperbolically paired with eye-gouging—indeed, it would seem to up the ante, punishment-wise. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Helen conflates torture with the traducing ballad, which brands and racks one's name: "Traduced by odious ballads, my maiden's name / Seared otherwise, nay—worse of worst—extended with vilest torture" (2.1.171-72). "I shall be Ballated / Sung up and down by Minstrells," Valladura laments in Heywood's *A Challenge for Beauty* (2.1).

A strong class element is sometimes present in the fear of being balladed: what was at stake was not merely slander but debasement at the hands of the vulgar. Shakespeare's Cleopatra, defeated but clear-eyed, sees what lies in wait for her as a conquered queen:

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[9] As one pamphlet writer would later write in his attack on cheap newsprint, "Scurrilous Pamphlets have done more mischief in the kingdome then ever all my Lord of *Essex's*, or Sir Thomas *Fairfaxes* whole traine of Artillery ever did" (6), *A Fresh Whip for al Scandalous Lyers. Or, A true description of the two eminent Pamphliteers or Squibtellers of this Kingdome* (1647).

[10] Würzback collects a number of such examples in the Appendix to her *Rise of the English Street Ballad*. Hyder Rollins also collects examples in his essay "The Blackletter Broadside" 277-281.

> Now, Iras, what think'st thou?
> Thou, an Egyptian puppet shall be shown
> In Rome, as well as I. Mechanic slaves
> With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
> Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
> Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
> And forced to drink their vapour. […]
> Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras. Saucy lictors
> Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
> Ballad us out o' tune. The quick comedians
> Extemporally will stage us, and present
> Our Alexandrian revels. And Anthony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I'th' posture of a whore. (5.2.203-217)

Much like Coriolanus, Cleopatra evinces a physical aversion to the breath of the mechanics. They *encloud* her atmosphere, forcing her to "drink their vapour;" for Coriolanus, they *infect his air*. The topical ballad is conflated with the topical play. Both were venues for news. Both, as Cleopatra foresees, will sting. In choosing the asp, Cleopatra refuses to be a monster, a show, a news spectacle. Macbeth, yet another character from the same period in Shakespeare's work, makes a similar calculation:

> Macduff: Then yield thee, coward,
> And live to be the show and gaze o'th' time.
> We'll have thee as our rarer monsters are,
> Painted upon a pole, and underwrit
> 'Here may you see the tyrant.'
> Macbeth: I will not yield
> To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet
> And to be baited with the rabble's curse. (5.10.23-29)

For Macbeth, to become the conquered monster is to become a news spectacle, and to become the latter is to be a baited bear, harassed by "the rabble's curse."

Coriolanus takes this reasoning much further: for him, one need not become an *infamous* news spectacle; one need not be slandered and undone by the world's "general censure," to

borrow a phrase from Hamlet as he muses on reputation (*Hamlet* 1.4.38). For Coriolanus, the rabble's voices and breath taint even when they are full of praises. Likewise, the praise of his social equals grieves him. To be a news figure at all, in his determination, is to be baited like a bear in the pits. To be named by others is to be defamed. An otherwise fearless soldier, he is deeply wary of words, particularly praise:

> Brutus: Sir, I hope
> My words disbenched yout not?
> Coriolanus: No, sir, yet oft
> When blows have made me stay I fled from words.
> You soothed not, therefore hurt not… (2.2.66-68)

Coriolanus cannot bear, he claims, "To hear my nothings monstered"—in the sense of his feats exaggerated to grotesque proportions by false reports. But the Latin root of the word is telling: *monstrare,* to exhibit, to display. In Shakespeare's time, monsters were still thought to embody a message from God, typically one of judgment or warning. Monsters were both news and exhibit, as *Macbeth, Anthony and Cleopatra*, and *The Tempest* all remind us. Coriolanus does not only gripe about the people's exaggerations; he resists being displayed at all. "I would they [the common people] would forget me," as he says (2.3.53). He desires for his deeds to somehow stand on their own, without report or interpretation. Even the wordless display of his battle-acquired wounds, a ritualized form of public news, offends him. He never frets about being balladed, for what he fears is not slander and ill report so much as report in general. Tellingly in a play wherein everyone is keen to offer their opinion, good or bad, of Coriolanus, there is only one time he asks to hear a report of himself, and it is from the lips of his almost-equal enemy, Aufidius, a man who hates him. "Spoke he [Aufidius] of me?" he asks Lartius.

> Lartius: He did, my lord.
> Coriolanus: How? What?

We return to this singular "Spoke he of me?" by the end of the play, when for the first time Coriolanus embraces his name and fame in the annals of history, albeit the bitter history of his enemy. Just as tellingly, the three times that Coriolanus deigns to report his own deeds—an act he otherwise cannot stomach—the subject is his solo assault of Corioles and the audience is Aufidius.[11]

To be a public figure, as King Harry realizes the morning of the Battle of Agincourt, was to be "subject to the breath / Of every fool…What infinite heartease / Must kings neglect that private men enjoy" (*Henry V* 4.1.126-19). What Coriolanus cannot endure is to be subject to the breath of others. His resistance to language—to rumor, reputation, and public discourse—is also a resistance to news culture. Coriolanus fears—if that is in fact the right word—both the Hydra's control over his own narrative (its tongues will enter his wounds and "speak for them," as one citizen says) and the monster's danger to government (2.3.6-7). Its tongues, its loose talk, its rumors, its wavering opinions, its news—all threatened to undo order.

Queen Elizabeth, sometimes portrayed in contemporary literature as *fama*, was keenly aware of the power of rumor, having often been the target of both political and personal slander throughout her long career.[12] Playing off of the duplicity of reports, she once deliberately (so it seems) misconstrued a compliment as an insult: after the young Baron Waldenstein was presented to her, as he records in his diary, he "said in reality that she far surpassed the reports

[11] These moments of willing self-report occur in the fight with Aufidius at 1.9 ("Within these three hours, Tullus, / Alone I fought in your Corioles' walls / And made what work I pleased"), the meeting with Aufidius in 4.5, and in Coriolanus' final boast in Antium ("I fluttered your Volscians in Corioles") in 5.6. Coriolanus also makes a coerced, mockingly bland self-report to the citizens ("For your voices I have fought…Done many things, some less, some more") in 2.3.

[12] As Kenneth Gross writes, Elizabeth "was dogged throughout her reign by tales of sexual misbehavior, secret marriages, and illegitimate children, or rumors about her secret plots to murder her rivals" (28). On the identification of Queen Elizabeth with Fame, see Kiefer, "Rumor, Fame, and Slander in *2 Henry IV*." The so-called Rainbow Portrait of Elizabeth, which features a gown decorated with tongues and ears, is a notable example.

about her, then she interrrupeted me, putting the wrong meaning on my words, and said: 'This shall be your lordship's punishment—you have perhaps heard more than your are going to see: pay somewhat less attention to rumour'" (qtd. in Botelho 14).

The fear of being balladed and mocked on the stage was not a comic invention of the playwrights. Under house arrest on suspicion of treason in 1600, the Earl of Essex wrote a remarkable letter to Elizabeth that candidly expressed his fears about how he was—and would be—portrayed in print and on stage.

> I not only…am subject to their wicked informations, that first envyed me for my happiness in your favor, & nowe hate me out of custom; but as if I were throwen into a corner like a dead carcas, I am gnawed on & torne by the vilest and basest creatures upon earthe. The prating tavern-haunter speaks of me what he list: the frantick libeler writes of me what he list; already they print me and make me speak to the world; and shortly they will play me in what forme they list upon the stage. The least of these is a thousand times worse than death. (Birch, *Elizabeth* 444-45)

The earl's good name was being torn at by dogs, and the Queen, as he later laments, will no longer read his letters. Without his voice to defend himself, other voices would undo him. Indeed, those voices controlled his voice ("they print me and make me speak to the world"). The power of self-presentation had slipped away from him, or so he feared.[13] Coriolanus, as I am arguing, is different than the earl, for the Roman hero is wary of other voices speaking his name and yet loathes to speak his own name. He shuns representations altogether, including self-presentation. To his mind, a man and his deeds should speak for themselves, without reliance on name, fame, and report. "Thy name," Aufidus demands. "Why speak'st not? Speak, man. What's thy name?" Six times he must ask Coriolanus for his name. The latter seems to hope that he

[13] After his abortive revolt, the earl would be beheaded in the Tower of London and posthumously subjected to a variety of printed portrayals. As F. J. Levy notes, "A man interested in the fall of the Earl of Essex might buy a broadside on the subject for a penny, or read Francis Bacon's account of the treason for six pence or the Reverend William Barlow's sermon on the execution for four pence" (15). Paul Jorgensen argues that Essex was, like Coriolanus, "a brilliant fighter and bad general" and that parallels between the two military men were "too close to have escaped any contemporary audience" (222).

might do without language, without self-report, that his innate nature might simply be self-evident. But it is not.[14]

> Coriolanus [*unmuffling his head*]: If, Tullus,
> Not yet thou know'st me, and seeing me dost not
> Think me for the man I am, necessity
> Commands me name myself.

The act of naming himself—of taking hold of his own fame and reputation and shaping them through self-presentation—is precisely the political act Coriolanus avoids to his own peril. It is only to his greatest enemy that he can so speak.

The Dangers of Fame

In the Induction to *2 Henry IV*, Rumour, wearing a robe "painted full of tongues," begins the play with these words:

> Open your ears; for which of you will stop
> The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?
> I, from the orient to the drooping west,
> Making the wind my post-horse, still unfold
> The acts commencèd on this ball of earth.
> Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,
> The which in every language I pronounce,
> Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.
> I speak of peace while covert enmity
> Under the smile of safety wounds the world;
> And who but Rumour, who but only I,
> Make fearful musters and prepared defense,
> Whiles the big year, swoll'n with some other griefs,
> Is thought with child by the stern tyrant war,
> And no such matter? Rumour is a pipe
> Blown by surmises, Jealousy's conjectures,
> And of so easy and so plain a stop
> That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,
> The still-discordant wav'ring multitude,
> Can play upon it. (1-20)

[14] Sicherman writes that, even disguised, Coriolanus "expects his great rival to know his identity and purpose instantly, without words, rather as if two angels—enjoying intuitive rather than discursive knowledge—were encountering." (192).

The classical *fama* behind Shakespeare's Rumour was itself a monster, a creature of countless eyes and ears and tongues that spread both true and false reports. Shakespeare's Rumour is, by its own metaphor, an instrument too easily played by yet another monster: "the blunt monster with uncounted heads, / The still-discordant wav'ring multitude," or what Coriolanus calls "Hydra," "the many-headed multitude," and "The beast / With many heads" (3.1.96, 2.3.15, 4.1.1-2). Rumour makes good on its boast of stuffing men's ears with "false reports," for Act 1, Scene 1 stages a decidedly early-modern dilemma: the crisis of conflicting reports. Lord Bardolph brings "certain news" of victory; Travers, news of defeat (1.1.12). The bad news is soon confirmed by Morton, himself an eyewitness. The supremely confident Lord Bardolph has been duped by a false report. Falstaff later takes Coleville in combat without lifting his sword, for the latter has apparently been duped by Falstaff's own self-aggrandizing rumors. Coriolanus cannot stand to be in others' mouths; he has then little desire to self-report. With gusto, Falstaff conflates himself with the body of Rumour (*painted full of tongues*) itself: "I have a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine, and not a tongue of them all speaks any other word but my name" (*2 Henry IV* 4.2.16-18). Falstaff, a one-man *fama*, has spread many flattering lies about the great Falstaff, thus leading Coleville to yield himself to a coward. He is solicitous about his "good report" (4.2.75) and his care extends to written reports:

> I beseech your grace, let it [Coleville's yielding to him] be booked with the rest of this day's deeds; or, by the Lord, I will have it in a particular ballad else, with mine own picture on't, Coleville kissing my foot; to the which course if I be enforced, if you do not all show like gilt twopences to me, and I in the clear sky of fame o'ershine you as much as the full moon doth the cinders of the element, which show like pins' heads to her, believe not the word of the noble. Therefore let me have right, and let desert mount. (4.2.40-49)

Falstaff, a coward, seeks to control his name; Coriolanus, a war hero, does not. It is not until his death is imminent that Coriolanus considers his portrayal in chronicles and annals.

A rumor of grain hoarding sets off the mob at the beginning of Shakespeare's final tragedy. From the start, Coriolanus treats the citizens as if they were the embodiment of rumor itself, as their frequent association with "voices" and "tongues" underscores.[15] Their "opinion," "good word," and "favours" are too misplaced and fickle to be trusted, and he mocks them with language—"rubbing the poor itch of your opinion;" "your affections are / A sick man's appetite, who desires most that / Which would increase his evil"—that strongly calls to mind the standard critique of newsmongering as a lust and malady (1.1.154-169).[16] Coriolanus notably seizes not on the truth-value of citizens' claim but its impertinence: "Hang 'em! They say? / They'll sit by th' fire and presume to know / What's done i'th' Capitol, whose like to rise, / Who thrives and who declines" (1.1.179-82). Though the setting is the Roman Republic, the dangerous presumptuousness of domestic news was an issue of grave concern to early modern culture. In 1620, when the corantos implied opposition to his foreign policy, James I had his Privy Council

> straitly […] command them and evry of them, from the highest to the lowest, to take heede, how they intermeddle by Penne, or Speech, with causes of State, and secrets of Empire, either at home, or abroad, but containe themselves within that modest and reverent regard, of matters, above their reach and calling, that to good and dutifull Subjects appertaineth. (Larkin and Hughes 495-96)[17]

The corantos were new, but the king's complaint was an old one. In 1553 Mary I had issued a proclamation that complained that "seditious persons"

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[15] The citizens are sometimes referred to *as* "voices," as when Coriolanus says "Here come more voices" or when Cominius mockingly addresses them "You're goodly things, you voices!" (2.3.115, 4.6.154). On the citizens as the embodiment of unstable opinion, see William Rosen, *Shakespeare' Craft of Tragedy*, 167-171 and James Calderwood, 212-13. Rosen notes that throughout the play, the "crowd picks up the leader's words" in an echoic fashion (168). In Act 2, Brutus tells Sicinius, "Let's to the Capitol, / And carry with us ears and eyes from th' time" (2.2.254-55). His meaning is simply to stay vigilant, but the people's two tribunes also become here yet another image of Rumour.

[16] Coriolanus also warns the Consul, "let them [the multitude] not lick / The sweet which is their poison" (3.1.159-160). On the critical rhetoric surrounding news and news-hunger, see Chapter One.

[17] See also F. J. Levy's "Staging the News," which notes that the likely author of this proclamation was Francis Bacon.

> cease not to invent, spread, and publish many false, untrue, and vain rumors and bruits, rashly discoursing upon the great and most weighty affairs touching the Queen's highness' royal person and state of the realm, contrary to their bounden duties of allegiance and contrary to all good order. (qtd. in Botelho 17)

Other monarchs, including Elizabeth, issued similarly pointed messages, rebuking such domestic news not only because it was "invent[ed]" and "false," but because it commented upon persons and affairs of state that were entirely out of bounds. Rumor and news led to public opinion, and the latter fostered a world "where gentry, title, wisdom / Cannot conclude but by the yea and no / Of general ignorance," as Coriolanus warns the patricians (3.1.147-49). Domestic news of a political nature in Shakespeare's time was *de facto* forbidden, for it was "contrary to all good order" as one of the Stuart proclamations put it. As Jason Peacey writes in his study of the relationship between print and politics, early modern newsprint was "thought to threaten royal authority" because pamphleteers and their readers meddled in matters of state (3). But "most importantly," Peacey argues, "contemporaries feared the *participatory* impact of cheap print, and they worried that print would foster unwelcome debate and division among the commonalty. They feared…an undermining of social distinctions by 'a sea of democracy'" (3-4). Coriolanus voices this political objection to news, specifically the newsmongering of the plebeians.

What is *not* under interrogation in *Coriolanus* then is the unreliability and "vast confusion" of news or the danger of false reports, despite the fact that Shakespeare engages with such issues in other works.[18] Though the rumor of Roman grain hoarding is never substantiated or disproven, the military reports in *Coriolanus* are all, notably, correct: the news that the Volsces are in arms in Act 1, the news of Coriolanus' shocking league with them, and the news of the eleventh-hour peace. Though Coriolanus scorns the people for their inconstancy and manipulability, scoffing that their hearts are shaken by "every feeble rumour," this is a

[18] The quoted phrase is Robert Burton's and is discussed in chapter one.

Shakespeare play with a distinct lack of false reports (3.3.129). Despite the absence of false reports, Coriolanus consistently rails against the falseness of rumor, report, and fame in general, precisely because all public discourse rings false to him. His grievance is not with false (i.e. invented) reports, but with the falseness of all report.

What is at stake is the participatory democracy that news foments. A government had two options with regard to public news: co-opt or censor. Coriolanus clearly believes in the latter strategy. But as F. J Levy argues, "restricting the knowledge of news and, by extension, any discussion of the meaning of that news to members of the political nation, was by the early seventeenth century…becoming strained" ("Staging" 257). For Coriolanus, the people with their mutable voices and reeking breath should be silenced. News was for authorities to pass down to the people when and where they saw fit. The perceived sharp divide between patrician and plebeian necessitated a strict news order: a top-down "ritual news" process. To allow the plebeians to speak of and in the Capitol (through their tribunes) was to muddle—and thus, monster—the proper hierarchy of state:

> You are plebeians,
> If they be senators: and they are no less,
> When, both your voices blended, the great'st taste
> Most palates theirs. They choose their magistrate,
> And such a one as he, who puts his 'shall,'
> His popular 'shall' against a graver bench
> Than ever frowned in Greece. By Jove himself,
> It makes the consuls base: and my soul aches
> To know, when two authorities are up,
> Neither supreme, how soon confusion
> May enter 'twixt the gap of both and take
> The one by the other.
> […] at once pluck out
> The multitudinous tongue (3.1.94-114)

Voices are not only voices here (imputing honor, conferring and dispersing *fama*) but votes, thus Sicinius' "the people / Must have their voices" and Coriolanus' mocking "Here come more voices. / Your voices! For your voices I have fought" during the process of his election to consulship (2.2.136-37; 2.3.115-16).[19] For his treasonous call to pluck out their "multitudinous tongue," Coriolanus is banished, shouted out of the city by the "Hydra" of the people. Coriolanus thus advances a political objection to rumor, news, and the dissentious voices of the common people.

What then is an acceptable news order for Coriolanus? David Randall has written at length about the "ritual news" of the early modern military world. The firing of canons, the display of enemy regimental colors, the ringing of bells, a triumph into the city gates, a public thanksgiving to God for victory—these were a form of news where action was word.[20] This news was not only potentially wordless (a bell-ringing signaling military victory), but authoritative, precisely because it was so hierarchical. Only someone in a place of authority—a captain or king or the like—could authorize such a public act, which conveyed *arcana imperii* to the masses at the appropriate time.[21] We see the authority and transparency of such ritual news in Act 5, Scene 4 of *Coriolanus*, which provides another example of Shakespeare's frequent staging of news bombardment. Menenius tells Sicinius that the situation is helpless: Coriolanus, "grown from man to dragon," will lay waste to Rome no matter his family's entreaties. "He wants nothing of a god but eternity and a heaven to throne him in," he concludes.

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[19] On the parallels between this election procedure and the election process to the Elizabethan House of Commons, see Gordon 206-7.

[20] Randall writes that "Where military news was concerned, such [public] rituals drew ultimately from a language of military symbols that was, by and large, intelligible across much of western and central Europe. A very large number of specific acts communicated specific military information" (27).

[21] As Ben Jonson writes in *News from the New World*, the king "alone is able to resolve" the truth that escapes the three professional newsmongers, Printer, Factor, and Chronicler (285-86).

Sicinius: Yes: mercy, if you report him truly.
Menenius: I paint him in the character…
[Enter a Messenger]
Messenger [to Sicinius]: Sir, if you'd save your life, fly to your house.
The plebeians have got your fellow tribune
And hale him up and down, all swearing if
The Roman ladies bring not comfort home
They'll give him death by inches.
[Enter another Messenger]
Sicinius: What's the news?
Second Messenger: Good news, good news. The ladies have prevailed
…….
Sicinius: Art thou certain this is true. Is't most certain?
Second Messenger: As certain as I know the sun is fire.
Where have you lurked that you make doubt of it?
Ne'er through an arch so hurried the blown tide
As the recomforted through th' gates.
Trumpets, hautboys, drums, beat all together.
Why, hark you,
The trumpets, sackbuts, psalteries, and fifes,
Tabors and cymbals and the shouting Romans
Make the sun dance.
A shout within.
Hark you!
Menenius: This is good news. (5.4.10-46)

In the noisy world of *Coriolanus*, the drum announces war and peace in an honest, wordless language distinct from the common people's bruits and rumormongering and the nobles' political gamesmanship. Coriolanus, who talks "like a knell" and whose "'hmh' is a battery" is at ease only among this war noise (5.4.17-18).[22] His voice is an instrument of war, not of public discourse: his "throat of war…Choired with my drum" (3.3.112-13). His tongue is conflated with the drum and with "thunder from a tabor" (1.7.25). Volumnia notes that shouts and trumpet flourishes are his "ushers…Before him he carries noise, and behind him leaves tears" (2.1.144-45). "When drums and trumpets shall / I'th' field prove flatterers, let courts and cities be / Made all of false-faced soothing," Coriolanus says after his triumph at Corioles (1.10.42-44). His

[22] Note that a knell is another form of wordless ritual news.

fellow soldiers celebrate him with a tumult of noise, and Coriolanus upbraids them for using drums and trumpets—the instruments of war—to praise him "In acclamations hyperbolical" (1.10.50). In using the war instruments for a purpose other than the call to arms or announcement of victory or call to retreat, they "profane" "these same instruments" (1.10.41).[23]

Ironically, though war noise sounds truest to Coriolanus, wartime was often associated with the tactical lie, false news, and a permissive mendacity. Plutarch's Coriolanus is suspected of employing a "false reporte" (530). Machiavelli writes in his *Discourses* that "Although to use fraud in any action is detestable, yet in the conduct of war it is praiseworthy and glorious" (513). Volumnia is at her most Machiavellian when she argues that if dissimulation can be honorable in war, it can be in peacetime as well, provided it is "in like request," that is, needful (3.2.52). She fails to grasp that for her son war, and war noise, is honest.

Indeed the ritualized news of war—the drumbeat and trumpet call and cannon blast—is the truest language to Coriolanus, a language that collapsed deed with word. As *A Trumpet to Call Souldiers on to Noble Actions* (1627) said of Count Thurn, his "warlike acts in this Enterprise, are his speaking Chronicles" (qtd. in Randall, Credibility 27). To have one's "warlike acts" serve as one's "speaking Chronicles" is precisely Coriolanus' fantasy: a world where "Action is eloquence," *fama* is unnecessary, and mouths are largely silent (3.2.76). "'Twas very faintly he said 'Rise,' dismissed me / Thus with his speechless hand," as Cominius says of him (5.1.66-67).[24] But the world of politics—and indeed, the world at large—does not allow for self-evident acts and silent actors, and Coriolanus' disdain for report, for self-fashioning, for self-

[23] On Coriolanus' obtuse disregard for the tactical merits of retreat, see Jorgensen's intriguing remarks.

[24] Coriolanus' hatred of tongues encompasses his own: he calls his heart "noble" and his tongue "base" (3.2.100). Though he is teasing his wife, his description of Virgilia as "My gracious silence" may in fact be the highest compliment, to his mind, that he pays anyone throughout the play, save for Aufidius (2.1.162).

presentation is his undoing. For as Aufidius and, later, his fellow conspirators rightly note, acts and character "lie in the interpretation of the time." Of Coriolanus, Aufidius muses:

> But he has a merit
> To choke it in the utt'rance. So our virtues
> Lie in the interpretation of the time,
> And power, unto itself most commendable,
> Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair
> T'extol what it hath done. (5.1.48-53)

This is a difficult passage set within a difficult speech.[25] The "it" of the second line quoted is ambiguous: the antecedent either merit (his merit chokes its own utterance) or the opposite, Coriolanus' "defect[s]," which Aufidius has just considered. The final metaphor is also hard to parse, but the most consistent reading of the passage is as follows: Coriolanus' merit is such that it chokes itself in the utterance, yet he is not unique in this, for all virtues are subject to the interpretation of others—no action, no merit, is perfectly self-expressive. Power, therefore, though it commends itself, can easily undo itself when extolling itself—and, taken more generally, when commenting on itself at all.[26] Interpreted in this way, the passage makes a unified point, with each line building on the other, despite the convoluted nature of the speech as a whole: a man and his virtues are one thing, but their expression and interpretation are another. Deeds are not words; character is not self-evident. Fame is separate from virtue, and fame destroys. Coriolanus cannot escape the realm of public discourse and public opinion. His deeds cannot be their own chronicles; he cannot be the "author of himself" (5.3.36). "I find thou art no less than fame hath bruited" the Countess tells Talbot in *1 Henry VI*, revising her earlier opinion

[25] Coleridge deemed this speech "beautiful" but "the least explicable from the mood and full intention of the speaker of any in the whole works of Shakespeare" (qtd. in Kermode 15).

[26] The same point is made by Agamemnon in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: "He that is proud [the first vice Aufidius considers as Coriolanus' undoing in this same speech] eats up himself. Pride is his own glass, his own trumpet, his own chronicle—and whatever praises itself but in the deed devours the deed in the praise" (2.3.146-148).

that in the flesh he proved "report is fabulous and false" (2.3.68, 17). But for the Roman soldier, the *Coriolanus* in other men's mouths—the Coriolanus of report—can only supplant him. The name replaces him in banishment ("Only that name remains") and outlasts him in death: for as Volumnia makes clear, Coriolanus' triumph over Rome will be the death of his family—including his son "brought forth to keep [his] name / Living to time") and the name of *Coriolanus* will be "abhorred":

> Volumnia: Though know'st, great son,
> The end of war's uncertain; but this certain,
> That if thou conquer Rome, the benefit
> Which thou shalt reap is such a name
> Whose repetition will be dogged with curses,
> Whose chronicle thus writ: 'The man was noble,
> But with his last attempt he wiped it out,
> Destroyed his country, and *his name remains*
> To the ensuing age abhorred.' (5.3.141-49, italics mine)

Coriolanus complained to Aufidius in the moment of recognition in 4.5 that, the people having "devoured" all of him, "Only that name remains" (4.5.75, 73). Volumnia's threat clearly echoes the phrase and goes a step further: the people can do more than devour the man; they can control his name. Just before his death, Coriolanus will return to the idea of his chronicle.

The control over Coriolanus' narrative—what a Volscian conspirator calls "his tale"—through report and public opinion is emphasized throughout the play. In the play's final scene, we have this interaction between Aufidius and the conspirators before they set upon Coriolanus:

> First Conspirator: Your native town you [Aufidius] entered like a post
> And had no welcomes home, but he [Coriolanus] returns
> Splitting the air with noise.
> Second Conspirator: And patient fools,
> Whose children he hath slain, their base throats tear
> With giving him glory.
> Third Conspirator: Therefore, at your vantage,
> Ere he express himself or move the people
> With what he would say, let him feel your sword,

> Which we will second. When he lies along,
> *After your way his tale pronounced* shall bury
> His reasons with his body. (5.6.49-58, italics mine)

Referring to Aufidius as a post, a news messenger, is suggestive, for Aufidius not only foments the mob against Coriolanus but works to control the Volscian lords' perspective of Coriolanus by preempting their reading of Coriolanus' letter ("Ere he express himself") with an accusation of traitor.

As was discussed in chapter one, the most common reason that news-pamphlet authors offered for why they wrote was the correction and/or prevention of false reports. In at least a few cases, military men, believing themselves slandered in print, wrote news-pamphlet accounts of battles to defend their own good name.[27] Such a thought—to defend one's name in newsprint, to defend one's good name in a public manner—does not appeal to Coriolanus, such is his hatred for news, fame, and public discourse. At first glance, the Roman soldier appears to embody the myopia that Francis Bacon detected in his own time—a disregard or blindness to the importance of news narratives—for it is not until the moment before he is assassinated that Coriolanus cares to shape his own fame. In his unfinished "A Fragment of an Essay, *Of Fame*," Bacon writes:

> but now, if a Man can tame this *Monster* [fame/*fama*], and bring her to feed at the hand, and govern her, and with her fly other ravening Fowle, and kill them, it is somewhat worth. But we are infected, with the style of the *Poets*. To speak now, in a sad, and serious manner: There is not, in all the Politiques, a *Place*, lesse handled, and more worthy to be handled, than this of *Fame*…*Fame* is of that force, as there is, scarcely, any great Action wherein, it hath not a great part; Especially, in the *War*…Therefore, let all Wise *Governors*, have as great a watch, and care, over *Fames*, as they have, of the *Actions*, and Designs themselves. (579-80)

Perception, born of rumors and reports, was as important as reality. Bacon goes on to give examples of leaders and nations undone by rumors and invented reports in times of war. In

[27] See for example *A libell of Spanish Lies…discoursing the fight in the West Indies* (1596) and *A true report of the service done upon certaine Gallies* (1602). Both examples are discussed in Shaaber, 237-38.

speaking of *fame*, Bacon makes it clear (especially through his classical allusions to the monster of fame), that he has the concept of *fama* in mind: not merely fame but also news, rumor, and report. But it is not that Coriolanus is blind to the power of *fama* so much as that he cannot stomach the act of self-report.[28]

The opening act of the play establishes the key issue of fame—of good report—and of its control by the reports of others. "Consider you what services [Martius] has done for his country?" asks the First Citizen. "Very well," replies another citizen, "and could be content to give him good report for't, but that he pays himself with being proud" (1.1.26-28).[29] The observation seems on the mark, for as Cominius will later say admiringly, Coriolanus "rewards / His deeds with doing them" (2.2.123-24). He shows from the beginning of the play a desire to be "author of himself"—not merely kinless but unbeholden to the language of others: untouched by praise, honor, gratitude, slander, and report of all kinds. Coriolanus' first entrance into the play is to upbraid the upstart citizens:

> Martius: What's the matter, you dissentious rogues,
> That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
> Make yourselves scabs?
> First Citizen: We have ever your good word.
> Martius: He that will give good words to thee will flatter
> Beneath abhorring. (1.1.152-57)[30]

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[28] Excluding his sarcastic, clipped appeal to the citizens in 2.3, there are in fact only three instances where Coriolanus looks back on what he has done and reports it to others. In all three instances the audience is Aufidius, and Coriolanus ruminates on what he has done in Corioles alone. The first instance is at 1.9: "Within these three hours, Tullus, / Alone I fought in your Corioles' walls, / And made what work I pleased." The second is when he meets Aufidius in 4.5. The third and most emphatic instance, in 5.6, is discussed below. Coriolanus can only brag to his almost-equal enemy.

[29] As D. J. Gordon notes, the classical conception of good report at stake here "is quite strictly the *fama* which is *praemium* [the reward] for Coriolanus' services…Honor is naming the deed" (211, 213). *Fama*, as Cominius makes clear, is due.

[30] The lust for news, as we saw in Chapter One, was also frequently figured as an itch: the malady of news led to the malady of public opinion that did not know its place.

Coriolanus seems to crave no words, much less the rabble's good word. He shuns the good report (*fama*) that is his due precisely because he abhors report.

Cicero famously defined honor as extrinsic to the individual: "honor is the reward for excellence given to someone by the judgment and enthusiasm of the citizens" (qtd. in Gordon 210).[31] But Shakespeare's Coriolanus denies any such dependence on the citizens, who are in any case too wavering to bestow true honor. He seems to have instead imbibed Quintilian, who wrote: "With regard to rumor and common report [*famam atque rumores*], one party will call them the verdict of public opinion and the testimony of the world at large; the other will describe them as vague talk based on no sure authority, to which malignity has given birth and credulity increase" (qtd. in Gordon 211). Praise "grieves" and "offend[s]" Coriolanus; his wounds "smart / To hear themselves remembered" (1.10.15, 2.1.154, 1.10.28-29). All report seems to be false report to his way of thinking:

> Martius: you shout me forth
> In acclamation hyperbolical,
> As if I loved my little should be dieted
> In praises sauced with lies.
> Cominius: Too modest are you,
> More cruel to your good report than grateful
> To us that give [i.e. report] you truly. (1.10.49-54)

[31] In Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Ulysses expresses this same extrinsic conception of honor:

> no man is the lord of anything,
> Though in and of him there be much consisting,
> Till he communicate his parts to others.
> Nor doth he of himself know them for aught
> Till he behold them formed in th'applause
> Where they're extended—who, like an arch, reverb'rate
> The voice again" (3.3.110-16).

As Cominius says just before this conversation, "thy deeds…I'll report," for "Rome must know / the value of her own" (1.10.2, 20-21).[32] Coriolanus may pay his own acts with doing them, but the report of them is owed to his community. "The noble world is but a Theatre of Renoune, the Tongues of all people make up the Trumpet which speaks them," as the pamphlet *Honour in Perfection* puts it (qtd. in Winstanley 153). "I have been / The book of his good acts, whence men have read / His fame unparalleled happily amplified," Menenius says of Coriolanus (5.2.16-19). Coriolanus wants nothing to do with this world—the realm of fame and name, especially after he is unshouted out of Rome by the mob: "'Coriolanus' / He would not answer to, forbade all names. / He was a kind of nothing, titleless" (5.1.11-13). Indeed, he gives up talking nearly altogether, until his family supplicates before him and he feels compelled to interpret aloud their dumbshow. He is a Shakespearean creation that strains to have no interest in Renaissance self-fashioning, and yet Shakespeare himself lived in a world, and amid a growing news industry, that made insulation from *fama* utterly impossible for a public figure. In Cominius' worldview, in which the individual depends on the acclaim of the public, to be nameless ("He…forbade all names") is to be "a kind of nothing." For Coriolanus, it is only by becoming nameless than he can truly "play the man I am" (3.2.14-15).

Coriolanus' grim view of *fama* explains his antipathy toward honor and praise. Likewise, his view of *fama* explains one of the apparent difficulties of the play: Why does he oppose not only the words of the citizens and their tribunes, but also the words of his friends and social equals? After all, his political objection to news—namely, that it blurs social distinctions and thus social order—applies only to the rumormongering of the common people. But, however

[32] In Plutarch's account, Cominius reports to the Consul "that he him selfe sawe him [Coriolanus] do with his eyes, as also for that Martius had reported unto him" (514). Shakespeare's Coriolanus makes no such self-report. It is only to Aufidius that he recounts what he has done.

mildly, Coriolanus also constantly opposes his fellow patricians: he rejects their praise, their advice, their appreciation of expediencies and the dictates of custom. We see this most dramatically after the battle at Corioles. Cominius wishes to honor Coriolanus, as Cominius says to him, "in sign of what you are" (1.9.26). Coriolanus refuses all such praise and bestowed honor not out of modesty alone, but out of a need to protect himself from outside definition. As Lee Bliss writes, "refusing praise refuses Rome the right to determine the value of his [Coriolanus'] actions" (53). Not only is acclaim "hyperbolical" and "sauced with lies," as Coriolanus says (1.9.49-51), it is an imposition. Coriolanus' rejection of this honor—"I do refuse it" (1.9.38)—is thus a consistent expression of his desire for self-sufficiency, self-authorship. The Roman hero cannot abide weak, deceptive language, yes, but he also refuses to be defined by the report of others. As Gordon puts it, "Honour is naming the deed…Deed, being named, passes into its opposite: voice" (213). It is not merely, for Coriolanus, that voices are not to be trusted. Voices turn deeds into reports. They strip the man away and replace him with a name. Praise "devours the deed," as Agamemnon says in *Troilus in Cressida* (2.3.147). Coriolanus' "true and ancient enemies," Gross writes, "are not Volsces but voices" (139). Though a report might be accurate (as Cominius and Menenius insist their accounts of Coriolanus are), it transmutes the authentic Coriolanus and his deeds into something false: a report. Despite the notable absence of false reports in the play, Coriolanus consistently rails against the falseness of rumor, report, and fame, precisely because all public discourse rings false to him. His grievance is not with false (i.e. invented) reports, but with the falseness of all report, all representation.

The Ends of Fame

At the beginning of Act 2, Scene 3, three citizens discuss Coriolanus. There is a sense of powerlessness all around: Coriolanus requires the citizens' voices, whereas the citizens have no

choice but to accept Coriolanus if he will show his wounds. “We are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them,” the third citizen says (2.3.6-7). This speech, which uses a form of the word *monster* three times in three lines, turns Coriolanus himself into part of the monstrous Hydra, a creature of many tongues like *fama*, an emblem of the unruly masses, and the very abomination Coriolanus himself identifies with the rabble. (This is in fact the second time Coriolanus’ wounds have been monstered, for he has uttered that line moments earlier.) Here, Coriolanus is not only beholden to others; he is absorbed by them. Only in the violent rift between himself and others can he lay claim to an identity. Coriolanus is thus uncivil in order to preserve himself. But what is that identity? In avoiding assimilation into the monster that is Rome, becoming a creature of tongues himself, in refusing to let others speak for him (the other metaphorical strand here is that of acting—Coriolanus refuses to act a part in the social pageant), Coriolanus becomes a dragon, a war engine, titleless, a banished kind of nothing in the city of kites and crows. Only in the wilderness, can report and fame be evaded; only outside of the *polis* can a man be nameless. Coriolanus, invincible on the battlefield but forever vulnerable in the city, is cut down in the city of Antium.

Coriolanus is cut to pieces before a shouting mob, an end that feels both fitting and inexorable. But his gory demise, though perfectly foreseeable, still surprises. Coriolanus and Aufidius do not fight; instead, two (or more depending on the edition’s stage directions) nameless conspirators hack down the once-invincible soldier. Shakespeare denies us the big fight, despite the fact that Aufidius and Coriolanus were literally sworn enemies, and neither man seems to take words lightly. Aufidius says in 1.3, “If we and Caius Martius chance to meet, / ’Tis sworn between us we shall ever strike / Till one can do no more.” And when they do meet in Corioles in 1.9, Coriolanus says, “I’ll fight with none but thee, for I do hate thee / Worse than a

promise-breaker." Ironically, forswearing is precisely what Aufidius will accuse Coriolanus of at the end of the play.[33] But it is at this very point that Aufidius abjures his own oath to face Coriolanus in lethal combat. He will defeat Coriolanus with words, which is to say, the only way one can.[34] The nameless conspirators do the dirty work, killing the monster who took Corioles singlehandedly. Coriolanus—who claimed earlier that he could take forty men (and given his deeds and adamant rejection of praise, this is perhaps not an entirely idle boast), who at the end longs to use his sword on seven Aufidiuses—seems to passively let the Volsces hack him to pieces. The strangeness does not end there.

If we sometimes see the petulant boy within the war machine, Coriolanus' end seems distinctly un-adolescent. He boasts, but does not fight. And his speech is a strange one, because despite its vaunting quality, it is a *memory* of violent opposition, rather than a swaggering oath to kill forty men before he is overcome:

> Coriolanus: 'Boy'! False hound
> If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there
> That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
> Fluttered your Volscians in Corioles.
> Alone I did it. 'Boy'! (5.6.113-117)

This speech is Coriolanus' first and only *public* articulation of his fame, of his deeds, precisely the political act he has not been able to stomach.[35] As Gross writes,

> Challenging the truth of Volscian history, Coriolanus for the first and only time ferociously embraces his own public fame. He is content to be written down, as long as it is as a shameful memory inscribed in an alien history, within such 'annals' as are, indeed, more clearly lost to the English audience than any Roman history…With a self-consciousness that seems unbearably strange, he asks that the memory of his lone fight be

[33] Aufidius also accuses Coriolanus of another most un-Coriolanus-like verbal vice: that of flattery (5.6.22.)

[34] In 1.11 Aufidius says, "I thought to crush him in equal force / True sword to sword, I'll potch at him some way / Or wrath or craft may get him" (1.11.13-15).

[35] In both of the brief, previous instances in which Coriolanus mentions his triumph at Corioles, he addresses Aufidius in private—namely just before their duel in 1.9 and at their meeting in 4.5. See footnote 33.

> recorded in annals which neither we nor Coriolanus could possess…This version of fame is the only one he can bear. (160)

It is the first and only time that Coriolanus lets his name speak for itself; perhaps that is why, though he draws his sword, he does, also for the first time, nothing.

But perhaps this is reading his death amiss. It depends on how we interpret Coriolanus' capitulation, if that is the right word, to his mother. Is his final action a suicide, because he has let his mother already destroy him—forced him to betray himself—or is this, like his earlier feat at Corioles, an incredibly bold, but failed, onslaught against the world? After all, Coriolanus wishes for seven Aufidiuses to fight (5.6.130), which sounds like a far cry from passivity. Humbled, but not fundamentally altered, Coriolanus seeks to once again assert his identity through the only way he knows how: opposition.

We are not helped at this point by the stage directions. For as Lee Bliss notes in *The New Cambridge* edition of the play, in some editions two conspirators kill Coriolanus, and in some editions, more. In some editions Coriolanus draws his sword, and in some he does not, and is therefore defenseless. This latter possibility suggests perhaps that in his final lines Coriolanus is "wishing for the appropriate locale to take on his enemy" lawfully (Bliss 272).

Whatever the stage directions should be, Bliss is surely right to suggest that, "If the interpretation of Volumnia in 5.3 determines the staging of 5.5 [does she glory in her triumphal entry or mourn that she has forced her son to both betray his values and expose himself to mortal danger?], how we understand Coriolanus' submission in 5.3 affects 5.6 and the way in which we respond to his death" (60). Has Coriolanus been broken by Volumnia, or has he actually evolved positively? There is a hint to recommend the latter. Because, for a brief moment before he is

hacked down, Coriolanus seems poised to listen to the words of others, to engage appropriately in the political realm:

> Coriolanus: Measureless liar, thou hast made my heart
> Too great for what contains it. 'Boy'? O slave!
> Pardon me, lords, 'tis the first time that ever
> I was forced to scold. Your judgments, my grave lords,
> Must give this cur the lie (5.6.104-108).

It comes as a shock to hear Coriolanus claim he has never scolded anyone before, when in fact he has proved a formidable excoriater. *Scold* must therefore be understood in a very particular way. Aufidius has attacked his manhood and character, both of which were close to unassailable. Moreover, Coriolanus has never deigned to intervene on behalf of his own reputation. His *scold* must be understood then as a correction—his first and last—about his own reputation. He challenges a false report of himself. Up until this point, Coriolanus had regarded all report as so debased that he has not deigned to dispute the truth-value of a specific claim. And there is more to consider. "Your judgments, my grave lords, / Must give this cur the lie," he says (5.6.107-108). They must give the lie, not Coriolanus. Up until this point, he has also denied his dependence. Yet here, he relents. For the first time in the play, Coriolanus seems ready to accept the power of others' language. Even more, he seems ready to accept that his actions do not speak for themselves—they must be rightly interpreted by the community—and that he must guide the community's interpretation of him, rather than remain aloof. But before the First Lord can give a pacifying speech, Coriolanus, still brooding on Aufidius' taunt of "boy" or on the lord's call for peace, regains his destructive throat of war.

Alive, Coriolanus' "fame folds in / This orb o'th' earth" (5.6.124-125). In death, his corpse is "herald[ed]" in a funeral procession, a final piece of ritual news complete with drums and trailing pikes. "Yet he shall have a noble memory," Audifius promises. But given that this

assassination was thoroughly premeditated, it is hard to take Aufidius' remorse in good faith. If it is a genuine, sudden change of heart, it calls to mind the "mutable" nature of the mob, of whom Coriolanus complained, "With every minute you do change a mind, / And call him noble that was now your hate" (1.1.171-72). We have, after all, just witnessed the mutability of the Volscian mob, which went from cheering Coriolanus to calling for this death in less than a hundred lines. Aufidius' remorse is either political gamesmanship or a similar wild fickleness: both supreme vices to the dead Roman. Fame, memorial, and report are all, by the end of this bleak play, poisonous concepts.[36] *Fama* could undo the state; it could also undo the individual, even a man who wanted no part of it.

[36] As Frank Kermode notes, "the word 'noble' tolls ironically through the last lines of this savage play" (254).

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