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From 'Aequivocatio' to the 'Jesuitical Equivocation'

The Changing Concepts of Ambiguity in Early Modern England

Máté Vince

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English and Comparative Literary Studies

University of Warwick, Department of English and

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Acknowledgements

Declaration

This thesis, entitled *From 'Aequivocatio' to the 'Jesuitical Equivocation'*, is entirely my own work. No parts of the thesis have been previously submitted for a degree anywhere.

Máté Vince

Abstract

From 'Aequivocatio' to the 'Jesuitical Equivocation'

This thesis is an exploration of ambiguity in rhetoric, dialectic, religio-political writing and literature in Early Modern England. It examines the ways in which the attitudes to ambiguity were formed in Early Modern England, with a focus on the development of ideas about the so-called 'Jesuitical equivocation' or 'mental reservation', a special case of ambiguity.

In late sixteenth century England, hiding Catholic priests sought a way of defending Catholics from what they perceived as unjust persecution. They believed to have found a solution in the doctrine of equivocation, according to which it is justifiable to deceive one's questioner by giving replies that the examiner is likely to misunderstand because they are phrased ambiguously, or because the speaker qualifies his/her words by a restriction only spoken within themselves, specifying what he means only to his own conscience and God.

The thesis first explores the ways in which ambiguity occurred in sixteenth century education (by looking at Aristotle, Cicero, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Quintilian, Servius, Melanchthon and John Case) to argue that the doctrine of mental reservation is grounded in the Classical and Renaissance rhetorical and dialectical tradition. In my second chapter I examine how the doctrine evolved from its first statement in 1584 by Doctor Navarrus, through the Casuistical tradition to Henry Garnet's infamous *A treatise of equivocation*. The third chapter is devoted to the controversy between the Protestant Thomas Morton and the Catholic Robert Persons, who debate whether equivocation is a justifiable evasion, or a simple lie.

The second part attempts to demonstrate that the obvious mistrust in ambiguity, usually seen as the effect of the trial of the Gunpowder Plotters and the ensuing anti-Jesuit propaganda, is in fact rooted more deeply in Renaissance culture. The fourth chapter explores Sidney's *Arcadia*, and the ways in which prophecies, the princes' disguises, and misunderstood speeches become indicators of the limitations of human understanding. The fifth chapter on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* concentrates on how conveying or concealing a message and understanding or misunderstanding the speaker's intention can be seen as acts of exercising power. Finally, a reading of *Macbeth* explores the ethics of deception, by looking at the instances of deceit that result from ambiguous language, employed by and against Macbeth.

To demonstrate the parallels between religio-political discourse and literature, the thesis looks at common assumptions about how meaning is produced, conveyed, understood, misunderstood, or allowed to be misunderstood.

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with ambiguity and equivocation in philosophical, controversial and literary texts known in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. It aims to contribute to the history of ideas and to literary history. It is an attempt at expanding our understanding of some of the ways in which ambiguity was conceptualised and judged in the period: on the one hand, it seeks to contrast the presumptions of recent criticism with the ideas expressed in certain central texts of the period, on the other hand, it tries to grasp the subtle alterations which were if not caused, definitely accelerated, by the controversy that followed the Gunpowder Plot (1605).

My starting point was a now widely accepted argument that the six uses of the term 'equivocation' in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are directly related to the trials after the Gunpowder Plot in which the Jesuit doctrine of equivocation was exposed to withering forensic analysis. Strictly speaking, the history of the doctrine of equivocation begins with the publication of Martín de Azpilcueta's *Commentary on 'Humanae aures'* in 1584, first causes anxieties in England during the trials of the Jesuits Robert Southwell and John Gerard in the 1590s, all of a sudden becomes a hotly debated issue in public discourse after trial and execution of Jesuit Superior Father Henry Garnet (1555–1606), and ends with Pius XI's 1679 condemnation of the doctrine.

In his *Commentary* Azpilcueta (or as he is more commonly known, Doctor Navarrus) relies on a distinction between human understanding and divine judgement, expressed in the dichotomy of 'inward' and 'outward' meaning, which characterises the entire discourse. Behind this separation (sometimes expressed in terms of the separation of the heart and the tongue) lies a decreasing faith in the

capability of human understanding to uncover the true intention of the speaker, as opposed to the Divine understanding which has direct access to the intention. By virtue of that (at least according to Navarrus and his followers) it is God's judgement that ultimately ought to determine the moral integrity of every speech. The question that Navarrus explores is whether a person in a situation in which his life is threatened by an unjust questioner has the right to mislead the questioner with an incompletely uttered response. Is it a lie to say out loud only part of the response and keep part of it to oneself and to God? Under what circumstances is such deceit morally and theologically justifiable?

To appreciate its significance, Navarrus's *Commentary* needs to be discussed in its special English context. Therefore, I have made a thorough examination of the theological treatises and practical handbooks that theorise and apply the doctrine of equivocation; I have also studied the logical and rhetorical textbooks through which Tudor students would have learned about the traditions of discussing ambiguity and equivocation. I began to realise that the received account of the relationship between Garnet's trial, the pamphlets and *Macbeth* is less straightforward than has usually been assumed, and that the concerns about ambiguity and equivocation are much more widely perceptible in the sixteenth century than had previously been understood.

I found myself agreeing with previous scholars that equivocation was significantly reflected in Renaissance English literature while disagreeing profoundly with their interpretation of its relevance to *Macbeth*. Therefore, I began again from the sources, to look into the theological and philosophical background of the doctrine of equivocation (which necessarily involved a study of the wider and very prevalent notion of ambiguity), to analyse the way in which it was used both by the Jesuits and

in the pamphlet war, and to examine the place of ambiguity and equivocation in other late sixteenth century English texts. What I originally conceived of as a discussion of equivocation in Shakespeare, informed by the cultural historical background, developed into almost the opposite: an exploration of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theories of meaning and understanding, as well as the ways to manipulate them, supported by examples from Sidney and Shakespeare. Consequently, the thesis, I hope, contributes to the historicisation of the discourse of equivocation by showing that the problems that the controversies tackled have had a long-standing tradition within literature. On the other hand, the examples from literary texts indicate that the issue of equivocation has a broader historical significance because it relates to more complex instances in which judging the moral righteousness of particular acts is difficult. The literary scope of the thesis consequently became narrower than I originally planned: I have had space to analyse in detail only Sidney's *Arcadia* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth*, but I suspect that the usefulness of this study to other scholars may lie as much or more in my exposition of the theory of ambiguity and equivocation in sixteenth century England on the basis of the primary texts in Latin and English. I did not have the space here to discuss the role of these concepts, for instance, in the interpretation of the Bible, which would be a most worthwhile further study. In this thesis, my interest lies in the workings of equivocation: the ways in which it is possible to mislead the hearer without uttering a plain lie. I am looking for the features of language and the assumptions about understanding speeches that the deceivers exploited in order to deceive the hearer.

Chapter 1 explores the ways and contexts in which ambiguity occurred in sixteenth century education. After a short introduction of the notions that could

denote different forms of ambiguity, I begin with those texts of secondary school education that have a formative influence on the ways in which ambiguity is perceived both in linguistic and in ethical terms. Servius's commentary on the *Aeneid* gives us an idea of the practices used in school education to teach the analysis of ambiguous sentences in order to recover the one sense in which they were presumably meant by their author. Cicero's treatment of the ethics of responses and promises in *De Officiis* provides some of the seminal arguments on both sides of the religious controversy for when and in what ways it is justifiable to mislead someone else, and to what extent the speaker of a promise ought to keep his words even when that seems inexpedient. University education in rhetoric and dialectic provides the general framework for discussing and evaluating ambiguity. The aim of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De inventione* and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* was to teach how to produce successful speeches, or successfully refute the opponent's position when the text of a law or a written document is ambiguous, while Aristotle's *Organon* examines from a philosophical perspective the ways in which it is possible to recognise and defeat faulty arguments that exploit ambiguity to mislead the hearer by arriving at only seemingly substantiated conclusions. These classical texts reflect awareness of the dangers that lie in ambiguity, but the overtly moralistic approach to using (and the user of) ambiguity is a new feature of such Renaissance treatments of rhetoric as Melanchthon's *Elementorum rhetorices*, or such appropriations of the *Organon* as his *Erotemata dialectices* and John Case's *Summa veterum interpretum in universam dialecticam Aristotelis*.

Having thus established the basic approaches to, and the ethical issues with, recognising, using or eliminating ambiguity that a learned late Elizabethan would have known, in my second chapter I turn to the origins and first appearances of the

doctrine of equivocation or mental reservation in England. A passage (identified by its first words, 'Humanae aures') from Gregory the Great's *Moralia*, and its slightly but significantly revised version in Gratian's *Decretum* provide the basis for the justification of equivocation and the central imagery for its discussion. This is followed by an exploration of Doctor Navarrus's *Commentary* (1584) on the same passage, which is commonly credited with being the first exposition of the doctrine of mental reservation. Probably contemporaneous with the *Commentary*, the collections of cases of conscience which were used in the education of English Catholic priests in the continental seminaries, discussed similar ideas in a less systematic but more practical form. George Abbot's sermon *De mendacio* (1597/8), which was the first attempt in England to expose equivocation as treasonous and highly dangerous, was largely based on these or similar handbooks of casuistry. Finally, I discuss Henry Garnet's systematic *Treatise of Equivocation* (c. 1600) in more detail than has been done before in order to better understand the arguments for the lawfulness of mental reservation, derived both from biblical examples and general assumptions about meaning and understanding. I attempt to give an outline of the theological and political context – before the controversy following the Gunpowder Plot solidified the positions – in which a person (or a literary character) could have been judged who, in order to save him/herself or someone else from what s/he considers unjust persecution, exploited the inherent potential of ambiguous language to deceive.

The third chapter tries to capture the process through which 'equivocation' as a notion became differentiated from 'ambiguity'. In this phase (in the aftermath of Henry Garnet's trial and execution partly as the author of the *Treatise*) two theologians, the Catholic Robert Persons and the Protestant Thomas Morton engaged

in a combative dialogue. The theological arguments of the debate have been amply

discussed before, and biblical hermeneutics falls outside the limits of my thesis.

Therefore, even though most of the debate revolves around the interpretation of

certain biblical passages, I will only deal with them in so far as they reveal

assumptions about how meaning is produced, conveyed, understood, misunderstood,

or allowed to be misunderstood. Persons and Morton share the same principles

derived from the classical authorities (the letter versus the spirit of the text, the

binding force of oaths, types of ambiguity), but their moral stances determine to

which of these they give priority when they come into conflict. While Persons seeks

to distinguish equivocation from lying and argues that equivocation is a type of

ambiguity, Morton separates (verbal) ambiguity from mental reservation (or

equivocation), and subsumes the latter under lying. The fact that they disagree about

who is morally responsible when misunderstanding occurs (the hearer or the speaker)

highlights the irresolvable conflict of interests that underlies the whole debate – the

self-defence of the state versus the self-defence of a persecuted religious minority.

What for Protestants constitutes a fear of misunderstanding the other who

conceals vital information, to Catholics appears as a desire to avoid telling the truth

without explicitly lying in cases where divine and human laws seem to clash. This

clash will be at the centre of my interpretations of literary texts in the second half of

the thesis. I look at literary examples to explore the various ways in which

understanding and misunderstanding are achieved. What teachers of rhetoric and

dialectic, as well as theologians, discuss on a theoretical level is seen happening in

literary texts: the various ways of deception are presented with their effects, and

occasionally, with a reflection on those effects. The readers of a book and the

audience of a play, given their advantage of some (although not complete)

knowledge over the characters, are invited to explore the potential and the morality of ambiguous speech.

In my fourth chapter I read Sidney's *Arcadia* (published in 1590/3), a text that most English educated Renaissance authors (including Shakespeare) knew, to argue for a generally shared interest in certain moral concerns that are sometimes believed to be the products of the equivocation controversy. With its two protagonists disguised for most of the book, *Arcadia* raises similar concerns about identity (and the extent to which identity is recognisable) as the discussion of hiding Catholic priests in the controversy, and *Twelfth Night* (1601/2) or *Macbeth* (1606?). By exploring prophecies, the princes' disguises, and misunderstood speeches I show the way in which disguise and other means of deceit without lying become indicators of the limitations of human understanding.

In my analysis of *Twelfth Night*, I concentrate on how conveying or concealing a message and understanding or misunderstanding the speaker's intention can be seen as acts of exercising power. In the light of the Catholic defences and Protestant attacks I examine the ethics of Viola's disguise, and the effect disguise has on her speeches. They illustrate the feature of equivocation which makes it the most appealing for the speaker and the most alarming for the hearer: that until the concealed information is revealed, such statements appear to be unambiguous, and therefore practically undetectable. The perceptions about the knowledge required to identify and dissolve ambiguity presented in the Morton–Persons controversy allow me to re-examine the difference between the ways in which characters and audiences understand what critics – I believe mistakenly – call Viola's 'clues' or 'hints' to her real identity and intentions. *Twelfth Night* and *Arcadia* exemplify the comic exploration of the kind of deceit that causes destruction in *Macbeth*.

In my last chapter, I offer a reading of *Macbeth* that explores the ethics of deception, informed by the analyses of the ways that rhetorical and dialectical treatises, texts of the religio-political controversy and other literary texts prompt us to think about the role of ambiguity. I begin with a discussion of recent criticism's engagement with the relationship of *Macbeth* to equivocation to examine the presumptions that critics work with. I aim to demonstrate that in the light of the material I present in my earlier chapters about Renaissance attitudes towards ambiguity, they are not necessarily justifiable, and occasionally they even prevent us from asking important questions. I examine equivocation in *Macbeth* from two perspectives. First, in order to give a more subtle evaluation of the influence of the scandal following Garnet's defence of mental reservation, I contrast the six uses of the word 'equivocation' in *Macbeth* to the other three Shakespearean uses of the word in *Hamlet* (before 1603), *All's Well That Ends Well* (1603–4) and *Othello* (c. 1604) to see whether a drastic change in the meaning of the term can be substantiated. Second, I examine instances of deceit that result from ambiguous language, employed by and against Macbeth. The disguised Pyrocles, Musidorus and Viola provide a comic counterpoint to the play, from which it is possible to examine the question of what justifies concealing information from the other while seemingly offering a response that fulfils their inquiry. The ways in which Basilius misinterprets, and Philanax disbelieves, the oracle emphasise the extent to which the Weird Sisters' prophecies are embedded in a long-standing tradition which associates prophecies with misunderstanding as a result of ambiguity. In conclusion, the dialectics of the deceit achieved by the Weird Sisters and the sin committed by Macbeth, who oversteps both divine and human laws, is discussed to suggest a reading of the growing distrust and moral disapproval of using ambiguity as an

anxiety resulting from a gradual realisation of the limitations of human understanding.

This is an anxiety which *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night* and *Arcadia* share with the Protestant authorities after the Gunpowder Plot: even if the outward word of the tongue ought to correspond with the inward meaning of the heart, it not always does, and at the same time, it is still not necessarily a lie. The debate could have provided the spark that led to the creation of *Macbeth*, but it could not have engendered it in itself: the literary texts I deal with all precede the debate, and nevertheless reveal the same anxiety about being misled without noticing it, being misled by what seems to be well known and rationally analysable. I hope to demonstrate that the anxiety of being deceived by language without even being able to notice the deception is deeply rooted in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean culture, with or without the trial of Henry Garnet. My thesis is thus an exploration of equivocation in rhetoric, dialectic, religio-political writing and literature before and after the Gunpowder Plot.

Chapter 1.

Ambiguity in Sixteenth Century Education

1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to set out the ways in which ambiguity and equivocation would have been presented in the framework of training in rhetoric and logic, that is, to provide a context in which to understand the controversy about Jesuitical equivocation. I will explore the various ways in which the concept of 'ambiguity' was discussed in schools and universities by examining some of the most relevant ancient and Renaissance texts (mostly textbooks of rhetoric and dialectic) that were commonly used in the grammar school and the university in the second half of the sixteenth century, when those who participated in the debate were educated.[1]

While the English word 'equivocation' was very seldom used before 1606, its Latin counterpart, *aequivocatio*, was common in rhetoric and dialectic textbooks. *Aequivocatio* is associated with a group of words (*homonyma*, *amphibolia*, *ambiguitas*), all of which relate to a wide range of phenomena that cause misunderstanding, confusion, or debate about the meaning of a written text, and all of which would generally be translated as 'ambiguity'. It is a striking feature of the debate over Jesuitical equivocation during the first two decades of the seventeenth century that the attackers of the doctrine emphasised that it was outrageous and completely unheard of, while the defenders argued that it was morally justified and very old. Therefore, the origins of the term, and the process in which it gained its new meaning of 'a statement modified with a secretly added qualification', deserve attention.

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[1] In initially identifying potentially relevant passages and distinguishing the types of ambiguities, I found Lausberg's *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study* (trans. by Matthew T. Bliss, Annemiek Jansen, David E. Orton, ed. by David E. Orton and R. Dean Anderson (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998)) very helpful. Cf. §§ 136, 137, 205, 206, 207, 210, 222, 223, 408.5a, 953, 1068, 1069, 1070, 1073. Even if not all of the classical positions on ambiguity that are listed in Lausberg would have been known by the Renaissance learned, the texts they read in education provided them with the knowledge of a representative body of notions.

In this chapter, therefore, I am looking for notions, definitions, arguments, and exemplary cases of deception and misunderstanding resulting from ambiguity in a broad sense that may be or actually are reflected in early seventeenth century religious, political and judicial debates, sermons and literature. The aim is to understand how attitudes to ambiguity were formed: in what ways can misunderstanding and disagreement arise from different interpretations of the same word, sentence or text? How is ambiguity produced? Is it accidental or intentional? What is the obligation of the public speaker when he recognises ambiguity? Is it ever advantageous for the speaker to employ it? How much and in what sense is ambiguity a moral issue?

2. Grammar School

We have a good general idea of the texts read in sixteenth-century grammar school, even if we cannot be certain of exactly what was taught in each school and in each decade.[2] The first few years of grammar school education were devoted to learning the Latin language (reading, writing through imitation), while the second part to the reading and the analysis of a well-defined classical syllabus.[3] The curriculum was based on Continental models, designed to help students acquire skills[4] that would enable them to read and write in an elegant and persuasive style (which Renaissance authorities saw as the purpose of rhetoric),[5] as well as teach them religious and moral virtues.[6]

The most important classical authors read in the grammar school were Terence, Cicero, Caesar, Sallust, Virgil, Horace and Ovid.[7] Their texts were studied for grammatical, stylistic and moral instruction: vocabulary and structures were closely examined, anything that later could be used for amplification (e.g. figures, elegant expressions, common places or model stories) was discussed and noted down, the ethical teaching was pointed out.[8] In what follows I examine practical ways in which the ambiguity of a text could have been discussed by exploring Servius's

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[2] Thomas Whitfield Baldwin (*William Shakspere's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), 2 vols) based his conclusions on the analysis of surviving grammar school statutes and the writings of educational theorists, but comparisons of his inferences with publication data suggest that the picture he gives of the range of texts is too idealistic. See Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 14. n. 6; cf. Lawrence Donald Green, 'Grammatica Movet: Renaissance Grammar Books and *Elocutio*', in *Rhetorica Movet: Studies in Historical and Modern Rhetoric in Honor of Heinrich F. Plett*, ed. by Peter L. Oesterreich and Thomas O. Sloane (Leiden; Boston, Mass: Brill, 1999), 75–115.

[3] Mack, p. 14.

[4] According to Mack (pp. 32–46), grammar school education would provide students with the following eleven skills that would be readily available whenever they needed to compose an effectual written or oral piece: moral sentences, moral stories, narratives, history, structures for compositions, rhetorical topics, thinking about an audience, amplification, commonplaces, note-taking and commonplace books, figures of rhetoric.

[5] Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 36.

[6] Mack, p. 12.

[7] Mack, p. 14.

[8] Mack, pp. 14–15.

Commentary on the *Aeneid*, and consider the parallel moral issues treated in another grammar school text, Cicero's *De officiis.* My aim is to present the way in which ambiguity and equivocation were discussed as part of general education.

2.1. Servius, *In Vergilii carmina comentarii*

While Servius's *Commentary on Virgil's Aeneid*[9] shares a number of characteristics with ancient rhetoric manuals, it also differs from them in ways that make it even more remarkable in investigating those approaches to ambiguity that Renaissance audiences had access to. First, it has to be admitted that there is no incontestable evidence that the *Commentary* was directly used in formal education in England; nevertheless, it is possible to argue that readers would have been familiar with it, even if not as part of the school curriculum, but as a tool they used when turning to Virgil's text for whatever reason (e.g. teachers in preparation to teach Virgil).[10]

The commentary would have appealed to the Renaissance audience because of its approach to Virgil's text. The grammar school practice of reading classical texts relied on the principles set out by Erasmus, which were included in Lily's widely

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[9] *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*, ed. by Georg Thilo and Hermann Hagen (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner 1881). All translations from Servius are mine.

[10] Editions of classical texts were not printed in England until the 1570s (Baldwin, I, pp. 498–500; see also Mack, p. 16. n 2; *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475-1640*, first compiled by A.W. Pollard & G.R. Redgrave, Vol. 3, Printers' & Publishers' Index, Other Indexes and Appendices, Cumulative Addenda and Corrigenda, ed by Katharine F. Pantzer, chronological index by Philip R. Rider (London: Bibliographical Society, 1991), *Appendix D: English Stock Titles*, pp. 200–202), but were imported from the continent. Apparently, Servius's commentary was constantly reprinted during the sixteenth century by various continental presses, most often together with Virgil's text and other commentaries by Renaissance scholars; sometimes with the text of the *Aeneid*, but without the other commentaries; and, much less often, entirely separately, which perhaps suggests that publishers saw it more as a useful guide to Virgil's text than as a classical text in its own right. Finally, the fact that new editions were published throughout the century suggests that the demand for the text was continual. Based on the search results in three major English library catalogues (The British Library, the Bodleian Library and the Cambridge University Library), Servius's text had at least 50 continental editions, fairly evenly distributed throughout the sixteenth century.

owned and used *Brevissima institutio* as well.[11] Servius primarily explains difficult, unusual, archaic expressions, sentence structures, comments on grammatical problems and figures of speech, but occasionally lists textual parallels, and gives background information on places, mythological figures, or philosophical doctrines as well.[12] His emphasis on linguistic explanations (sometimes not even directly relevant to Virgil's text, rather illustrating general grammatical points) made the *Commentary* a valuable tool for anyone who wished to understand Virgil, and by that learn proper expression and good style in Latin, which was the main objective of grammar school rhetorical education.[13]

The treatment of ambiguity in rhetoric textbooks focuses on the interaction between two speakers. Servius's approach is very different for obvious reasons: he is interested in making Virgil's poem accessible, therefore he concentrates on the transmission of meaning from the text to the reader. The aim for Servius was to clarify obscure sentences for the reader. A clear understanding of the written text, however, is only the first step for a public speaker, whose main objective is to be able to argue for or against one or more of the interpretations in a debate. Nevertheless, since the *Aeneid* abounds in speeches and dialogues, ambiguity, intentionally or unwittingly obscure sentences could occur between two characters as well, which would parallel more closely the situation that public speakers are involved in. Unfortunately, Servius mentions ambiguity only once as a means of manipulation by one character of another; that, however, could set a precedent for interpreting further passages in a similar way.

Servius refers to ambiguity twenty-eight times with one of the words employed by the authors on rhetoric: he uses *homonymum* once, *amphibolia* (*amphibolus*,

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[11] Mack, p. 45.

[12] Cf. the methods of reading ancient texts recommended by Renaissance educational authorities as described in Mack, pp. 14–15.

[13] Mack, pp. 14–18, Skinner, p. 36.

amphibolon) 12 times, and *ambiguitas* (*ambiguus*) 15 times.[14] No clear definition is given for any of these expressions, but his explanations reveal a wide range of notions that are covered by them. It would be hard to tell how systematically Servius uses *ambiguitas* and *amphibolia*, but latter appears to be a technical term, while the former to have a wider scope of reference.

Amphibolia in most of the cases refers to a linguistic phenomenon. It is used to denote a single word with multiple meanings (e.g. *classica*, which can mean a trumpet and its sound);[15] or a structure in which a word can be taken as the complement of more than one word (e.g. in 'caput ingens oris hiatus', both the 'head' and the 'gap' can be *ingens*);[16] or a structure where the agent and the patient of an action are linguistically interchangeable[17] (e.g. 'ira inritata Deorum' can mean both 'the agitated gods' anger' and 'her anger against the gods').[18] In two of the cases *amphibolia* seems to refer to some kind of contradiction, for example, between the ways in which Cato and Virgil narrate the death of Anchises,[19] or between a previous action and what one says.[20]

Ambiguitas can refer to the same linguistic phenomena as *amphibolia* (a word or structure that can be interpreted in more than one way), and Servius sometimes uses

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[14] In his article on Servius's usage of the various concepts of ambiguity, Richard F. Thomas examines the 7 occurrences of 'polysemy', concluding that it refers to the potential of words to have multiple meanings as lexical entries, which is immediately eliminated once the word is put into a context ('A Trope by Any Other Name: "Polysemy," Ambiguity, and Significatio in Virgil', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 100 (2000), 381–407, (pp. 382–386)). According to him, 'polysemy' does not occur anywhere else in classical Latin literature. He compares its usage with *ambiguitas*, as well as with the usage of *significatio* in Servius and in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, but surprisingly he does not deal with the occurrences of *amphibolia*, even though that would have contributed with crucial material to his discussion. Thomas's aim is to show that Servius seeks to eliminate ambiguity whenever possible for an ideological reason: ambiguities in the characters or the language threaten the 'optimistic' or 'imperial' reading that – according to Thomas – Servius wishes to disseminate, as well as those scholars who argue that ambiguity is far from classical thinking in the (post-modern) sense that Thomas is defending in the article (pp. 406–407).

[15] Servius, ad v. 7.637.

[16] Servius, ad v. 11.680.

[17] Cf. Quintilian's example (7.9.6): 'Aio te, Aiacida, Romanos vincere posse', which ultimately comes from Cicero's *De divinatione*, II.116. See C. L. Hamblin, *Fallacies* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1970), pp. 16–17.

[18] Servius, ad v. 4.178.

[19] Servius, ad v. 3.711. (the ambiguous line is in 6.718, mentioned here).

[20] Servius, ad v. 8.76.

it to assert that something is obscure, doubtful, uncertain, or irresolvable: for instance, it is *ambiguum*, whether souls in the underworld, when they drink from Lethe before they are reborn, forget their previous punishment, or their future after they have returned to their bodies.[21] Three of the instances that Servius calls *ambiguus* deserve special attention. Dealing with 1.661, he comments on Virgil's own usage of the word *ambiguus*:

> 'For indeed, she feared the ambiguous house and the double-tongued Tyrians'[22]

> 'she feared the ambiguous house': that is, the one in which the changeable woman lives (as in 'woman is always varying and changeable').[23] Juno also says in Book 4, 'you suspected the houses in high Carthage'.[24] 'Ambiguous': here [means] *uncertain*; in other places 'ambiguous' is understood as *twin* or *double*, as 'he recognised the double parentage'.[25] 'Double-tongued': deceitful; because it should be taken to refer not to their tongue but to their mind/soul.[26]

According to Servius, *ambiguus* sometimes simply means 'uncertain', which is a surprising remark in this context, as he glosses the parallel expression 'bilingues' as 'deceitful', explaining that it refers to the twofold nature of Carthaginians' mind, rather than to their tongue.[27] He also admits that *ambiguus* elsewhere means 'double

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[21] Servius, ad v. 6.724.

[22] 'But Cytherea revolves new tricks, new / plans in her bosom: that, transformed in his face and expression, Cupido / should replace the sweet Ascanius, to ignite / the queen to madness with gifts, and to fill her bones with fire; / For indeed, she feared the ambiguous house and the double-tongued Tyrians, / [because] the fierce Juno was burning, and under cover of the night she kept returning to her troubles.' (My translation.) 'At Cytherea novas artis, nova pectore versat / consilia, ut faciem mutatus et ora Cupido / pro dulci Ascanio veniat, donisque furentem / incendat reginam atque ossibus implicet ignem.; / *quippe domum timet ambiguam Tyriosque biliguis*, / urit atrox Iuno et sub noctem cura recursat.' Virgilius, *Aeneis*, 1.657–662. Quotes from the *Aeneid* are according to the following edition: Publius Vergilius Maro, *The Aeneid*, ed. with introduction and notes by R. D. Williams, Books 1–6 (London: Macmillan, 1972); Books 7–12 (London: Macmillan, 1973).

[23] The parallel that Servius quotes is from 4.569: these are Mercury's last words to Aeneas in his dream, warning him to flee Carthage. His speech is ambiguous throughout, because Mercury in his prophecy fails to specify the object of the destruction Dido is preparing. Thus, Aeneas understands it to be himself, while Dido is in fact determined to commit suicide.

[24] *Aeneid*, 4.97.

[25] *Aeneid*, 3.180.

[26] Servius, ad v. 1.661: '*Domum timet ambiguam* in qua habitat mutabilis femina, ut *varium et mutabile semper femina*, item Iuno in quarto *suspectas habuisse domos Carthaginis altae*. *Ambiguam*: modo incertam; alias 'ambiguam' pro gemina duplicique accipitur, ut *agnovit prolem ambiguam*. *Bilingues*: fallaces; nec enim ad linguam rettulit, sed ad mentem.' (In the passages taken from Servius's *Commentary*, I regularised spelling, added occasional punctuation marks and italicised Virgilian quotations for clarity.)

[27] Cf. the danger associated with the separation of mouth/tongue from heart/mind in anti-Jesuit propaganda, see e.g. in the poem on Garnet's trial, Chapter 3, 2.2 below.

or deceitful', as in 3.180. There it appears in the description of Anchises's recognition that he misunderstood Apollo's earlier prophecy (3.94–98) about where they would found their new city.[28] Servius makes this remark in connection with one of the many misunderstood prophecies in the *Aeneid*. Anchises is immediately reminded of Cassandra, who told them to go to Italy. But, Anchises comments, 'who would have believed that the Teucrians will come to the Hesperian shores? or whom could Cassandra then move?' (3.186–187). Anchises here confesses that he was mistaken because he followed the obvious but merely apparent meaning of an ambiguous prophecy, instead of looking for a potentially hidden meaning.[29]

   The last example is noteworthy because it comes from a speech within the epic. Servius suggests that a double meaning is communicated in a single message, and the right choice between the two is the hearer's responsibility.[30] Servius here explains the ending of Venus's speech in the scene of Book 10 where both she and Juno attack Jupiter for not keeping the promises he has given to them:

> 'Would it not have been better to settle over the ashes of their old home
> and the soil that once was Troy? Give back Xanthus and Simois,
> I am begging you, to the wretched, and let the Trojans
> oh father, expound once more their fate.'[31]

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[28] The oracle then said that they ought to seek their 'ancient mother', that is, the land from where their tribe originated. Anchises mistook it as a reference to Crete (3.103–117), where Teucer the founder of Troy came from, but now he remembers that Troy was founded by Teucer *and* Dardanus, hence the Trojans' 'double parentage' (*proles ambigua*). They should have been heading for Dardanus's place of origin, which is Italy.

[29] Cf. the discussion of the effect of other prophecies (e.g. Croesus) in Renaissance texts, and their standard association with disrupting social order, e.g. Melanchthon's *Erotemata Dialectices* (see below). The prophecies in Sidney's *Arcadia* (Chapter 4) and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (Chapter 6) belong to the same tradition.

[30] This will reoccur as one of the central arguments that Jesuits use to justify equivocation. For a similar example, see the commentary to *Aeneid*, 4.9 ('Anna soror, quae me suspensam insomnia terrent'). *Insomnia*, according to Servius, can either mean 'sleeplessness,' or 'dream'. 'The ambiguity of this reading results from the fact that she does not say openly that she could not sleep, but that she had an ungentle rest, that is, she was interrupted in her sleep, so that we understand both that she was terrified even in her dreams, and that she had to endure sleeplessness because of her terrible dreams.' ('Sed ambiguitatem lectionis haec res fecit, quod non ex aperto vigilasse se dixit, sed habuisse quietem inplacidam, id est somniis interruptam, ut intellegamus eam et insomniis territam, et propter terrorem somniorum vigilias quoque perpessam.') The interaction of the two meanings intensifies the sense of pity for the queen's suffering (cf. 'amoris confessio').

[31] 'Non satius cineres patriae insedisse supremos / atque solum, quo Troia fuit? Xanthum et Simoenta / redde, oro, miseris iterumque revolvere casus / da, pater, Iliacos Teucris.' *Aeneid*, 10.59–62.

> 'And the soil that once was Troy': similarly in Book 3: 'and the fields where once Troy was'. 'Give back Xanthus and Simois, I am begging you, to the wretched': it is ambiguous which one she says, whether to give back the actual old Troy, or, to give back soil in Italy that resembles Troy. Because we know that it was a custom for immigrants to shape it to the image of their own homeland, as it is said [in 3.497]: 'you are viewing the image of Xanthus and Troy'. Venus aptly uses the middle style, to indicate both the giving of old Troy, and the Italian empire that, as Jupiter had promised to the Trojans, would resemble Troy. And it is rather the former that she wishes and asks for.[32]

Venus's request here is ambiguous. Does she mean 'give us back Troy itself' (which would be a bigger gift than originally promised) or 'give us back land in Italy that resembles Troy' (which is what Jupiter had in fact promised)? Venus skilfully manages to convey two meanings at the same time, and it is up to Jupiter and Juno to decide which interpretation they take. Nevertheless, 'it is the former', Servius claims, 'that she secretly wishes and asks for'. Servius thus clears up this ambiguity for the readers with reference to Venus's assumed intention, but at the same time sees it as a double-sided sentence for those present at the assembly of the gods. This is a successful technique of manipulation (the only case when Servius presents ambiguity as a means for that), but at the same time the explanation points to a crucial problem (that is easily overlooked) concerning ambiguity: what can be made clear and unambiguous for the external observer who knows the outcome of the past or fictitious events, still remains obscure and ambiguous for the participants in the situation. This is a parallel with the problem of Jesuitical equivocation: even though the Jesuit clarifies his meaning to the external observer (God), it remains obscure for the immediate addressee of his declaration (the examiner).

The commentary of Servius offers a model of recognising and, where possible, eliminating the ambiguity of a text through reference to contextual circumstances or

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[32] '*Atque solum quo Troia fuit* sic in tertio [11] *et campos ubi Troia fuit. Xanthum et Simoenta redde oro miseris* ambiguum est utrum dicat, redde nobis re vera Troiam antiquam, an, redde nobis terras in Italia ad similitudinem Troiae: novimus enim hanc fuisse consuetudinem, ut advenae patriae suae imaginem sibi redderent, ut [III 497] *effigiem Xanthi Troiamque videtis*. bene ergo Venus medio usa est genere loquendi, ut utrumque significaret, et antiquae reditum Troiae et imperium Italiae, quod Troianis Iuppiter ad similitudinem Troiae fore promiserat. et magis hoc est quod latenter desiderat atque petit.' Servius, ad v. 10.60.

the presumed intention of the speaker. If Renaissance students read the *Aeneid* with the help of Servius's notes, they may also have acquired a notion of ambiguity which could have affected the way they read other texts.

2.2. Cicero, *De officiis*

Cicero's *De officiis* does not address the problem of ambiguity directly, but because it plays an important role in moral education in the grammar school (it is the only grammar school text that contains arguments about the right and the honourable, the useful and the expedient), and because it focuses on the ethical implications of the desirable behaviour of public figures, especially the orator, some of its points are worth mentioning here.[33] The *De officiis* also needs to be discussed here, because some of the moral situations Cicero describes resemble issues that arise in connection with Jesuitical equivocation, and that are ultimately related to the problem of implied meaning and the morality of concealing relevant information through speech.[34]

The most important principle, Cicero argues, that everybody must follow in all of their actions (and especially those who, like orators, have an influence on public opinion, and even the welfare of the state) is that every action must be morally right (*honestum*) and expedient to the state (*utilis*). The two mutually require each other: nothing can be morally right that is not *therefore* also expedient, and nothing can be

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[33] Mack, pp. 22–23, 35.

[34] The *De officiis* is quoted a number of times in the debate, e.g. George Abbot, *Quaestiones Sex* (Oxford: Ex officina Iosephi Barnesii typographica, 1598), sig. H2ᵛ–H3ʳ; Robert Persons, *A Quiet and Sober Reckoning VVith M. Thomas Morton*, STC (2nd ed.) / 19412 ([Saint-Omer: English College Press], 1609), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, sig. Mmm1ʳ–Mmm3ᵛ; Thomas Morton, *A Full Satisfaction Concerning a Double Romish Iniquitie*, STC (2nd ed.) / 18185 (London: Printed by Richard Field for Edmond Weauer, 1606), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, sig. L2ᵛ, M1ᵛ–M2ʳ; M3ʳ; Morton, *An Exact Discoverie*, sig. G1ʳ–G2ʳ; Allen-Persons Case III.3, in *Elizabethan Casuistry*, ed. by P. J. Holmes, Catholic Record Society Publications, Records series vol. 67 ([London]: Catholic Record Society, 1981), pp. 125–126 (see in detail in Chapters 2 and 3).

expedient that is not right morally.[35] I will concentrate on two issues that Cicero discusses in Book 3: whether a seller needs to disclose all the information he possesses about the goods to the buyer, and under which circumstances oaths cease to be binding.

In Book 3 Cicero reports a debate between the philosophers Diogenes of Babylon and Antipater of Tarsus, his pupil and successor.[36] They discuss whether a person selling his property is morally obliged to tell the buyer every detail about the property, for example, that it is overpriced, or, in case of a house, that it will have to be torn down soon. Diogenes argues that as long as the vendor does not tell an explicit lie, he is only seeking what is expedient for him: ' "It is one thing to conceal", Diogenes will perhaps reply; "not to reveal is quite a different thing. (...) But I am under no obligation to tell you everything that it may be to your interest to be told." '[37] It would be ridiculous, according to Diogenes, if the seller listed all the faults of what he is trying to sell.[38] In opposition to his view, Antipater claims that the interest of others, and through them, of the whole state is more important than (or is in fact undistinguishable from) someone's personal expediency: ' "It is indeed your duty", Antipater would reply, "if you will remember the bonds of social unity which nature has ordained among men." '[39] To keep information from the buyer 'involves wilfully leading another man into error'.[40] According to him, it is true that concealing is not immoral in itself, but to conceal something in one's own interest that would be in the other's interest to know is a moral fault, because one's own

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[35] *De officiis*, II.iii.9–10. Both Latin and English references to *De officiis* are given according to the following edition (unless stated otherwise): Cicero, *De officiis*, trans. by Walter Miller (London: William Heinemann, 1947).

[36] *De officiis*, III.xii.51–xvii.72. Antipater is usually recognised as one of the sources for Cicero's treatment of some of the problems in the *De officiis*: See the 'Introduction' to Cicero, *On Moral Obligation*, trans. by John Higginbotham (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), pp. 18–19.

[37] 'Aliud est celare, aliud tacere; [...]; sed non, quicquid tibi audire utile est, idem mihi dicere necesse est.'; *De officiis*, III.xii.52.

[38] *De officiis*, III.xiii.55.

[39] *De officiis*, III.xii.53. Higginbotham's translation.

[40] 'per errorem in maximam fraudem incurrere', *De officiis*, III.xiii.55. Higginbotham's translation.

expediency should not be sought through another's (and hence the state's) inexpediency.[41]

Business transactions are regulated by civil laws on the one hand, and the principle of 'honest dealing between honest parties', derived from universal law on the other. Therefore in such transactions, one's actions should be governed not only by what the written laws allow, but also what common sense morality suggests.[42] Thus, in business deals one should always be reminded that 'the fairer the better', and behave 'as good faith requires'. Cunning practices, like the misrepresentation of what one is selling, should be avoided, because even if it is not forbidden and punished by the civil law, violating good faith is against the universal law (*ius gentium*).[43]

> For there is a bond of fellowship [...] which has the very widest application, uniting all men together and each to each. [...] It is for this reason that our forefathers chose to understand one thing by the universal law and another by the civil law. The civil law is not necessarily also the universal law; but the universal law ought to be also the civil law. [...] Away, then, with sharp practice and trickery, which desires, of course, to pass for wisdom, but is far from it and totally unlike it. For the function of wisdom is to discriminate between good and evil; whereas, inasmuch as all things morally wrong are evil, trickery prefers the evil to the good. [...] And no greater curse (*pernicies*) in life can be found than knavery that wears the mask of wisdom.[44]

The cases Cicero discusses here involve a declaration that will result in a misconceived picture of the state of affairs in the interlocutor, because he lacks certain information which the speaker withholds intentionally, and which would affect his understanding of the situation. The statement of the seller, therefore, is parallel with ambiguous sentences in the sense that its meaning is different for the two people involved in the communication. However, while the two advocates in the

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[41] *De officiis*, III.xiii.56–57.

[42] Cf. the discussions about the letter and spirit of the law below.

[43] 'Itaque maiores aliud ius gentium, aliud ius civile esse voluerunt; quod civile, non idem continuo gentium, quod autem gentium, idem civile esse debet. Sed nos veri iuris germanaeque iustitiae solidam et expressam effigiem nullam tenemus, umbra et imaginibus utimur.'; *De officiis*, III.xiv.58–III.xvii.72.

[44] *De officiis*, III.xvii.69–72.

case of an ambiguous document can argue with equal plausibility for their interpretation (because they both 'lack the information', the intention of the author, for example), in the case of such withheld qualifications, one of the two parties possesses the information that determines the only correct interpretation of the statement. The written law cannot defend the buyer from a fraudulent seller (unless he explicitly denied what turns out to be true).[45] As a result, there is a need for some kind of protection external to the body of the law, and, according to Cicero, there should be an implied agreement that withholding information is the violation of generally accepted principles of communication, and consequently is a moral fault.

Another moral dilemma that Cicero discusses is whether an oath or a promise should be kept under all circumstances. According to him, it is a moral obligation to keep promises and oaths (the latter are especially binding, since an oath is 'an assurance backed by religious sanctity; and a solemn promise given, as before God as one's witness, is to be sacredly kept'),[46] unless performing them endangers the promiser's life, causes greater moral wrong, is inexpedient for the person to whom it was given (like the promise to Phaëton that he can ask for whatever he wants from his father, Phoebus), the person to whom it was given is an unlawful enemy (like pirates who demand ransom to release their captive), or if at the moment the oath was sworn it was not meant in the mind to be performed. The last two exceptions from the moral obligation of performing what was promised (even if with an oath) are especially relevant. Cicero claims that 'an oath sworn with the clear understanding in one's own mind that it should be performed must be kept; but if there is no such understanding, it does not count as perjury if one does not perform the vow',[47] for example, when somebody breaks an oath to pirates who are the

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[45] *De officiis*, III.xvi.65.

[46] *De officiis*, III.xxix.104.

[47] 'Quod enim ita iuratum est, ut mens conciperet fieri oportere, id servandum est; quod aliter, id si non fecerit, nullum est periurium.' *De officiis*, III.xxix.107.

common enemy of the people. 'For swearing a false oath is not perjury, but to swear "with the intention of your soul", as it is habitually expressed in words, and not perform it, is a perjury.'[48] 'For Euripides aptly says: "My tongue has sworn; the mind I have has sworn no oath." '[49]

Cicero's principles have implications that the Jesuits will employ to defend the doctrine of equivocation: when swearing an oath, what is uttered and what is meant may differ; what is in the mind is superior to what is in the words;[50] and to employ such a double oath is morally justifiable in certain cases. However, Cicero's judgement about concealing relevant information from another person whose choices depend on that information (or the lack of it) seems to corroborate the position of those who oppose the doctrine of equivocation, as they contest the morality of such mental reservations.

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[48] *De officiis*, III.xxix.108. My translation. Walter Miller's translation conceals important distinctions: 'For swearing to what is false is not necessarily perjury, but to take an oath 'upon your conscience,' as it is expressed in our legal formulas, and then fail to perform it, that is perjury.'

[49] *De officiis*, III.xxix.108. The Euripides quotation is from *Hippolytus*, 612. This is a line that Renaissance polemicists pick up on both sides. Cf. Abbot, *De mendacio* (in *Quaestiones sex*, STC (2nd ed.) / 36 (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1598)), H3[r], Persons, *A quiet and sober reckoning*, STC (2nd ed.) / 19412 ([Saint-Omer: English College Press], 1609), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], Mmm2[v]–Mmm3[r]; Thomas Morton, *The encounter against M. Parsons*, STC (2nd ed.) / 18183 (London: [W. Stansby at Eliot's Court Press] for Iohn Bill, 1610), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], Hh1[v]–Hh3[r]. Hippolytos makes this claim in an argument with Phaidra's servant, who after making him swear not to expose to anybody what she was going to tell him, reveals the stepmother's love for the stepson. Hippolytos says it in the heat of the debate, but eventually he never actually discloses his knowledge to anyone.

[50] Cf. Aristotle's theory in *De interpretatione* about the relation of words, thoughts and the things they describe. See below (Section 3.2.1).

3. University

Since the last two decades of the 20th century, extensive research attempted to establish the most frequently used texts in university education. As well as studying the authorities on rhetorical and dialectical argumentation, every student at Oxford and Cambridge was required to undertake a certain number of formal public disputations (and to attend even more) to become first a *sophista generalis*, then a bachelor of arts, and subsequently a master of arts.[51]

A number of texts emerge as being used most commonly: Cambridge requirements for the one-year rhetoric course were Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, Hermogenes, or rhetorical works by Cicero; the four-term Oxford course covered Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (though it never came to be as influential as the more practical Roman treatises,[52] or as it was on the continent[53]), and orations and rhetorical works by Cicero.[54] The booklists[55] add to these the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*,[56] which was probably used instead of (or as a guide to) the more demanding Quintilian or Aristotle. While the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* was sometimes printed alone, Cicero's *De inventione* was very frequently printed together with it almost as a kind of appendix (but very seldom on its own).[57] The most important texts for learning

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[51] J. M. Fletcher, 'The Faculty of Arts', in *The History of the University of Oxford*, Volume III: *The Collegiate University*, ed. by James McConica (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 157–200 (p. 169); Mack, p. 58. For the requirements concerning participation and attendance of disputations and declamations in Oxford (with references to differences from Cambridge), see Fletcher, pp. 168–170 (Bachelor of Arts), pp. 181–184, pp. 190–194 (Master of Arts).

[52] George Alexander Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 195.

[53] Skinner, p. 35.

[54] Mack, p. 51.

[55] Elizabeth S. Leedham-Green, *Books in Cambridge Inventories: Book-lists From Vice-Chancellor's Court Probate Inventories in the Tudor and Stuart Periods*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2vols.; *Private libraries in Renaissance England: a collection and catalogue of Tudor and early Stuart book-lists*, eds. R.J. Fehrenbach & E.S. Leedham-Green, 6 vols. (Binghamton, N.Y.:, Marlborough, England: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, Adam Matthew Publications, 1992-[2004]).

[56] Mack, p. 52. n. 20. On the continent, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* would often have been a set text for the grammar school, but in England it was more usually studied as an introduction to elementary texts on logic.

[57] Skinner, p. 33.

dialectic were Aristotle's *Organon* (perhaps not always all the six treatises, but Cambridge statutes explicitly mention both the *Prior* and the *Posterior Analytics*, *Topica* and *Sophistical Refutations*), or a Renaissance textbook based on it (e.g. Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*, Melanchthon's *Erotemata Dialectices*, Caesarius's *Dialectica*, Ramus's *Dialecticae libri duo*, Seton's *Dialectica*, and John Case's *Summa veterum interpretum in universam dialecticam Aristotelis*.)[58]

The collegiate system in Oxford and Cambridge allowed room for a considerable amount of study of material in addition to the compulsory texts adjusted to individual needs.[59] I will look at only some of the most commonly studied Latin texts of sixteenth century university rhetorical and dialectical education (*Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De inventione*, Quintilian's *Institutiones*, Melanchthon's *Elementorum rhetorices libri duo*, Aristotle's *Organon*, Melanchthon's *Erotemata dialetices* and John Case's *Summa...*), that contain strikingly crucial material from the point of view of the early seventeenth century debates about Jesuitical equivocation, and ambiguity in general.

3.1. Rhetorical Education

3.1.1. [Pseudo-Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium*

The aim of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is to teach the basic theory of public speech. The treatise begins with identifying the task of the public speaker: to be able to secure the agreement of the audience by arguing in matters where law and morality are involved.[60] The four books of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* deal with invention in

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[58] Mack, pp. 55–56.

[59] E.g. history, mathematics, physics, ethics, theology, Greek, modern languages, literature. Mack, pp. 50–51.

[60] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, I.ii.2. Both Latin and English references to *Rhetorica ad Herennium* are given according to the following edition (unless stated otherwise): [Cicero], *Ad C. Herennium, de ratione dicendi*, trans. by Harry Caplan (London; Cambridge (Mass.): Heinemann, Harvard University Press, 1954).

judicial (I–II.), deliberative and the epideictic oratory (III.), then briefly with the other four parts of oratory.[61] Ambiguity primarily arises in a part of judicial oratory, the legal issue, when disagreement stems from conflicting interpretations of the same text (i.e, texts of wills or laws, where the author of the text is never present to be asked about his intention). In cases where 'the text signifies two or more meanings',[62] the speaker ought to first examine whether the text is actually ambiguous.[63] This can be done by reformulating the sentence under discussion in a way that would reflect the opponent's interpretation, and argue that the author of the text would have written it that way, had he wanted to mean what the opponent suggests. To strengthen the interpretation that is favourable to the speaker, and to further discredit the opponent's point, the speaker has to demonstrate that his own interpretation is feasible, and in an honest (*honestus*), right (*rectus*), lawful way (*lex*), according to the natural custom (*mos natura*), resulting in a good (*bonus*) and just (*aequus*) decision, as opposed to that of the opponent.[64] The aim of this process of demonstration is to prove that what is 'regarded as ambiguous' (*ambiguum esse scriptum putabitur, quod ad duas aut plures sententias trahi possit*),[65] is in fact not ambiguous at all, if one 'understands which one is the true meaning' (*utrum sententia vera sit*).[66] Thus, the method the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* suggests in dealing with

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[61] Kennedy, pp. 96–99.

[62] 'scriptum duas aut plures sententias significat'. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, I.xii.20. My translation.

[63] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, II.xi.16.

[64] For the definition of *honesta res* and *rectum*, see III.ii.3 (Caplan's note in *ed. cit.*): 'Utilitas in duas partes in civili consultatione dividitur: tutam, honestam. […] Honesta res dividitur in rectum et laudabile. Rectum est, quod cum virtute et officio fit. Id dividitur in prudentiam, iustitiam, fortitudinem, modestiam. Prudentia est calliditas, quae ratione quadam potest dilectum habere bonorum et malorum. Dicitur item prudentia scientia cuiusdam artificii: item appellatur prudentia rerum multarum memoria et usus conplurium negotiorum. Iustitia est aequitas ius uni cuique re tribuens pro dignitate cuiusque. Fortitudo est rerum magnarum adpetitio et rerum humilium contemptio et laboris cum utilitatis ratione perpessio. Modestia est in animo continens moderatio cupiditatem.'

[65] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, II.xi.16.

[66] After this brief discussion, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* makes a digression to another issue concerning ambiguity. Some authorities suggest, according to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, that the discussion of amphibolies as the dialecticians treat them is also useful in the training of an orator. However, the text claims, the problem of amphibolies hinders rather than promotes the education of young men, since it encourages the obsession with childish punning. Those who overemphasise the

sentences that are understood differently by the opponents is to posit the existence of one true meaning which can be discovered through careful investigation, with reference to general principles of the law, or at least to try to convince the audience that such an absolute interpretation exists.

Ambiguity, however, sometimes occurs not only in written documents, but in the orator's own speech. That is a mistake, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* warns, and should be avoided, particularly in the Proof of Reason (*confirmatio*),[67] because it renders the speech obscure in a way that may lead the audience to conclusions that run against what the speaker wants.[68] Although in its description of the phenomenon, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* does not use any of the terms related to ambiguity, this instance is nevertheless relevant to the problem of misunderstanding, because it warns that it is a mistake when 'what is said can be taken in another way'.[69] Ambiguity, on the other hand, can be employed by the speaker to provoke laughter as part of the subtle approach, required to introduce a speech to a hostile audience.[70]

The solution that the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* suggests for tackling ambiguity in written documents is pragmatic rather than linguistic: to list the advantages of one of the interpretations and then stress that this is therefore the *only* interpretation of the text. In the orator's own speech, on the other hand, ambiguity is discussed either as a mistake to be avoided (because it makes the audience's response unpredictable), or, if competently employed, as a useful method to raise laughter in the audience, and by

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significance of amphibolies look for a multiplicity of meanings even where one of them does not make any sense, and that may discourage the young orator from composing his speech, for fear of a potentially present double meaning in every word.

[67] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, II.xxiv.38.

[68] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, II.xxvi.40.

[69] 'item vitiosum est quod in aliam partem ac dictum sit potest accipi'. Cf. the different interpretations of Gregory the Great's remark on human understanding by Doctor Navarrus and Sepúlveda (see 2.2 below).

[70] 'Si defessi erint audiendo, ab aliqua re, quae risum movere possit, ab apologo, fabula verei simili, imitatione depravata, inversione, ambiguo, suspicione, inrisione, stultitia, exuperatione, collectione, litterarum mutatione, praeter expectationem, similitudine, novitate, historia, versu, ab alicuius interpellatione aut adrisione.' *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, I.vii.10.

merely insinuating the intended interpretation, enhance their emotional involvement by seemingly allowing them to make their own inferences.

3.1.2. Cicero, *De inventione*

Most of *De inventione* is taken up by the discussion of invention. In Book 2 (on topics of confirmation and reprehension) Cicero turns to controversies that arise from a written document, among them, ambiguity. A dispute arises concerning a document, Cicero argues, when there is doubt about its interpretation as a consequence of one of the following causes:[71] a discrepancy between the intention of the author and the words of the text, a conflict between two laws, two or more possible meanings of what is written, logical inference based on analogy (*ratiocinatio*), or differing definitions of the state of affairs.[72]

Cicero's approach is similar to that of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* concerning how to argue in cases where the debate arises from the ambiguity of a written document, although he offers a more detailed description of the ways the speaker can make his case.[73] He is even more dogmatic, however, in suggesting that the speaker ought to insist that there is in fact no ambiguity involved, because even if the words taken in themselves can refer to more than just one thing, the context will always suggest one correct interpretation.[74] The speaker can argue for his interpretation by demonstrating that his interpretation of the debated words is in line with the way they

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[71] This is essentially the same classification as that of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, although somewhat more systematic. Cf. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, II.ix.13–II.xi.16.

[72] *De inventione*, II.xl.116. Both Latin and English references to *De inventione* are given according to the following edition (unless stated otherwise): Cicero, *De inventione*; *De optimo genere oratorum*; *Topica*, trans. by H. M. Hubbell (London; Cambridge, Mass: Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1949).

[73] *De inventione*, II.xl.116–II.xli.121.

[74] *De inventione*, II.xl.117.

are understood in common usage.[75] It is also possible to cite other parts of the same document, the author's other writings, actions, speeches, where the words are used, or even to refer to his general character and way of life to support one's interpretation.[76]

Apart from the ambiguity of a document, a divergence of opinions about the proper interpretation of a written text may arise in public debate when the document is *ambiguous* in the sense that its message is uncertain or unclear (even though it does not involve ambiguity in a strict, linguistic sense). This is the issue of the letter and spirit. The doctrine of the letter and spirit is rooted in the background assumption about language that the intention of the speaker can differ from what the actual words suggest, that is, that an expression set down in words is not always a faithful representation of someone's thoughts. Cicero finds it justifiable (and gives advice how) to take either side – defending the letter or arguing from a conjectured intention – depending on what the case requires.

In connection with cases when the speaker has to defend sticking to the text of the document, Cicero suggests methods that work by manipulating the emotions of the judges or the audience. He proposes ways to move the burden of proof from the speaker to the judge or the opponent.[77] The methods include pretending astonishment at the idea of departing from the letter of the law, turning the question back to the judge, or interrogating the opponent if he denies the letter of the law. When, on the other hand, the opponent argues that the author had written something other than what he intended, the speaker can argue that relying on inferences instead of the written words would result in an uncertainty and a feeling of insecurity in connection with the legal system.

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[75] *De inventione*, II.xl.116.
[76] *De inventione*, II.xl.117.
[77] *De inventione*, II.xliv.127.

If the case makes it necessary for the speaker to argue against the letter of the document, he has to found his argument on a plea for fairness (*aequitas*, II.xlvi.136). The speaker's first task is to justify reference to the intention of the author by highlighting the importance of the judges.[78] This argument requires the judges to think about their own role in the process as active participants and establishes interpretation as a necessary part of making their decision, contradicting the opponent who argues for the letter of the law as a rigid set of rules that only need to be applied without any reference to the special circumstances of the case.

Turning to the case itself, the speaker has to demonstrate the consistency of the author's intention on the subject; argue that accommodating the interpretation of the words *to the time* (as a consequence of important changes in circumstances or some special case) is necessary to sustain the consistency of the author's will.[79] The problem, Cicero most significantly argues, with insisting only on the letter of the text is that there always are evident exceptions that the law does not mention explicitly – by virtue of their being evident – but always implies. It would be impossible to act properly in any matter of law, any document, or even spoken instructions, if one wanted to rely on the words only, instead of following the intention of the person who gave those words.[80] Cicero emphasises the superiority of the intention by claiming that it is those things *about which* the letters of the law (the 'weak and obscure signs of the will') inform, 'the utility of the law and the wisdom and the carefulness of the lawgiver', that men admire in the laws. The law therefore 'consists

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[78] *De inventione*, II.xlvii.139.
[79] *De inventione*, II.xlii.122–124.
[80] 'Atqui lex nusquam excepit; non ergo omnia scriptis, sed quaedam, quae perspicua sint, tacitis exceptionibus caveri; deinde nullam rem neque legibus neque scriptura ulla, denique ne in sermone quidem cotidiano atque imperiis domesticis recte posse administrari, si unus quisque velit verba spectare et non ad voluntatem eius, qui ea verba habuerit, accedere', *De inventione*, II.xlvii.140.

in the intentions, not the words,' and the task of the judge is to follow the intention rather than the letter.[81]

Cicero's text contributes to the theory of handling ambiguities in several important points. His advice to establish the proper meaning of a word by comparing it to its common or individual usage is influential but in the case of ambiguous words will tend to privilege the interpretation which benefits the position of the advocate rather than arrive at any objective truth, although that is the status it claims for itself. His suggestion (to destroy arguments that prioritise the intention over the letter of the text by highlighting the destructiveness of the resulting uncertainty in the law) demonstrates the possibility of reasoning against inferences from extra-textual sources, which contributes to the arguments of the opponents of the doctrine of equivocation. The contrary line of reasoning that emphasises the validity of considering the change of context during interpretation is equally useful for the defenders of the doctrine of equivocation.

As I will demonstrate in the next section about dialectical education, the idea that the thought is more important than the spoken or written word is present in Aristotle's *De interpretatione* as well. Thus, it appears that the educational texts themselves provided ample precedence for the defenders of the doctrine of equivocation to argue that their equivocating confessions are not lies, since there are cases in which the intended meaning in the mind differs from the apparent signification of the words in which it is expressed, and that in cases like that, the true meaning is the one in the mind.[82] Undoubtedly, this argument will not be able to solve the problem that the Protestant examiner of a Jesuit had to face, namely, that equivocation is undetectable. The interpretation of a written text becomes an issue

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[81] *De inventione*, II.xlviii.141. This argument provides for the potential existence of an implied but never explicitly stated meaning behind every (spoken or written) word, and, in such cases, the primacy of the implied meaning, which will be a cornerstone in arguments that defend the doctrine of equivocation.

[82] In the sixteenth–seventeenth century debates these issues are inseparable from debates about the interpretation of the Bible, the question of literal versus allegorical interpretation.

only when there is an overt contradiction between the ways in which the two parties understand the words. The significant difference in the case of mentally reserved qualifications is that they do not become manifest until something happens that contradicts the surface meaning of the speech. Thus, the mentally reserved qualification is only revealed when the examiner had already judged the situation (in all likelihood, mistakenly).

3.1.3. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*

Quintilian mentions ambiguity in three contexts which are largely the same as in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and the *De Inventione*. Therefore here I point out only the significantly different aspects of his treatment.

One way of making jokes is to employ ambiguity (*amphibolia*). Such jokes rely on the homonymy of words (or a close similarity between them), one of which is usually a name.[83] These jokes, according to Quintilian, tend to turn into abuse,[84] and therefore they are usually not suitable to be used by the orator.[85] Quintilian warns against using such jokes, because they are in most of the cases childish or vulgar,[86] but he admits that a lucky coincidence sometimes provides an occasion to employ them, and combined with other sources of humour they may even be ingenious (*subtilis*).

It is possible to argue against the interpretation based on the letter, Quintilian suggests, in three circumstances: when it is clear from the text itself that it is not

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[83] Cf. for instance the joke quoted from Cicero on the name *Coque* and the conjunction *quoque*, which Quintilian criticises.

[84] 'conversa in maledictum fere ambiguitate'

[85] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 6.3.47. Both Latin and English references to *Institutio oratoria* are given according to the following edition (unless stated otherwise): Quintilian, *The orator's education*. Edited and translated by Donald Russell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[86] In Book 8, in connection with decadent style characteristic of bad taste, Quintilian mentions the 'childish hunt for similar or ambiguous words'. *Institutio oratoria*, 8.3.57.

applicable to every situation; when there is 'no argument that could be taken from the law itself, but only such where it is to be examined about what the dispute is';[87] finally, when there are actual words in the document itself from which it is possible to prove that the intention of the author was different.[88] Quintilian suggests that it is possible to win cases by relying on arguments that try to reconstruct that hidden meaning. This could help the Jesuits argue that the audience is responsible for the interpretation, as well as to present relying on hidden meanings as legitimate.

The other relevant type of legal Issue is that of ambiguity (*amphibolia*/*ambiguitas*) itself.[89] Ambiguity occurs in an infinite variety, but all of its forms fall into two categories: ambiguity of *words on their own*, and of *conjunction of words*.[90] Quintilian lists six types of ambiguity (one with 3 subcategories) that can occur in written documents, but, because according to him an exhaustive list would be impossible, these are merely examples; his categorisations, explanations and examples nevertheless influenced Renaissance treatments.[91]

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[87] My translation. In Donald Russel's translation: 'there is no Argument which can be derived from the law itself, but the only Question concerns the subject of the dispute'. That is, when the law is unambiguous, but it is debatable whether it fulfils the requirement of equity to enforce the law in the specific case. For example, in the case of the foreigner who, although it is forbidden for foreigners to climb the walls of the city, climbed the wall when the city was attacked and helped to defend it. Quintilian concludes: 'the battle is therefore fought on Equity and the Spirit of the Law. It may be possible however to take examples from other laws to make it plain that we cannot always stand by the Letter, as Cicero did in *Pro Caecina*'.

[88] *Institutio oratoria*, 7.6.4–8.

[89] *Institutio oratoria*, 7.9.

[90] If 'verba coniuncta' simply meant 'groups of words', as Russell translates it, then the second and third type of ambiguity mentioned under the 'singula verba' label would also have had to belong here, therefore the difference between 'words on their own' and 'words in conjunction' seems to be that in the second group ambiguity only occurs because a grammatical relation, made necessary by the sentence, is also involved.

[91] The first one is homonymy, that is, when the error is caused by a word that can refer to more than one thing or person (e.g. gallus/Gallus, Aiax), and it is especially frequent in wills. The second type is when a word makes sense as a whole or as broken up into parts, like in(-)genua, arma(-)mentum, Cor(-)vinum. Quintilian considers this a childish punning on words, but notes that Greek authorities treat it as a topic for *controversia*. The third type is when two words can be read as one or two, for example when it is not clear whether the deceased wanted to be buried *in culto loco* or *inculto loco*. The remaining three categories involve words in conjunction. Ambiguity can occur when two (or more) words attract the same case, and the words in the oblique case can logically belong to either (e.g.: 'Aio te, Aeacida, Romanos vincere posse'). The conjunction of words can also cause ambiguity when one of the words in the sentence can be attached to more than one of the words, like when Vergilius says about Troilus that he was dragged around by his horses 'ora tenens tamen,' that is, 'even though he held the rein' or 'and even then he was holding on to something'. Ambiguity can

A few more scattered remarks refer to ambiguity in the remaining books of the *Institutio oratoria*, all of them describe it as an error in the speech that renders it incomprehensible, and thus is a threat to the overall effectiveness of the whole speech. Book 8 is about elocution, and in 8.2 Quintilian discusses the ways in which the clarity of the speech depends on words. Ambiguity should be avoided not only when it makes the speech incomprehensible, but also when it makes it too complicated, because then it is a sign of poor composition.[92] Finally, in 9.4 (which is about composition, or word arrangement), in connection with the proper word order Quintilian mentions that the faulty placement of words can cause *amphibolia*, 'as is well known'.[93] Although these last instances are not directly connected with each other, they all suggest that ambiguity should be avoided whenever it is possible, because it spoils the speech.

Ambiguity for Quintilian seems to be a feature of language that is best to avoid. He suggests it to be used only very cautiously even in jokes, talks about it as a threat to the speech (whether used intentionally or unwittingly), and as a type of legal issue, it occurs as a problem to be overcome, something that is the cause of debate. Most importantly, at the conclusion to his treatment of ambiguity in legal issues he remarks: 'It is pointless, to try to turn the letter itself to our advantage, because if that were possible, there would not be ambiguity in the text.'[94] This is exactly the opposite of what Cicero and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* suggest, since both of the earlier treatises advise the speaker to first of all try to prove that the ambiguity of the text is a misunderstanding. What Quintilian proposes to do, rather, is to try to establish which interpretation is more in accordance with the nature of the expression (when to do that is possible at all), and always to refer to equity and the intention of

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also arise when more than one antecedents are possible ('heres meus uxori meae dare damnas esto argenti quod elegerit pondo centum': does the heir have the right to choose or the wife.) Ambiguity can arise from multiple grammatical mistakes or lack of clear indication of vowel lengths.

[92] *Institutio oratoria*, 8.2.16.
[93] *Institutio oratoria*, 9.4.32.
[94] *Institutio oratoria*, 7.9.14. My translation.

the author. His acknowledgement of the futility of arguing that an utterance is not ambiguous when the dispute arose exactly from the ambiguity, is remarkably clear-sighted, and suggests that Quintilian (as opposed to some of the Renaissance authorities and polemicists) did not believe that speech and thought are in a logically necessary correspondence.

3.1.4. Melanchthon, *Elementorum Rhetorices*

Melanchthon's *Elementorum Rhetorices libri duo* (one of the sources for Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*)[95] is a summary of the most important topics concerning public speech. It assumes that the reader will know the definitions of most of the terms used, and instead of a detailed discussion, it contains an abundance of examples. His treatment, especially of ambiguity, is generally adapted from the classical sources, but he adds a discussion of religious debates to each point (in fact, his examples typically come from disputes about biblical interpretation), and in certain cases he clearly differentiates between the practice to be followed in religious and in non-religious matters.

Ambiguity is again dealt with under the legal status: it occurs either in cases depending on the letter and the spirit (*scriptum et sententia*)[96] or as an issue on its own (*ambiguum*).[97] Dispute arises concerning the letter and the spirit of a written document (in public as well as ecclesiastical matters) when the text is obscure (*obscuritas*) ambiguous (*ambiguitas*), or contradicts common sense (*absurdus*): these are the cases when the speaker ought to rely on the spirit of the text. In court cases

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[95] Mack, p. 78., *Introduction* in Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric*, edited with notes and commentary by Peter E. Medine (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 11–15.

[96] Philipp Melanchthon, *Elementorum Rhetorices libri duo*, in *Philippi Melanchthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider, Vol XIII (Halus Saxonum, apud C. A. Schwetsche et filium, 1846), 417–506, cols. 442–443.

[97] *Elementorum Rhetorices*, cols. 443–44.

and matters of rational discussion, the speaker has to demonstrate that his opponent's opinion is absurd (i.e. it goes against reason or the received laws), by citing laws and reasons (*rationes*). In that, it is useful to investigate the circumstances 'because it is from those that we often chase down the meaning, and that we can judge if the text and the intention consent or dissent. For Hilarius rightly says, "The circumstances clarify what is said" '.[98] Melanchthon refers his readers to dialectic, where they can learn how definition and division can be employed to dissolve obscurity and ambiguity respectively.[99] However, in cases that involve biblical teachings (*dogmata*) and precepts (*praecepta*), the speaker should stick to the letter of the text, unless they contradict an article of the faith or another clear scriptural locus. In such cases the intention has to be assumed from the clearer part of the Bible or other authority, but even then the dialectical rules of valid argumentation have to be observed to avoid false conclusions.[100]

Ambiguity features as a status on its own right as well. It occurs when a common (*generale*)[101] or an ambiguous word (or the grammar of a phrase or figure) causes a dispute. For example: how should the instruction that 'If a priest takes a wife, he should be suspended' be interpreted? Should he 'be suspended' (as some claim) from his office, or (as others) from a tree? Cases of ambiguity can be resolved by relying on doctrine, grammar, syntax, figures of speech, or the field of knowledge from where the expression is taken. Melanchthon again refers his readers to the solutions offered concerning dialectical topics, and the way division and definition is employed there.[102]

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[98] *Elementorum Rhetorices*, col. 443: 'Est autem generale praeceptum, cuius maxime usus est in hoc genere controversiarum, ut excuciantur circumstantiae, ex his enim saepe venamur sententiam, et iudicamus, utrum scriptum et voluntas consentiant aut dissentiant. Vera est enim vox Hilarii: Circumstantiae illuminant dicta.'

[99] On definition and division as a way of eliminating ambiguity, see the following section on dialectical treatises on ambiguity.

[100] *Elementorum Rhetorices*, cols 442–443.

[101] *Common* in the sense that the word has a broad semantic field.

[102] *Elementorum Rhetorices*, cols. 443–444.

3.2. Dialectical Education

3.2.1. Aristotle, *Organon*

Aristotle's aim with the *Organon* is to teach dialectical reasoning, that is, the art of examining statements that claim for themselves the status of truth, and by confirming or refuting them, gain genuine knowledge. One of the crucial concepts that anyone with a university education would have encountered is *aequivocatio*. The word ὁμονυμία (*aequivocatio* in Boethius's influential Latin translation) and its definition are found at the very beginning of the first treatise of the *Organon*, the *Categories*: it designates things that 'have the name only in common, the definition (or statement of essence) corresponding with the name being different'.[103] Three terms that recur in the *Organon* are translated traditionally with the words 'ambiguity' and 'equivocation': ὁμονυμία, ἀμφιβολία, and πολλακῶς λέγεται ('understood in many ways').[104]

In *De interpretatione*, Aristotle lays down the basic principles of proper language usage in arguments: he discusses the properties of the main parts of speech, sentences, propositions, and the valid and invalid types of conclusions that can be drawn from them. The first few passages deal with the relation of written and spoken language, and of both to thought. Aristotle claims that spoken words are arbitrary[105]

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[103] *Categories*, 1a1–1a2; a definition that is echoed elsewhere in the *Organon*, as well as in Renaissance texts, e.g. in John Case's *Summa* (I4ᵛ, see below). References to *The Categories* are given according to the following edition: Aristotle, *The Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics*, trans. by Harold P. Cook, Hugh Tredennick (London; Cambridge, Mass: Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1962).

[104] Somewhat misleadingly, in modern translations *homonymia* tends to be rendered in English as *equivocation*, while *amphibolon* and *ambiguitas*, the terms that the classical authors used for the same concept are usually translated as *ambiguity*.

[105] 'A noun is a sound having meaning established by convention alone […] No sound is by nature a noun: it becomes one, becoming a symbol.' *De interpretatione*, 16a20–32. References to *De interpretatione* are given according to the following edition: Aristotle, *The Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics*, trans. by Harold P. Cook, Hugh Tredennick, (London, Cambridge, Mass: Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1962) On Renaissance translations of this passage, and especially 'by convention' (θέσει), see Marie-Luce Demonet, *Les voix du signe: nature et origine du langage à la Renaissance (1480-1580)*, (Paris: Champion; Genève: Slatkine, 1992), pp. 84–94.

signs (σύμβολα) of affections (παθήματα) in the soul, while written words are the signs of spoken words. Whereas thoughts (or affections),[106] that represent universal objects, are themselves universal for every human, their primary representations, the spoken words, are different in every language.[107] In this very dense passage Aristotle lays down the basic principles of his linguistic theory: he draws an important boundary between *things and thoughts* on the one hand, and *spoken and written words* on the other. While the former are infinite in number and have a necessary mutual correspondence with one another, written and spoken words are limited, and are connected to the existing things merely by convention.[108] In the last of the six treatises, Aristotle signifies this relationship as the cause of ambiguity: 'for names and the quantity of terms are finite, whereas things are infinite in number; and so the same expression and the single name must necessarily signify a number of things'.[109]

This first passage of *De interpretatione*, by asserting the priority of thought over utterance, gains a special importance in the debates about Jesuitical equivocation, since it serves as the Jesuits' justification of the validity of mixed propositions.[110] They argue that it is not lying to add unuttered mental qualifications to their pronounced statements, since the words are merely there to reflect the thoughts, and with the mentally reserved part, their statements are true.[111]

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[106] In this context, 'affections of the soul' means 'thoughts'. Cf. C.W.A. Whitaker, *Aristotle's De Interpretatione. Contradiction and Dialectic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 9 n.1.

[107] *De interpretatione*, 14a4–9.

[108] This distinction is crucial to treatises that argue that a difference between a speaker's intention and his words does not necessarily constitute a lie. A discrepancy between what is in the 'heart' and what is expressed by the 'tongue' can be caused by the misunderstanding of the hearer (just as much as the intentional deceit of the speaker).

[109] *Sophistical Refutations*, 165a11–12. References are given according to the following edition: Aristotle, *On sophistical refutations; On coming-to-be and passing-away*, trans. by E. S. Forster, D. J. Furley (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1955).

[110] Cf. Frank L. Huntley, '*Macbeth* and the Background of Jesuitical Equivocation', *PMLA* 79.4 (1964), 390–400, p. 391. n. 11., *Henry Garnet: A Treatise of Equivocation*, ed. by David Jardine (London, 1851), pp. 12–15.

[111] Here I omit the discussion of the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* (Aristotle's two treatises on the syllogism), as ambiguity does not have a significant role in them.

In the *Topica*, examining the variety of arguments that can be used to reason about any problem,[112] Aristotle mentions three reasons why detecting ambiguity is useful for the dialectician. First, detecting and avoiding ambiguities provides clarity to the argument. Second, a discussion of a philosophical problem can only be successful if the opponents can ensure that they are talking about the same things. Third, if both parties are able to detect ambiguity in the other's argument, then neither of them can mislead the other, or can be misled by the other.[113] He then presents the reader with fourteen linguistic and logical tests for detecting ambiguity.[114]

The threat that ambiguity (a misunderstanding as a consequence of the same term being understood in different ways by the two parties in a philosophical debate) poses for the Aristotle of the *Organon* is that no knowledge is gained and/or an erroneous notion prevails. For correct dialectical reasoning to take place, it is essential to disentangle ambiguity whenever it occurs. The relevance of these issues for sixteenth century readers of the *Organon* becomes obvious in connection with the disputations university students were required to attend and take part in.

In the last treatise, the *Sophistical Refutations*, Aristotle deals with fallacious arguments and refutations (that only seem to be true, whereas in fact they are not),[115] to demonstrate how to correct false arguments once they have been recognised.[116] The intentional usage of such fallacies is a characteristic of the Sophist who 'makes money from apparent and not real wisdom. [...] [I]t is clear that for these people it is

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[112] *Topica*, 100a18–25. All references are given according to the following edition: Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*; *Topica*, trans. by Hugh Tredennick, E. S. Foster (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Heinemann; Harvard University Press, 1960).

[113] *Topica*, 108a18–108a37.

[114] *Topica*, 106a9–107b37.

[115] *Sophistical Refutations*, 164a20–24.

[116] The reason is threefold why knowing how to respond to these fallacies is useful in philosophy. First, since they turn on language, knowing them puts the disputant in a better position generally, since he will be aware of the various meanings that similarities and differences attach to words. Second, it helps one be able to answer questions even in his own mind, thus making him generally less prone to being mislead. Third, it enhances his reputation, as it shows that his training is universal (*Sophistical Refutations*, 175a5–18).

essential to seem to perform the function of a wise man rather than actually to perform it without seeming to do so'.[117] Using a fallacious argument is considered unfair by Aristotle, and those who employ such arguments 'to win a reputation which will help them to make money are regarded as sophistical. For, as we have said, the art of the sophist is a money-making art which trades on apparent wisdom, and so sophists aim at apparent proof; [...] sophistry is an appearance of wisdom without the reality'.[118] By misleading their opponents with fallacious arguments, their aim is to make them admit to a false conclusion which seemingly proves the Sophist's point.

Therefore, to recognise and demolish them, it is essential to know the ways in which these fallacious arguments are constructed by the Sophists. There are six modes of producing a false illusion with language,[119] that is, of failing 'to indicate the same things by the same terms or expressions': equivocation (ὁμονυμία), ambiguity (ἀμφιβολία), combination (σύνθεσις), division (διαίρεσις), accent (προσῳδία) and form of expression (σχῆμα λέξεως). When an argument or refutation is fallacious, a word or phrase in either a premise or the conclusion has more than one meaning, or the question the Sophist is asking is itself ambiguous:[120] it contains equivocation (a word with more than one unrelated meaning) or ambiguity (terms that can fulfil several functions in a phrase, e.g. in 'speaking is possible of a silent person', speaking can be either 'about' or 'by' the silent person). These two fallacies have three modes: when the expression itself has more than one meaning, when a word is customarily used in more than one sense, or 'when a word has more than one

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[117] *Sophistical Refutations*, 165a20–32.
[118] *Sophistical Refutations*, 171b22–35.
[119] There are further ways described in which fallacies are produced not in connection with language which I will not discuss here.
[120] *Sophistical Refutations*, 177a9–15. Cf. my discussion of the dialogue between Viola and Feste in *Twelfth Night*, 3.1.1–29 (Chapter 5, Section 2 below).

meaning in combination with another word, though by itself it has only one meaning' (e.g. 'knowing letters', where letters can either be the object or the subject).[121]

There are five 'Sophistic' methods of asking questions to confuse the opponents and force them into seemingly contradicting themselves or some generally accepted truth: by asking vague questions, by asking numerous questions in one question, by inducing one's opponent to make statements which can be easily refuted, by questioning the opponent on the tenets of the philosophical school he belongs to, and asking questions that answered either way lead to paradoxes (e.g. questions that contain a false division, like 'Ought one do what is expedient or what is just').[122] To refute the fallacious sophistical arguments, or to be able to reply to their refutations and questions,[123] the disputant needs to rely on distinction.[124] The disputants ought to make sure they understand the words identically by setting apart the possible meanings and agreeing on which sense they are disputing about; this obviously destroys the fallacious argument of the Sophist. In fact, Aristotle apparently thought it a moral obligation to insist on distinguishing the meanings, since in connection with ambiguous questions he remarks that it is not proper either to ask or to give an answer for such questions.[125]

In the *Sophistical Refutations* Aristotle – drawing, no doubt, on Socratic-Platonic teaching – establishes the figure of the Sophist as the enemy of the true philosopher, who aims at the reputation of the wise, but gains it by deceiving those who are not

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[121] The fallacies of combination and division depend on ambiguous sentence structures where phrase boundaries are not clear. The fallacy of accent (only relevant in writing) is when the same graphemes can represent two words, differing only in their pronunciation. Finally, the fallacy of form of expression is caused by a misleading grammatical property (e.g. a word of a certain gender is declined in a paradigm characteristic of another gender, or when a state (e.g. to flourish) is expressed by an active verb as if it were an action). *Sophistical Refutations*, 165b30–166b19.

[122] *Sophistical Refutations*, 173a20–30. Cf. Cicero, *De officiis*, II.iii.9–10.

[123] In 175b38–176a18 Aristotle argues that an ambiguous question in fact contains two questions, and accordingly, should be treated as two. 'If, therefore, one must not give one answer to two questions, it is obvious that neither should one say "yes" or "no" where equivocal terms are used.'

[124] Aristotle outlines the solutions for the respective fallacies with abundant examples in 175a1–179a25.

[125] *Sophistical Refutations*, 175b38–176a18.

aware of the rules of dialectical argumentation. The Sophist is both a real figure whom the philosopher may have to face,[126] and a projected image, or the personification of the common mistaken or misleading arguments that the philosopher needs to avoid if he is seeking the true knowledge of the things. Later interpreters of Aristotle will make a lot out of this double nature of the figure of the Sophist, and gradually turn it into an increasingly demonic threat.

3.2.3. Melanchthon, *Erotemata Dialectices*

In *Erotemata Dialectices*, Book 4 (devoted to the topics used in arguments)[127] Melanchthon deals with the several ways faulty arguments can be resolved. Ambiguity (*aequivocatio*) is one of the errors that can result in a defective reasoning, therefore it should be avoided in one's own arguments and recognised and resolved in others', making sure that 'what the other said ambiguously, is interpreted adroitly'.[128] It is, moreover, a serious threat for the community, because it 'breeds discord' (*discordia*), and those who resort to it 'cast, as it were, Eris's apple among the people, which in turn produces great dissension' (*dissensio*), leading to the Trojan war.[129] Ambiguity results from the words, or from the things themselves.

When ambiguity stems from language, it needs to be clarified with the help of the grammar of the language, taking the common usage of the terms into

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[126] Public debates were probably held in Athens, both as entertainments and for instruction of the youth. See Hamblin, pp. 55–58.

[127] Philipp Melanchthon, *Erotemata dialectices*, in *Philippi Melanchthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider, Vol XIII (Halus Saxonum, apud C. A. Schwetsche et filium, 1846), 513–752, Liber Quartus: *De locis argumentorum*, cols. 641–752. Quotations from Melanchthon appear in my translation.

[128] 'dextere'; *Erotemata Dialectices*, col. 720, col. 729.

[129] 'Ut enim venit Ἔρις non vocata in convivium Pelei, in quo Iuno, Pallas et Venus consederant, et cum pomum obiectum dari formosissimam iussisset, discordiam inter deas excitavit, unde bellum Troianum ortum est: ita qui spargunt ambiguas opiniones, tamquam pomum Ἔριδος populis obiiciunt, quod postea magnas dissensiones parit.' *Erotemata Dialectices*, col. 720.

consideration.[130] If ambiguity is the consequence of the things themselves, the rules and distinctions of the relevant field of knowledge have to be invoked.[131]

Ambiguity is a key problem in the discussion of fallacies as well. In accordance with Aristotle, a fallacy is not simply a mistake, it is 'a deception in the argument that, by appearing true, misleads the hearer',[132] therefore knowing and avoiding fallacies is a moral obligation.[133] Fallacies, according to Melanchthon, belong to the trade of the Devil, who delights in lies, as opposed to God, who loves the simplest truth. Therefore it is necessary to take heed of the Sophist (who employs fallacies) to evade the Devil's traps of false doctrines.[134]

Melanchthon repeats Aristotle's division of fallacies into fallacies of language and fallacies beyond language.[135] In the case of *aequivocatio*, the deceit originates from the ambiguity (*ambiguitas*) of one word. A syllogism that contains an equivocal expression yields an invalid conclusion because instead of three, in fact four terms are used, therefore there is no logical necessity binding the conclusion to the premises. When *aequivocatio* occurs in an argument, the meaning should be determined with reference to grammar, definition, or division according to the relevant field of knowledge.[136]

Amphibolia differs from *aequivocatio* in that ambiguity results from more than one word or from the syntax of the sentence.[137] This type of fallacy is especially frequent in cases of the letter and spirit, proverbs and prophecies, for instance, in the

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[130] *Erotemata Dialectices*, col. 720.

[131] *Erotemata Dialectices*, col. 722.

[132] 'Fallacia est deceptio in argumento, quae specie aliqua veri insidiatur auditori.' col. 726.

[133] 'Rursus autem monendi sunt iuniores, ut non solum haec praecepta refutandi vitiosa argumenta discant, sed simul etiam in animis veritatis amorem, et sophistices odium confirment, ac semper in conspectu habeant vocem divinam: Non dicas falsum testimonium.' *Erotemata Dialectices*, col. 726.

[134] 'Cum igitur mendacia proponuntur, sciamus non tantum homines nobis insidiari, sed ipsum diabolum simul grassari, suum virus aliquibus afflantem. Cavenda est igitur sophistica, ne diabolus nobis laqueos iniiciat, ut omnibus aetatibus multos fascinatos falsis dogmatibus horribiliter evertit.' *Erotemata Dialectices*, col. 726.

[135] *Erotemata Dialectices*, cols. 727–736; 736–750.

[136] 'Monet vetus versiculus, ex ambiguis oriri dissensiones et falsas opiniones, qui sic recitatur: Erroris genetrix est aequivocatio semper.' *Erotemata Dialectices*, col. 729.

[137] Melancthon here borrows one of Quintilian's examples ('Aio te Aiacida Romanos vincere posse'); *amphibolia* is treated on cols. 729–732.

well-known prophecy given to Croesus ('Croesus Halym transiens evertet magnum imperium'), where, because of the lack of a pronoun, it is impossible to make out whose empire is going to be overturned.[138]

Melanchthon's treatment of ambiguity reflects an increasing uneasiness about the phenomenon. Its destructive capacities (even though the treatment is hypothetical) come to the foreground because it is seen as a threat to social consensus, and fallacies become associated with blasphemy and the Devil. Proverbs and prophecies are firmly linked with ambiguity, and the examples of fatal misunderstandings that result from ambiguity go beyond the context of scientific discussion.

3.2.4. John Case, *Summa veterum interpretum in universam Dialecticam Aristotelis*

John Case's introductory work to dialectic gives an insight into the ways in which Aristotle's logic was taught at English universities in the Renaissance.[139] The second book of the *Summa...*, which discusses the material of Aristotle's *Categories*, presents the problem of ambiguous reference as one of the key issues in dialectical reasoning. Of the seven Antepredicaments the first to be discussed is the equivocal (*aequivoca*),[140] because 'it is easier to avoid it if the mistake is recognised'.[141] The equivocal are 'names, according to a first and a second meaning/intention, that, through their multiple and double-headed signification, drag and compel the human mind into different understandings,' or (and here he translates Aristotle's definition)

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[138] *Erotemata Dialectices*, col. 730.

[139] Mack, pp. 56–57.

[140] Note that Renaissance authors tend to translate *homonyma* as *aequivoca*, rather than *ambigua* or *amphibolia*, the terms ancient authorities used. The basis for that change is probably Boethius's translation of Aristotle.

[141] John Case, *Summa veterum interpretum in vniversam dialecticam Aristotelis...* (London: Thomas Vautrollerius, 1584), STC (2nd ed.) / 4762, in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 20 March, 2010], sig. I4ᵛ. Quotations from John Case appear in my translation.

'things that have a common name, while the definitions that belong to that same name, are different, like *canis* or *Taurus*.'[142]

Book 5 of the *Summa...* bears the title 'Reprehensio Sophistarum', *Sophistical Refutations* (but based on its tone, it could just as well be translated as 'Blaming the Sophists'), and sets out to teach its readers the techniques of the Sophists (the *elenchi*),[143] to make the readers better disputants, better judges, and abler to defend themselves in more refined ways. If the disputant does not know the *elenchi* well, the Sophist will be able to force him to accept an erroneous argument by way of a false appearance of truth, by pretending wisdom, or by latent and hidden deceitfulness that the Sophist uses to bring about a (seeming) contradiction in the disputant's argument.[144]

The figure of the Sophist is noteworthy. He is not simply someone who pretends to be wise to win his audience with false illusions of an argument, as for Aristotle or Plato, but a dangerously malevolent opponent, who aims at deceiving others to their ruin. A Sophist is 'defined as a deceitful and treacherous man, who imitates another's fame, [...] a deviser of contradictions, [...] a monkey imitating the wise'. He not only pretends to be wise (because he lacks the proper knowledge), but does so to mislead others: 'the false Sophist is so far from speaking true that he pretends all the time: he is so far from leading back [the mistaken] to the right way that he triumphs most when he manages to lead them astray'.[145] He is 'an inventor of fraud and attacker of

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[142] 'Definiuntur vel notantur potius esse nomina primae vel secundae intentionis, quae multiplici anticipitique significatione sua, mentem humanam in varias cogitationes distrahunt et impellunt, aut, si magis placet, definiuntur entia, quorum nomen quidem est commune, ratio vero eidem nomini conveniens, alia aliaque, ut canis, Taurus.' *Summa...*, sig. I4ᵛ.

[143] The Elenchi are 'arguments that are false and filled with the zeal for disagreement, through which the case concludes in a contradiction in the eyes of those who do not know' ('fallax et contendendi studio suscepta ratiocinatio, per quam contradictio causae, de qua agitur, in opinione ignorantis concluditur', sig. Mm1ʳ). Cf. the aim Aristotle attributes to *sophistici elenchi*, i.e. *sophistical refutations*.

[144] *Summa...*, sig. Ll4ʳ.

[145] *Summa...*, sig. Mm1ʳ.

the art [of dialectic]' who can make the ignorant 'concede even that he himself is not a human being'.[146]

The Sophists use fallacies (only seemingly true arguments) to deceive their opponents. One of the fallacies Case identifies (following Aristotle) is the fallacy of equivocation. When Sophists employ the fallacy of equivocation (*aequivocatio*), they 'hide beneath it [i.e. *equivocation*], like the snake under the flower, and prepare many traps for the incautious'.[147] Case's definition of the fallacy of equivocation is worth quoting because of his persistently hostile language: it is

> nothing but a treacherous device to deceive through the ambiguity of a word. When the multiple signification of the word is not recognised, [the Sophist] goes immediately for the deceit, and quickly casts doubt. It is not in vain that the Philosopher [i.e. Aristotle] insists in the First book of the *Topica* that we should distinguish of the manifold and discriminate between things diligently and carefully.[148]

The fallacy of equivocation can be brought about in the same ways as it has already been discussed in connection with the *antepraedicamenta*.[149] After the fallacy of equivocation, Case deals with *amphibologia* in a way similar to Melanchthon's:[150] what *aequivocatio* is for words (*voca*), it is *amphibologia* for sentences (*orationes*). Like Melanchthon, Case also associates *amphibologia* with misleading punning – e.g. in quibbles (*aenigmata*) and oracles 'that drag the sense in

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[146] *Summa...*, sig. Mm2[r].

[147] 'sub ea [sc. aequivocatione] (ut anguis sub herba) latitans'. This Vergilian paraphrase, the snake hiding under the flower as the evil who deceives by ambiguous speech or behaviour, is a common image, and significantly, it occurs in *Macbeth* too. For a more detailed discussion of the tradition to which Case's usage belongs, see section 3.1 in Chapter 6.

[148] '[...] nihil aliud est, quam insidiosum decipiendi artificium per ambiguitatem nominis. Ignota enim multiplici nominis significatione, fraus statim intenditur, scrupulus cito iniicitur. Non otiose ergo suadet Philosophus i. *Topicorum*, ut distinctionem multiplicium, et discriminationem rerum diligenter et attente observemus. Materia huius fallaciae (ut ita dicam) est ipsa dictio; forma numerosa significatio vocis, et intentio fraudis. Efficiens causa, unitas dictionis. Finis deceptio simplicis. Fraudantur enim in actione, formatur in intentione, ab unitate vocis proficiscitur, ad deceptionem destinatur.' *Summa...*, sig. Mm3[r].

[149] 'Multiplex est vel in Actu, cum dictio eadem tam secundum formam compositionis, quam secundum modum prolationis, diversa significat, ut canis; Potentia, cum vox eadem manens secundum formam compositionis, modo proferendi alterato, significationem mutat: ut cortex pro libro, et testa arboris; Apparentia, seu (ut veteres aiunt) phantasia, cum in opinione ignorantis sic appareat, propter similitudinem unius, cum altero. Ut si credat ignarus (Sophistica ratione coactus) eodem in iride esse colores qui sunt in rebus.' *Summa...*, sig. Mm3[r]–Mm3[v].

[150] *Amphibologia* was often used instead of *amphibolia*, due to mistaken etymology.

two ways/doubts (*ancipitem*)' – which the Sophists use 'like a veil, like a cloud, they throw thunderbolts on their opponents'.[151]

The most striking feature of Case's treatment of the fallacies, and among them, of equivocation as the primary one, is the unmistakable hostility and a strong sense of moral objection towards the figure of the Sophist, who can be expected to practise fallacious reasoning as his own art. His attitude and the characteristics he attributes to the figure of the Sophist as an opponent have more in common with the presentation of enemies in contemporary political-religious debates than with the avaricious original in Aristotle.

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[151] 'ut, quia Christus dixit, Pater me maior est: ergo inquit Archisophista, non est aequalis Patri.' The Arch-Sophist may be a reference to Machiavelli, see Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance England*, (Kingston [Ont.]: McGill-Queen's University Press, c1983.), p 187, and n. 187.

4. Conclusion

The works I have discussed in this chapter represent three interconnected approaches to ambiguity which, for convenience, I will refer to as the rhetorical, the dialectical, and the grammatical approach.

Writers within the rhetorical tradition are divided on the crucial question of what the speaker has to persuade his audience about. According to Cicero and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the task of the orator is to convince the audience that from a choice of interpretations, there is one which is the only right option. Quintilian, on the contrary, believes that the orator ought to admit the existence of equally plausible interpretations and argue for the relative merits of one of them.

The aim of the dialectical approach is to gain knowledge, consequently their point of view is influenced by the struggle to resolve scientific or moral problems, and avoiding, recognising, and eliminating ambiguities becomes a moral obligation. Ambiguity from this perspective means either a mistake in an argument, or a misunderstanding between the two parties which prevents them from reaching the only right conclusion, or a technique the party who is not interested in finding the truth can employ to mislead his opponent intentionally. For Aristotle this deceitful party, the Sophist, bears a threat for the community by impeding the revelation of genuine knowledge. For Aristotle's Renaissance followers the Sophist is an almost demonic figure who leads the ignorant astray or casts the seeds of discord and sedition among people: he is trading lies, the instruments of the Devil.

The last approach is perhaps the most fundamental. Servius's commentary provides a model for reading texts. What is at stake at the moment of encountering a text is understanding the other. Ambiguity, if it is recognised, disrupts the flow of communication and demands to be eliminated, but that is not always possible. And when it is not recognised, partly by the mistake of its intended audience, the consequences may turn out to be severe: examples are abundant in the analysed texts, from mistaken oracles to the spreading of blasphemy.

A student in a sixteenth century grammar school would not only have encountered a remarkable variety of ways in which ambiguity was dealt with, but also a perplexing range of notions that ambiguity could cover. In Aristotle, ὁμονυμία (translated to Latin as *aequivocatio*) is used for words with more than one referent, while ἀμφιβολία describes the phenomenon of ambiguity in general. Classical Latin sources use *amphibolia* and *ambiguitas* relatively interchangeably to refer to a multiplicity of meanings on any level of the language. Renaissance texts seem to distinguish between *aequivocatio* 'ambiguity of words' and *amphibol(og)ia* 'ambiguity of units larger than words', while referring to them as *ambiguitas* in general. Apart from lexical or syntactic ambiguity, however, the same terms can refer to a semantic problem of an utterance being obscure, doubtful, twofold, undecided or contradictory, ambivalent.

The arguments that could be collected from grammar school and university education for supporting an interpretation are also numerous. Classical and Renaissance authorities list both linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena that contribute to the interpretation of ambiguous texts. Meaning can be inferred by relying (apart from the debated text itself) on the common usage of expressions, or, on the contrary, on a technical sense applied in a relevant field of knowledge. Language usage characteristic of the author and the presumable intention of the author based on his general character provide further arguments for choosing between the meanings. Originally unambiguous texts can suddenly become ambiguous when circumstances change, when an unforeseen but potentially implied exception arises, or when the speaker's gestures contradict his words. These examples are not only reminders for the students that meaning is easily destabilised, but are also indicative of possible arguments. Once ambiguity is recognised, there are a number of ways to deal with it. However, recognition does not always come in time.

Chapter 2.

The Ears of Men and the
Judgement of God:
The Theoretical Background and
Practical Application of Equivocation

1. Introduction

Towards the end of the sixteenth century the word 'equivocation' gains a radically new meaning in England. At a superficial glance, it would appear that this new meaning, the casuistical concept of *equivocation* as a statement with a crucial qualification that the speaker retains in their mind to mislead the hearer (the topic of this and the following chapter) has almost nothing in common with *equivocation* as lexical or syntactic ambiguity (the topic of the previous chapter). However, once we accept the principles (derived from the classical rhetorical and dialectical tradition) that (1) to establish the meaning of a statement which causes debate because of its ambiguity we often have to go beyond the mere words and seek contextual information, and that (2) certain statements are commonly known to contain an already implied qualification, then *mental reservation* or *restriction* no longer seems an entirely alien idea.

It is partly due to treatises and handbooks like the ones I will treat in this chapter that casuistry earned a bad reputation both among Protestants, and within the Catholic Church. From one point of view, cases of conscience teach their readership to regard moral principles – supposedly derived from the Bible – as relative, and allow for moral laxity by giving the individual the justification to decide which principle to privilege. On the other hand, casuistry can be regarded as simply acknowledging the notion that religious moral principles (like laws) can sometimes be in conflict, and then one of them has to be given priority.[1] Such choices seem almost impossible in situations like the one in which Catholics found themselves from the late sixteenth century: when the authorities interrogated them to find out where someone (e.g. a priest) was hiding, they could either sacrifice their soul by lying about their knowledge to save the person, or they could sacrifice the person by

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[1] For a discussion of the Renaissance and present day views, seeking a less prejudiced approach to Catholic and Protestant casuistry, see Camille Wells Slights, *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert and Milton* (Princeton; Guildford: Princeton University Press, c1981), Preface and Chapter 1 ('The Tradition').

telling the truth. The Protestant interrogator is the Catholic's lawful worldly authority, but what he is conducting is arguably unjust persecution in the Catholic's eyes, and the Divine Law orders them to defend the priest's (or anyone else's) life. Should everybody choose martyrdom? There are so many conflicting interests here that they will never be reconciled – unless there is a way to say and not say what one knows.

But, as I will argue in my later chapters, the desire to say something and mean it in a certain, slightly different sense which will hopefully remain hidden from the hearer, does not occur in such extreme situations exclusively: the cowardly servant of a comedy might try to conceal what he knows about his master's misdeeds in the bedroom by giving only partial responses; the girl might find it safer to express her love in speeches that are made ambiguous by being delivered as a boy. But retaining crucial information can be a dangerous weapon for the evil too: equivocal prophecies can lead someone to their ruin just as much as conspirators can keep their plans secret by equivocal confessions.

The history of Jesuitical equivocation begins with the discussion of a hypothetical marriage case, and marriage vows remain frequent models for speeches that are interpreted differently by their speaker and their hearer. The question that Navarrus explores is whether a person in a situation in which his life is threatened by an unjust questioner, has the right to mislead the questioner with an incompletely uttered response: is it a lie to say out loud only part of the response and keep part of it to oneself and God? Under what circumstances is such deceit morally and theologically justifiable?

Navarrus's suggestions on how and when to use such *mixed propositions* are directly applicable to the case of Catholic priests in England. After his *Commentary on 'Humanae aures'...*, the first full exposition of the doctrine of mental reservation, I will turn to George Abbot's 1597 Oxford sermon on lying, which is among the first preserved reactions to the doctrine in England, published with five other lectures as

Quaestiones Sex. The so far relatively neglected *De mendacio* was probably the earliest Protestant attack on equivocation in print.[2] Abbot devotes 12 pages of his 22 page 'Preface' to the six lectures, and half of *On Lying*, to the early dissemination of the doctrine of equivocation in England, a process, he argues, that makes all Catholic testimonies suspicious not just after Southwell's trial, but over the previous twenty years.[3] His attacks are mostly based on late-sixteenth century collections of casuistry that reveal the ways in which the problem of keeping one's identity secret forced priests to develop methods by which they did not tell the truth, but neither did they explicitly lie. I will give a brief overview of these cases. Finally, I analyse the argument of Father Henry Garnet's infamous *Treatise of Equivocation*. Written around the turn of the century, it expounds the doctrine in a crystallised form, with systematic rules for its applicability by prosecuted Catholics against the Protestant authorities.

Whether the doctrine of Jesuitical equivocation was as influential and dangerous as Garnet's prosecutors presented it in the Gunpowder Plot conspirators' trial is hard to gauge. Nevertheless, there is an obvious anxiety in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century about concealed identities and mistaken statements that were intentionally formed in a way to mislead the hearer, or a moral middle way between lying and telling a truth that endangers the speaker.

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[2] See Kenneth Fincham, 'Abbot, George (1562–1633)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn, Jan 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4>, [accessed 25 Nov 2012].

[3] George Abbot, *Quaestiones sex* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1598), B1ʳ: 'inde cuivis non caecutienti patet, quod per annos iam viginti ultimo elapsos, eorum omnes actiones, gestus, praxes cum istis convenire ad amussim reperiamus.' ('from which it should be clear to everybody who is not blind that all their actions, gestures, techniques should be revaluated in the light of these rules in the past 20 years').

2. Words Weighed Through the Heart or the Heart Weighed Through the Words: Navarrus and *Mental Reservation*

There is a general agreement among cultural and literary historians that the doctrine of equivocation was first fully expounded by the Spanish theologian Martín de Azpilcueta (1491/2/3–1586), or Doctor Navarrus, as he is more commonly known, in a work printed in 1584.[4] In his *Commentary on 'Humanae Aures...'* – a passage in Gratian's *Decretum* –, Navarrus sets out to resolve a marriage case proposed to him in the form of three questions by his 'Jesuit fellows'. The basic problem he addresses is whether a 'response given partly expressed by words, partly conceived in the mind', is true.[5]

An intriguing question about Navarrus's *Commentary* is when it was written. Zagorin[6] and Malloch[7] agree that the *Commentary* must have been written long before it was eventually published in 1584, because Navarrus refers to it in his casuistical handbook, *Manuale sive Enchiridion Confessariorum et Poenitentium* ('Manual, or Handbook of Confessions and Penances') which was extremely popular in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[8] The time of composition may be significant for the history of equivocation because the fact that – as Navarrus himself points out – the case he discusses could no longer happen after the Council of Trent (1545–1563) led some historians to assume that the *Commentary* was directly

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[4] Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 164, p. 176; Archibald E. Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', *Recusant History*, 15.6 (1981), 387–395, p. 388; Archibald E. Malloch, 'Equivocation: A Circuit of Reasons', in *Familiar Colloquy: Essays Presented to A. E. Barker*, ed. by Patricia Bruckmann ([Ottawa]: Oberon Press, 1978), 132–143, p. 133; Frank L. Huntley, '*Macbeth* and the Background of Jesuitical Equivocation', *PMLA* 79.4 (1964), 390–400, p. 391.

[5] Martín de Azpilcueta (Doctor Navarrus), *Commentarius in cap. Humanae aures, XXII. Q. V. De Veritate Responsi; Partim verbo expresso, Partim mente concepto redditi.* in: *D. Martini ab Azpilcueta Navarri, I. U. D. Praeclarissimi Commentaria*, Vol. I. (Venice, 1588). According to Zagorin (p. 168. n. 35.) in the first edition, the title appeared in a longer version, with the words 'et De Arte Bona et Mala Simulandi' added to the end. All English translations in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

[6] Zagorin, pp. 167–168.

[7] Malloch, 'Equivocation: A Circuit of Reasons', n. 3. (p. 141).

[8] Zagorin, p. 165.

influenced by the needs of the Catholics in England – a conclusion which Malloch rejects.[9] If, however, the *Commentary* had been written before (or during) the Council, this would explain Navarrus's motives for writing it, although, as Zagorin points it out,[10] its eventual publication so long after he had written it would still remain a puzzle.

According to Malloch 'the treatise had evidently been written some years before. Azpilcueta [i.e. Navarrus] refers to it in the revised, Latin edition (1573)' of the *Enchiridion*, in Chapter XII, Number 8.[11] Zagorin claims that 'Navarrus referred to his commentary on the chapter "Humanae aures" in Gratian's *Decretum*' in 'chap. xii, nos. 8–9', and that later he 'again cited his own commentary', in 'chap. xviii, nos. 3, 8, 61', noting that these references 'could not have appeared in early editions of the *Enchiridion*, since the commentary was not published until 1584'.[12]

A brief look at a few editions of the *Enchiridion* might yield more reliable information about the date of composition of Navarrus's treatise.[13] While I found no reference to the *Commentary* in the editions I had access to in XVIII. 3 and 8, some of them (and, more importantly, some pre-1584 editions) contained a reference to 'c. Humanae aures 22. q. 5.' in XVIII. 6[14] and in XVIII. 9,[15] and the same reference[16] is to be found in all editions at XII. 8, as well as at XII. 9 and XVIII. 61,[17] and at several other places, e. g. in XII. 13.[18] Additions at XII. 8 in the editions from 1573

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[9] Maclloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's *Treatise of Equivocation*', p. 394. n. 11.

[10] Zagorin, p. 175.

[11] Malloch, 'Equivocation: A Circuit of Reasons', n. 3. (p. 141).

[12] Zagorin, p. 168 and p. 168. n. 33 & 34.

[13] Throughout this argument, I am relying on the following editions of Martín de Azpilcueta's *Enchiridion, sive Manuale Confessariorum et Poenitentium* (accessed to through the Bavarian State Library's digital collection, http://www.bsb-muenchen.de): Zaragoza (1555, Spanish), Venice (1569, Italian), Rome (1573), Venice (1573), Antwerp (1575), Antwerp (1579), Lyon (1584), Rome (1584), Venice (1584), Rome (1588), Lyon (1592), Würzburg (1593).

[14] e.g. Rome, 1573; Lyon, 1592.

[15] e.g. Zaragoza, 1555; Venice, 1573.

[16] With occasional misprints, like in the Zaragoza (1555, Spanish), Venice (1569, Italian) and Venice (1573, Latin), where the reference is to 'c. Humanae aures 22. q. 1'.

[17] Both noted by Zagorin; the latter missing in some editions

[18] Twice – not noted by Zagorin or Malloch. It has to be noted, however, that 'c. Humanae aures 22. q. 5.' is more likely to be a reference to Gratian's *Decretum*, and not to Navarrus' *Commentary*,

claim that Navarrus further elaborated on that point in his commentary. This reference[19] is in the present tense in some editions,[20] and in the past[21] in all the editions after 1584, the year of publication of the *Commentary*, which would suggest a composition date between 1573 and 1584.[22] However, the same editions between 1573 and 1584 contain another potential reference to some version of a commentary in the *past* tense.[23] Finally, a reference (that I have not seen noted in secondary literature) in the 1573 Rome edition at VIII. 17 clearly states that Navarrus has written a *Commentary on Humanae aures*: 'quae scripsi in Commentario Humanae aures 22. q. 5.'[24] Therefore the *Commentary* in some form must have existed before 1573 (and most probably after 1569).[25]

As it is apparent from this brief survey, elements of the argument of the *Commentary* appear elsewhere in Navarrus's earlier works.[26] What still remains unexplained is the late publication and the fact that the doctrine of mental reservation is exposed in a treatise on a marriage case that could no longer cause a problem of conscience. This may strengthen the position that even if the composition of the text was unrelated, its publication has to do with the situation in England.

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because the latter contains only 3 rather than 5 questions, and because some of the editions read 'ca.' (Venice, 1569) or 'capit' (Rome, 1588; Lyon, 1592; Würzburg, 1593), rather than 'c', which clearly indicates that the reference is to a *chapter*, than to the *commentary*.

[19] Missing from the 1573 Venice edition.

[20] '[I]n cuius Comment. late de hoc *disserimus*'. Rome, 1573 and Antwerp, 1575 and 1579.

[21] '[I]n cuius Comment. late de hoc *disseruimus*'.

[22] The present and past tense differ only in one letter (disser*i*mus/disser*ui*mus), therefore the difference could be a consequence of a printer's error; furthermore, it would be quite natural to refer to something already written in the present tense.

[23] XVIII. 61. in the Rome, 1573 edition reads: 'Tum quia quamvis iuret se dicturum quod scit, vere respondere potest se illa nescire absque periurii metu, intelligendo intra se, illud non ita scire, ut detegere teneatur, Henric de Gandavo, Quol. 9. in Princip. Adrian. in 4. de Correct. frater. § Ostensis col. 6. quicquid dicant Genesius a Sepulveda & Sotus per ea quae ipsos re ferens dixi ubi supra a nu. 766. & nu. 801. quod nervosius postea *confirmavi*, in c. Humanae aures 22. q. 5'. (n8ᵛ).

[24] I have not found this reference in the other copies I had access to.

[25] Its dedication is to Pope Gregory XIII (1572–1585), but since there is no evidence that it was added before publication, this information cannot be decisive in dating the work.

[26] For instance, the conclusion of Question 1 of the *Commentary* refers to passages in the *Enchiridion* (12.9, 18.61, 25.44), where he had already justified using ambiguity to defend physical or personal integrity.

Navarrus's treatise discusses a *de praesenti* marriage case, in which a certain 'N.' is brought to court with the charge that he proposed marriage to a woman, which he now denies.[27] When asked by the judge whether he said to the woman that he would marry her, he, under oath, replies he did not, 'secretly understanding in his mind that "he did not say that <with the intention to take her as wife>"'.[28] Navarrus, through the interpretation of a passage in Gratian's *Decretum*, traditionally referred to as *Humanae aures*, seeks to answer the questions whether N. (1) is guilty of lying in the eyes of God, (2) is guilty of perjury in the eyes of God,[29] or (3) sinned in any other way. The passage in Gratian is itself an application of a chapter from Gregory the Great's commentary on the Book of Job, *Moralia*, and the differences between the two texts are noteworthy, especially because sixteenth–seventeenth century interpreters tend to cite Gratian's version, while in their text they refer to Gregory as the authority.[30]

In the passage, Gregory explains why it is a misinterpretation to claim that Job believes himself to be more righteous than God.

> Every one observes, who reads the text of the history, that blessed Job did not say that he was more righteous than God. But he says, 'Let Him put forth equity against me, and my judgment shall come to victory.' Examining namely his life, and not knowing the reasons of his smiting, as has been often observed, he believed that he was scourged for the sake of washing away his sins, and not of increasing his merits. And he was therefore confident, that his judgment would

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[27] For this section, apart from the brief mentions of the *Commentary* in Malloch 'Equivocation: A Circuit of Reasons', pp. 133–135, Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, c1988), Chapter 10, pp. 195–215; Johann Peter Sommerville, 'The "New Art of Lying": Equivocation, Mental Reservation and Casuistry', in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Edmund Leites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 159–84, see Zagorin's discussion (pp. 168–175), who outlines the arguments of Navarrus and discusses their influence on the literature of lying.

[28] 'N. qui dixit clam cuidam foeminae: accipio te in uxorem meam sine animo eam ducendi, respondit iudici eum adiuranti et interroganti; an ea verba dixisset? se non dixisse illa subintelligendo mente, quod ea non dixerit animo illam ducendi.' Punctuation added. Although the common practice is to enclose the mentally reserved phrases in square brackets, I decided to use angle brackets instead, to avoid confusion with necessary additions to quotations, which I enclosed in square brackets.

[29] Zagorin's translation (p. 169) for this question is disputable. He renders the phrase 'an peieraverit coram Deo, licet non fuerit mentitus' (literally: 'whether he committed perjury in the presence of God, even if he did not lie') as 'even if it was licit for him to lie, did he commit perjury in the presence of God'.

[30] e.g. Sepúlveda, VI.

come to victory, because he found in himself no fault, for which he deserved to be smitten. Which thing indeed the Lord also said of him to the devil; 'Thou hast moved Me against him, to afflict him without cause'. What had he sinned then, by speaking thus, who, unknowingly, agreed, in these words, with the divine and secret sentence upon himself? Or what harm is there, if, in the judgment of men, our words differ, on the surface, from the exactness of truth, when, in that on which they turn in the heart, they are closely joined to, and agree with, it. ['cordis cardine'].[31] *The ears of men judge our words as they sound outwardly; judgement of God, however, hears them as they are brought forth inwardly. Among people the heart is weighed through words, but in front of God, the words are weighed through the heart. Therefore, when the Blessed Job says outwardly what the Lord said inwardly, everything he says is all the more justly uttered the less he, in his piousness, deviates from the internal meaning.*[32]

Job, as a biblical figure, is a moral example. If his actions are misinterpreted, the danger is that an unjust practice is presented as worthy of imitation, resulting in sinful human behaviour. Therefore Gregory has to prove that when Job exclaims 'Proponat aequitatem contra me, et perveniet ad victoriam iudicium meum',[33] he is not placing his own judgment above God's. According to Gregory, what Job says is the result of thorough self-examination, during which he did not find any just reason for the punishments. This judgment of his coincides with God's ('Commovisti me

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[31] Up to this point, the translation is from: St. Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* (Oxford, John Henry Parker; J. G. F. and J. Rivington, London, 1844), in *Lectionary Central* <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book26.html>, [accessed 22 October, 2010].

[32] My translation. 'X, 15. 'Numquid aequa tibi videtur tua cogitatio, ut diceres: Iustior Deo sum?' [Iob. 35, 2] Quia beatus Iob iustiorem se Deo non dixerit, omnis qui textum historiae legit, agnoscit; sed ait: 'Proponat aequitatem contra me, et perveniet ad victoriam iudicium meum' [Iob. 23, 7]. Vitam suam videlicet pensans et causas percussionis ignorans, ut saepe iam dictum est, pro diluendis peccatis se credidit et non pro augendis meritis flagellari; et idcirco iudicium suum ad victoriam pervenire confisus est, quia culpam in se, pro qua debuisset percuti, non invenit. Quod quidem de illo et Dominus ad diabolum dixit: 'Commovisti me adversus eum, ut affligerem eum frustra' [Iob. 2, 3]. Quid ergo haec loquendo peccavit, qui verbis istis divinae de se et occultae sententiae etiam nesciendo consensit? Aut quid obest si a rectitudine veritatis humano iudicio verba nostra superficie tenus discrepant, quando in cordis cardine ei compaginata concordant? Humanae aures verba nostra talia iudicant qualia foris sonant; divina vero iudicia talia ea audiunt qualia ex intimis proferuntur. Apud homines cor ex verbis, apud Deum vero verba pensantur ex corde. Beatus ergo Iob dum hoc ait exterius quod interius Dominus dixit, omne quod locutus est tanto iuste exterius intulit, quanto pie ab interna sententia non recessit.' *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob*, Cura et studio Marci Adriaen, Libri 23–35, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 143B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), p. 1276. (Punctuation added, misprints corrected.) Throughout the chapter I modernised and normalised Latin spelling.

[33] 'Let him propose equitie against me, and my iudgement shal come to victorie'. For the Catholic translations, I used the Douai-Rheims Bible (*The Holy Bible Faithfvlly Translated Into English: Ovt of the Authentical Latin, Diligently Conferred with the Hebrew, Greek, and Other Editions in Diuers Languages*, 2 vols. (Iohn Cousturier, 1635), in Google Books <books.google.com>, [accessed 10 November 2012]). 'There the righteous might dispute with him, so shoulde I be deliuered for euer from my iudge'. For the Protestant translations, I used the Bishops' Bible (*The Holie Bible*, STC (2nd ed.) / 2099.2, (London: Richard Iugge, 1568), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 10 November 2012]).

adversus eum, ut affligerem eum frustra'),[34] even though Job is unaware of that. Therefore when he utters 'Let him propose equitie against me, and my iudgement shal come to victorie', his speech coincides with the judgment of God, even if the ears of men misconstrue it as blasphemy.

In the passage that serves as a starting point for Navarrus, Gratian takes one sentence from the argument in which Gregory proved that Job's exclamation is not blasphemous. Gratian, by adding his interpretation, turns it into a moral principle of human communication.

> The ears of men judge our words as they sound outwardly, but the judgement of God hears them as they are uttered from within.[35] Certainly he is one that knows who explains from the words of another his will and intention; for he ought not consider the words but rather the will and intention, because the intention should not serve the words, but the words the intention.[36] Therefore, if the divine judgment hears our *outward words* as they are *brought forth inwardly*, it is not the intention that should serve the words, but the words should serve the intention: then is it clear that God does not receive the oath as the one to whom it is spoken, but as the one who speaks understands it, because to the recipient our words sound not as they are brought forth inwardly but outwardly.[37]

In this passage Gratian (following the tradition of differentiating between the letter and the spirit) establishes the superiority of the inner meaning – understood by God –, which is, nevertheless, not necessarily inaccessible to men (as it seems to be in Gregory). Gratian places the responsibility of seeking and grasping the intention on the person to whom the oath is given, instead of setting it as a moral obligation for

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[34] Douai-Rheims Bible: 'But thou hast moued me against him, that I should afflict him in vaine'. Bishops' Bible: 'although thou mouedst me against hym, to destroy him without cause'.

[35] The slight alteration in the second sentence ('talia ea audiunt' becomes 'talia foris audiunt') gives more emphasis to the contrast of the 'inner' and 'outer'.

[36] Up to this point, Zagorin's translation, p. 169.

[37] My translation. 'Humanae aures talia verba nostra iudicant, qualia foris sonant. Divina vero iudicia talia foris audiunt, qualia ex intimis proferuntur. §. 1. Certe noverit ille, qui intentionem et voluntatem alterius variis verbis explicat, quia non debet aliquis verba considerare, sed voluntatem et intentionem, quia non debet intentio verbis deservire, sed verba intentioni. *Gratian*: Si ergo divina iudicia verba nostra talia foris audiunt, qualia ex intimis proferuntur, si intentio non debet deservire uerbis, sed verba intentioni: patet, quod Deus non sic accipit iuramentum, sicut ille, cui iuratur, sed pocius sicut qui iurat intelligit, cum recipienti non ex intimis, sed ex hisque proferuntur foris, verba nostra sonent.' Gratianus, *Decreti Secunda Pars, Causa XXII. Quaestio V. caput xi. Apud Deum verba nostra non ex ore, sed ex corde procedunt.* in *Corpus iuris canonici. Pars 1, Decretum magistri Gratiani*, edited by Emil Friedberg and Aemilius Ludwig Richter (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1995), p. 886 (Punctuation added).

the speaker to express himself in a way that will be properly understood. Navarrus uses Gratian's argument to show how the speaker of the oath can trick those who unjustly compel them to reveal something they are not bound (or sometimes not even allowed) to tell. Navarrus suggests that in such cases one should consciously use utterances with multiple meanings. The desired consequence is that the *inward* meaning escapes the audience who will only be aware of the *outward* meaning. This indicates a radical change: while in the rhetorical and dialectical tradition the aim was to avoid ambiguity in order to ensure that the speaker makes himself understood, Navarrus's speaker exploits ambiguity because he intends his speech to be misunderstood.

Navarrus is arguably not the first person to interpret Gratian's passage as justifying the speaker's manipulation of meanings as a way of escaping both the revelation of secrets and lying. In fact, it must have been a common, even if questionable practice, as the mistaken interlocutor in Sepúlveda's *De ratione dicendi testimonium in causis occultorum* (1538) testifies.[38] In this dialogue, written in near-classical Latin, two friends, Philetus and Theophilus discuss the problem of whether one is bound to confess a crime that he knows of, and that would otherwise remain undetected by the authorities. As Theophilus (Sepúlveda's persona in the dialogue) argues, Gregory[39] did not encourage the speaker to deceive the audience, rather offered a defence in a potential situation in which the speaker's words are unjustly and intentionally misinterpreted, although his real and innocent meaning could have been discovered if his questioner had focussed on the intention and not the words of what he said.[40] While, according to Sepúlveda, in Gratian the second (not real)

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[38] Cf. Zagorin, p. 181.

[39] In fact Gratian.

[40] Zagorin here most probably misreads Sepúlveda. On p. 180 he says: 'Theophilus commented, however, that Gregory's dictum must be interpreted without deceit or malice as good and honest men would understand it.' In fact, the Latin text explains the method Gregory/Gratian is suggesting for interpreting the words of a hypothetical speaker, and not how Gregory/Gratian's words should be understood. Sepúlveda's text reads: 'Ego vero et gravissimam et sanctissimam esse istam Gregorii

meaning is created (with malicious intent) by the *hearer*, Navarrus encourages the *speaker* to create an apparent and an actual meaning. In Sepúlveda's interpretation, then, Gratian defends the integrity of a speaker who is falsely accused through the misinterpretation of his speech when the questioner takes the meaning of the speaker's words and not his intention. According to Navarrus's interpretation, the same passage allows for the producing of utterances with a double meaning: one the hearer will understand, and another that the speaker actually means. Such utterances rely on using ambiguity or mental reservation.

Navarrus teaches how to construct speeches lawfully that seem to convey relevant information to a question while they do not disclose knowledge that 1. would be in the questioner's interest to know, 2. but the questioner has no right to know, 3. and the existence of which is unknown to the questioner. Furthermore, the aim is to do so without denying what the speaker knows to be true (i.e. without lying). There are situations in which one is questioned unjustly, and telling the truth would jeopardise the life or well being of the person questioned, or someone else. In such cases telling the truth is a sin; however, lying is always a sin,[41] even if it is committed in a good cause. In such irresolvable conflicts the person can in good conscience (and sometimes is even morally obliged to) resort to giving a reply that the questioner is likely to misunderstand. Navarrus, in answering the three questions

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doctrinam, certum habeo, quae declarat, non esse malitiose interpretanda verba eius *[i.e. of the hypothetical speaker, not Gregory]*, qui plane loquitur et sine fraude, quod boni et aequi homines intelligant, etiam si quod verbum exciderit loquenti, sive utcumque prolatum fuerit, quod possit in calumniam rapi malitiosa interpretatione. Haec enim sunt, si recte memini, verba Gregorii ex Moralium libr. xxvi. *Humanae aures... sed verba intentioni.* Quam orationem Gregorii quis non videat ad calumniam dumtaxat refellendam pertinere? Calumniatur enim, *qui intentionem et voluntatem alterius*, ut ipse ait, *variis explicat verbis.* [cap. ex litt de sponsalia]' The relevant sentence in my translation: 'Who would not see that these words of Gregory relate to refuting false accusation?'. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *De ratione dicend testimonium in causis occultorum criminum: Dialogus, qui inscribitur Theophilus,* in *Joannis Genesii Sepulvedae... Oper: cum edita, tum inedita, Accurante Regia Historiae Academia,* 4 vols, (Madrid: Typographia Regia de La Gazeta, 1780), IV, pp. 375–413, <http://bibliotecaforal.bizkaia.net/ >, [accessed 21 November 2012]. First published: Valladolid, 1538.

[41] Navarrus, *Commentarius*, 2.1. (In the references to the text of the *Commentarius*, the first number refers to the Question, the second to the Chapter within the Question.)

put to him by the Jesuits, gives a justification of the lawfulness of such deception,[42] and simultaneously marks out the limits of its applicability. The limitations pertain to the situations in which it can be employed, the ways in which it can be employed, and the techniques with which the deception can be achieved.

Navarrus proposes three ways of producing the desired misunderstanding: it can be achieved either by one of two types of (what he calls) amphibology, or by *mental reservation*. These three are not always easily distinguishable, because ultimately they all rely on the distinction between the speaker's intended meaning and the words that are carefully chosen to suggest a different meaning to the questioner. However, as the full title of Navarrus's work suggests, his primary aim is to justify the application of *mental reservation*, that is, of 'responses given partly expressed by words, partly conceived in the mind'.[43]

Mental reservation, to which Navarrus refers as 'understanding inside the mind' (*mente subintelligere*), is the basic idea that enables the verbal manipulation that in its fully developed version became infamous as the doctrine of Jesuitical equivocation. During an interrogation, it is sometimes lawful, according to Navarrus, to give replies that are only partly vocalised, with an important restriction or 'reservation' being retained in the speaker's mind. Thus, the questioner or judge hears a seemingly complete and self-contained answer, which in itself is false, but when it is understood together with the part expressed only internally, it forms a true statement. Even if the vocally realised part of the statement is false (and thus deceives the interrogator), a proposition with a mentally reserved qualification is not a lie in the eyes of God, because, according to Navarrus's interpretation of Gratian, God judges by the thought and not the words, and the thought in the speaker's head

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[42] Cf. *Commentarius*, 3.8: simulation and dissimulation can be right or wrong; without a good cause they are a sin, with a good cause they are prudence. For more detail, see Zagorin, pp. 172–173.

[43] *Commentary on [Gratian's] Chapter XXII. Question V. 'The ears of men' about the truthfulness of responses, given partly expressed by words, partly conceived in the mind.*

contains the full (and true) proposition. Speaking with mentally reserved qualifications is not a lie from the point of view of the speaker's private conscience either, because the sentence in its entirety does not constitute a lie: a speaker lies, according to the formal definition, if he asserts something that he knows to be false.[44] On the other hand, propositions containing mental reservation are not even so unusual, because, according to 'dialecticians',[45] beyond mental, vocal, and written propositions, there also are mixed propositions, consisting of any combination of the other three (*oratio mixta*).[46]

Although 'N.', according to the case, said to the woman that he would marry her, he in fact did not intend to do so. His promise for marriage, therefore, has to be taken as a mixed proposition, in which he qualified the meaning of what he said in his mind. The idea of such mixed propositions is widely known and accepted, Navarrus argues, as can be proven from numerous biblical examples: if in these passages the words had been taken at face value, the interpreter would have to conclude that sometimes even Christ or God lied. Navarrus takes as an example the line in Psalm 1, 'Non resurgent impii in iudicio'.[47] This is known by all not to be true, unless it is understood to contain a restriction of the seemingly universal validity of the proposition, presumably that 'they will not rise <to eternal glory>'.[48] For the proper

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[44] For more detail on Augustine's definition of the lie, see Chapter 3. Malloch ('Equivocation: A Circuit of Reasons', pp. 133–134) points out that for this argument Navarrus needs to use Aquinas' version of Augustine's definition, which omits the reference to the 'intention to deceive' part.

[45] When referring to 'dialecticians', Navarrus presumably has in mind the interpretative tradition of the first paragraphs of Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, beginning with Boethius's translation and commentary. Cf. *Medieval philosophy*, ed. by John Marenbon, *The Routledge History of Philosophy*, Vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 406–409.

[46] *Commentarius*, 1.3–4.

[47] Douai-Rheims Bible: 'the impious shal not rise againe in iudgement'. Bishops' Bible: 'the vngodly shall not [be able to] stande in the iudgement'.

[48] *Commentarius*, 1.3. 'Tertio, quod una et eadem ratio potest componi ex diversis partibus, quarum aliae sint expresse vocales vel scriptae, et aliae tacitae et mentales: et quod ipsa tota sit vera, et partes eius separatae sint falsae et haereticae: et econtrario ipsa sit haeretica, et aliquot partes eius separatae sint verae et cathoilcae. Quorum exempla sunt innumerae orationes tam sacrarum et canonicarum literarum, quam humanarum: in psalmo enim primo est oratio mixta ex illa parte scripta vel vocali, *Non resurgent impii in iudicio*, et ex illa mentali et subintellecta, *ad gloriam aeternam*, quae tota est vera, et de fide; licet sola illa pars eius vocalis vel scripta, videlicet, *non resurgent impii in iudicio*, sit falsa et haeretica.'

interpretation of any proposition, therefore, the whole has to be examined, otherwise seemingly orthodox, but in fact blasphemous propositions like 'Deus est <angelus>' could go unpunished, while true statements like 'Deus est non <angelus>' could be judged blasphemous.[49] Interestingly Navarrus does not outline situations in which these contrasting examples would actually be imaginable: they seem entirely hypothetical, abstractions devised only to support the argument, without practical implications. That mental reservation is not an abstract possibility, however, becomes apparent when Navarrus – referring to the example of Jesus who said to his disciples that he did not know the day of Judgement – suggests that priests should use it when they are asked to reveal what they heard during confession, especially crimes potentially unknown to the authorities.[50]

Apart from mentally reserving an important qualification to the speaker's words, the other way of misleading an unjust questioner is to use amphibology. Amphibology can be created in two ways: with words that have more than one commonly accepted[51] meaning,[52] and with sentences that can represent different mental concepts[53] for speaker and questioner.[54] However, Navarrus ultimately seems to subsume all kinds of ambiguity under mental reservation. For instance, explaining

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[49] *Commentarius*, 1.2: 'Secundo, probatur illa firma ratione, quod sicut omnes Dialectici docent, terminus qui secundum eos est pars orationis invenitur pure mentalis, pure vocalis, pure scriptus, et mixtus ex his: ita invenitur oratio pure mentalis, pure vocalis, pure scripta, et mixta ex eis: argumento de toto ad partem cum identitate, ut ita dixerim, rationis quod est firmum, l. quae de tota. ff. de rei vendic.capitu. pastoralis. § item cum totum. de. offic. deleg. et illa quae fuerit mixta debet iudicari vera vel falsa, consideratis omnibus eius partibus. Tum quia incivile est iudicare de lege, nisi tota perfecta. l. incivile. ff. de legib. Tum quia expressa et tacita regulariter sunt eiusdem virtutis. l. expressa. ff. de reg.iur.l. Labeo. l. item quia. ff.de pactis. Et ideo tota illa oratio mixta, *Deus est angelus*: cuius duo priores termini, scilicet *Deus est* sunt vocales, et tertius scilicet *angelus* scriptus vel mentalis, est falsa et haeretica: licet pars eius vocalis scilicet *Deus est* sit vera et catholica, et e contrario, tota illa oratio, *Deus non est Angelus*, cuius tres priores termini scilicet *Deus non est* essent vocales, et quarturs scilicet *Angelus* esset mentalis vel scriptus, est vera et catholica, et pars illa vocalis *Deus non est* esset falsa et haeretica.'

[50] *Commentarius*, 1.4.

[51] This should be understood as being in contrast with words that have one meaning but the context (or some special circumstance) in which they are used multiplies their signification.

[52] 'ex diversa verbi significatione'. *Commentarius*, 2.12.

[53] Behind this presumably lies Aristotle's separation of thing, thought and speech in the process of representing the world at the beginning of *De interpretatione*.

[54] 'ex diversa interrogantis, et respondentis mente, ac intentione'. *Commentarius*, 2.12, which presupposes that they have different preconceptions, which leads to the difference in interpretation of the same verbal material.

one of his examples, he reinterprets homonymy as a kind of mental reservation: '[someone] in whose house another takes shelter can justly reply, when asked by [the refugee's] pursuers where he is, that "non est hic", intending in his mind "est" to mean "to eat", against common understanding'.[55] At another point, justifying the misleading negative response of a man who is asked by the guards of a city whether he is coming from another city which is (mistakenly) thought to be plague-stricken, Navarrus first relies on the different meanings the guards and the man attribute to the reply. The guards' question, Navarrus argues, pertains only seemingly to where the man is coming from, their real intention is, in fact, to know whether he might be infected by the plague. The man, even if he is coming from that city, replies according to the actual meaning of the question when he denies coming from there (since he knows he is not infectious), therefore he lies only seemingly. According to Navarrus it would in itself be just to use words whose meaning is different depending on the circumstances of the speaker and the hearer, nevertheless he concludes the discussion of this example by relying on mental reservation again: 'he is just to reply that he is not coming from that city, and has not been there, intending to mean in his mind that he is not coming from there <infected by the plague>, nor has he entered that <plague-infected> city; and he satisfies the interrogation in the eyes of God'.[56]

Even though mental reservation is in itself lawful, it is not so in every situation. Only in cases that jeopardise the mental or physical integrity, honour, or family of the person examined may mental reservation be lawful. Navarrus restricts the rather broad applicability of the doctrine with a set of rules. To use any type of

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[55] *Commentarius*, 2.10: '[is], in cuius domum aliquis refugit, interrogatum ab illius hoste ubi sit ille, quem prosequitur, iuste posse respondere, "non est hic", subintelligendo per illud verbum, 'est', "comedit" contra communem verbi intelligentiam'. A similar and often repeated English example is 'He does not lie here', with the intended meaning 'He is not speaking falsely here', as opposed to the more obvious 'He does not reside here'. See similar puns with 'lie' in my discussion of *Twelfth Night* and *Hamlet*.

[56] *Commentarius*, 2.9: 'iuste posse respondere se non venire ex eo, nec illud fuisse ingressum subintelligendo, quod non venit ex eo *peste infecto*, nec sit ingressus illud *peste infectum*, et satisfacit interrogationi coram Deo'.

amphibology (either ambiguity of words/sentences, or mental reservation) is justified only if the speaker is not bound morally to give an answer. If the inquiry is carried out by a lawful judge in a lawful manner, everybody is bound to reply plainly, making sure that his answer is formulated according to the judge's understanding.[57] However, nobody is bound to reply to unjust inquiry, that is, inquiry that either pertains to matters that the judge has no right to know, or that is conducted unlawfully.[58] In these cases the person under examination can lawfully reply according to his own meaning, rather than the judge's. Ultimately, it is the judge that misleads himself: it is his responsibility to uncover every detail of the case (e.g. special circumstances that may reveal extraordinary or unexpected meanings of words) so as to be able to detect potential ambiguity. Therefore when the inquiry is unjust, the defendant may give his reply according to the understanding a just judge should have had.[59] There is only one matter in which all Catholics are bound to reply directly, regardless of whether their interrogators are competent judges or not, whether the procedure is just or not: it is forbidden for them, under all circumstances, to deny their faith: 'he sins mortally who dissimulates being a Catholic [...] It is possible that someone can lawfully conceal being a Catholic if it can be done without breaching God's honour, profession of faith, or causing scandal', nevertheless it remains a mortal sin to explicitly deny faith or to conceal it by pretending heretical practices/gestures.[60]

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[57] *Commentarius*, 3.10. Cf. Cicero's arguments in *De Officiis* about the binding forces of oaths given to lawful enemies (e.g. in war) and not lawful enemies (e.g. to pirates).

[58] *Commentarius*, 2.5–6. A judge, for example, does not have the right to ask questions about what priests learnt during confession. The inquiry can be deemed unjust, for example, when the judge forces the person to confess otherwise unknown crimes committed by the person himself or by others, or when he compels the person to swear he will reply without mentally reserved qualifications (*Commentarius*, 2.11–12). This last instance, in which Navarrus justifies the application of mental reservation when being denied the right for mental reservation, is noteworthy. The examiner who is aware of this has no other choice than trust in the speaker's honesty.

[59] *Commentarius*, 2.7–8. Cf. *Enchiridion*, XII.8–9; Zagorin, pp. 167–8; p. 173.

[60] *Commentarius*, 3.16: 'ex hoc proximo corollario inferri peccare mortaliter eum, qui dissimulat se ore catholicum [...] licet quis licite possit occultare se esse catholicum, quando id facere potest sine iactura honoris divini, et confirmationis fidei, et scandalo praedicto proximi; peccat tamen mortaliter, si interrogatus an sit catholicus, respondeat expresse non esse vel tacite gestando signum

Navarrus, by imposing these conditions stipulating when someone is bound to reply plainly, placed the responsibility of judging the situation on the speaker. This, however, from the other perspective also means that the control over these cases is not in the power of the examiner but the person examined. At the same time, it has to be noted that using ambiguity or mental reservation is suggested only as a last resort, and Navarrus outlines the order of justifiable behaviours as a response to an increasingly severe injustice. What the person examined should first do, Navarrus advises, is to refuse to reply at all.[61] If he is further coerced, he should explicitly say he is not bound to reply to such a question.[62] If that still does not stop the judge from conducting further examination, and the examined has good reason to be afraid, only then should he resort to manipulating the meanings.[63]

As Navarrus argues in the conclusion-summary of the treatise, using mixed propositions is sometimes the only way to avoid suffering injustice or acting unjustly. When someone is forced to choose between lying and revealing secrets that according to divine laws do not have to, or should not, be revealed, the only lawful way is to seemingly satisfy the unjust questioner and at the same time remain intact in conscience and in the eyes of God.

An important issue concerning Navarrus's *Commentary* is its claim for finding a 'new method' of excusing the Patriarchs from the charge of lying.[64] A central

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proprium et determinatum, quo infideles utuntur ad prodendum suam infidelitatem.'. To what extent and under what circumstances is it lawful to create the false impression in others that the person is not Catholic is a constant debate in casuistry, and the approaches vary considerably, as it will be seen later in this chapter. Cf. Zagorin, pp. 174–175.

[61] Cf. Garnet's behaviour during his trial on several occasions, e.g. [Anon.], *A True and perfect relation...* ((Imprinted at London: By Robert Barker, 1606). STC (2nd ed.) / 11619a.5., in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>, [accessed 1 July, 2011]), sig. Y4^r.

[62] *Commentarius*, 3.12: if the judge/examiner does not have the authority: 'potest dicere se non teneri ad respondendum; et si cogatur, appellare: et si non est locus appellationi; vel si timet saevitiam, si appellet, negare vel affirmare quod verum sit secundum mentem et intentionem propriam, non curando de illa, quam iudex habet.' Cf. the behaviour of priests in bloody question cases: Zagorin, pp. 192–193.

[63] *Commentarius*, 3.10–12.

[64] *Commentarius*, 3.7: 'Ex omnibus supra in his tribus quaestionibus resolutionis, ultra praefata colligitur primo novus modus excusandi a mendacio Patriarchas illos vericidissimos, quos credimus nunquam mentitus fuisse Abrahamum, Iacobum, Isaacum, et Iosephum.'

element in Protestant pamphlets was to attack Jesuitical equivocation for its novelty. Huntley, Malloch and Zagorin agree that the novelty is the concept of the mixed proposition (*oratio mixta*), and it is undoubtedly this concept that was attacked most frequently by Protestants.[65] However, it is not clear how important the idea was for Navarrus.

When, in the conclusion of his *Commentary*, he summarises his main points, he does not even mention *oratio mixta*, and in the passage in which he claims to have found a new method, he merely lists examples of biblical cases where the doctrine of mental reservation will save the Patriarchs from the charge of lying.[66] To Navarrus then, probably, the concept of mixed speech is not so much a new doctrine, but another argument that justifies the doctrine of mental reservation.

Mental reservation, on the other hand, was not very new. It had been embedded in Catholic discourses: contemporary sources agree that in England the practice was first introduced into official and public knowledge in 1595 during the trial and examination of two Jesuits: Father Robert Southwell, a major Jesuit missionary to England (and a friend of Henry Garnet), and John Gerard, before his escape in 1597.[67]

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[65] Zagorin, p. 172, p. 177.; Malloch, 'Equivocation: A Circuit of Reasons', p. 135.; Huntley, p. 391. This discourse of novelty as danger may have been influenced by the classical Roman tradition, in which novelty is by default considered as suspicious, dangerous, in which 'res novae' becomes a synonym for sedition. The ultimate expression of that discourse is Donne's anti-Jesuit satire, *Ignatius his Conclave*, in which the founder of the order is presented as struggling to be admitted in Satan's innermost circle, where only real innovators of evil are allowed. Even though equivocation is a minor topic in Ignatius' arguments, if we accept Healy's suggestion ('Introduction', p. xix in Donne, *Ignatius His Conclave:An Edition of the Latin and English Texts*, introduction and commentary by T. S. Healy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969)) that Donne might have worked together with Morton on the treatises in his controversy with Persons, then the connection between Donne's satire and the problem of Jesuitical equivocation may be stronger than is obvious upon first sight. See also Abbot, sig. E3ᵛ, describing the novelty of the doctrine.

[66] On this point, Navarrus' argumentation seems to become circular. One justification for mixed propositions is that there are examples for it in the Bible. Now that mixed propositions are declared lawful, they are used to justify their application by other biblical figures.

[67] Zagorin, pp. 190–191.; Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', p. 397.

3. The Anglo-Romans' Auricular Murmurs: Casuistry and Abbot's *De mendacio* (1597/8)

'Like Africa, so does Italy bring forth novelties, nay, monsters',[68] and the latest monster, equivocation, is transferred to England especially by Jesuits like Robert Southwell and John Gerard, who 'open the door not just for lying, but perjury'.[69] The first noted case of mental reservation in England, according to George Abbot, was an inquiry around 1592, in which a young person stubbornly denied charges that the accusers were almost certain were correct. At one point one of the judges began to suspect that the young man was using some kind of reservation,[70] a practice that somewhat later Southwell and Gerard expounded in more detail.[71] Abbot, allegedly because he did not want to deviate from truth, consulted one of the former judges about the events, who not only confirmed Abbot's knowledge, but handed over to him an unpublished collection which had been found 12 years earlier, and which revealed the Jesuits' secret instructions.[72]

Abbot describes this collection of casuistry in detail, suggesting that not only its contents but also some of its self-referential statements raise suspicion. The author and the date of composition are doubtful.[73] The ways in which the cases were solved, according to Abbot, bear a close resemblance to Southwell's and Gerard's doctrines,

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[68] Abbot, *De mendacio*, sig. E3^v.

[69] Abbot, *Praefatio*, sig. A3^r.

[70] 'Eo reservationis nomine, quod illorum est, secretam tacitamque aut materiae aut alicuius circumstantiae celationem aut suppressionem innuebat' (*Praefatio*, sig. A3^v).

[71] Abbot, *Praefatio*, sig. A3^v–A4^r.

[72] 'Consilii etenim fere universi rationem complectitur, quo instructi Iesuitae, et e Seminariis emissi sacrifici, in Angliam redeunt. Nihil autem quicquam apud illos magis in arcanis haberi, ex eo manifestum est, quod chartis haec tantum, non typis, commendentur: quod detegere nolint ipso, cum in quaestionem venerint: quod nostrorum vix quisquam aut viderit, aut audierit, nisi eminus et a longinquo stans.' (*Praefatio*, sig. A4^r).

[73] An inscription at the end claims that each of the cases treated in the document were submitted for approval to Pope Pius V in 1571, but – while the collection was presumably once in use – none of the cases bears a sign of his decision. Some of the cases, Abbot claims, must have been inserted after 1573 when Navarrus's revised edition of the *Enchiridion* was published, since some of the cases refer to it, but at this date the Pope had already been Gregory XIII for a year. See *Praefatio*, sig. A4^r–A4^v. Abbot here falsely claims that the *Enchiridion* has not been published in Latin before 1573. As I have mentioned earlier, the 1573 Rome edition is an extended one, and Abbot claims that the references are to this edition based on their numbering, rather than the earlier ones. (sig. B1^r).

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thus they reveal their origin: the Catholic seminaries on the continent. Therefore Abbot feels compelled to uncover to 'the whole Christian world [their teachings]', that is, as described in a phrase that skilfully blends the concept of secret confession and secret – therefore suspicious – teaching together, 'their auricular murmurs that the Anglo-Romans whisper to their adherents'.[74]

Abbot continues his *Praefatio* by quoting a number of cases with their resolutions in the manuscripts he was working with. Malloch[75] stipulates that the cases may come from Gregory Martin's (now lost) *Resolutiones quorundam casuum nationis Anglicanae*.[76] Most of the cases correspond to those contained in Holmes's *Elizabethan Casuistry*, an edition of two late-sixteenth century manuscript casuistical handbooks, one by an unknown author from the Douai-Rheims seminary, the other written by William Allen, Robert Persons, and possibly Gregory Martin.[77]

These three groups of cases of conscience, quoted on the one hand by Abbot (and presumably written in the early 1570s), and extant, on the other, in the Douai-Rheims and Allen–Persons collections (written in 1578 and in the early 1580s respectively),[78] elaborate on and give advice concerning issues that were mentioned only in passing by Navarrus. The underlying issue is almost always whether and in what circumstances Catholics are bound to reply to (or co-operate with) their Protestant

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[74] 'Quia tamen Chrisitanus intelliget orbis, quae sint illa, quae murmure auriculari, suis sectatoribus insusurrant Anglo-Romanenses, proponam verbatim ea, quae in praesenti negoti ex chartis deprehensis occurrunt, ut, quam misere turpiterque a genuina Evangelii doctrina, et recepta apud omnes Christi martyres sententia, hi Antichristi testes deflexerint, quilibet hominum intelligat.' *Praefatio*, sig. B1ᵛ.

[75] Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', n. 13. (See also for further philological problems.)

[76] Holmes identifies the Allen–Persons cases with the '*Resolutiones...*' (*Introduction*, pp. 7–8.)

[77] Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, p. 8. It is not always easy to match the cases contained in Abbot and in the Holmes edition, or to account for the differences between the two, because Holmes chose to print them only in his English translation, and as he points it out in his introduction, he also rearranged and edited the two groups of cases, driven by the differences found between the extant manuscripts. For Holmes' editorial procedures and a more detailed description of the source manuscripts see *Introduction*, pp. 6–12. The cases in Holmes that could be with certainty matched up with cases in Abbot are Douai-Rheims Cases: J2, J5 and Allen–Persons Cases I.1. and I.7.

[78] Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, p. 8.

interrogators. These documents demonstrate how widespread the applicability of ambiguity and especially mental reservation was according to Catholic teaching.[79]

The first case that Abbot quotes[80] is a general discussion of how Catholics should behave when Protestant authorities interrogate them. The resolution first sets down as a principle that the most respectable behaviour is to profess one's faith under all circumstances (thus promoting the glory of the Catholic faith), even if that is likely to lead to martyrdom. However, according to Navarrus,[81] an oath forced by an incompetent judge obliges the person to reply only according to his own meaning. This applies to everybody in England,[82] since all the Ecclesiastical judges there at the time are incompetent.[83] Therefore the most prudent way is to refuse to take the oath, or 'to swear sophistically and reply sophistically to each question, unless asked about faith',[84] if, however, one is asked 'tyrannically' to profess his faith, he is bound to do

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[79] For the summary and brief treatment of the issues typically treated in casuistical handbooks (e.g. marriage, divorce, baptism, household matters, tithes, public offices, avoiding capture), see Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Chapter 9 and 10.

[80] Abbot, *Praefatio*, sig. B1^v–B2^r.

[81] The reference the text gives is to *Enchiridion*, XII.8.: 'Quoniam si iudex iuramentum exigens talis [sc. competens] non fuerit, vel esto quod sit competens, interrogat tamen contra iuris ordinem, vel est alius homo privatus, qui per metum, aut importunitatem, iuramentum extorquet, tunc iurare poterit, id quod se secundum suam mentem est verum, falsum autem secundum mentem alterius cui exhibit iuramentum c. Humanae aures. 22. q. 5. in cuius Comment. late de hoc disserimus.' (Rome, 1573, sig. O2^v).

[82] Cf. e.g. Thomas Morton, *A full satisfaction concerning a double Romish iniquitie...* STC (2nd ed.) / 18185 (London: Printed by Richard Field for Edmond Weauer, 1606), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. M3^r–M4^r.

[83] In the long and detailed resolution to Allen–Persons Case I.1. four reasons are listed why the ministers of the Queen do not have the authority to interrogate priests. First, because Elizabeth is a heretic Queen since Pope Pius V's Bull, *Regnans in excelsis*. (This question is treated once more in Case II.ii.27, which somewhat contradictorily to the reply here concludes tentatively that even though Catholics are not bound to obey the Queen's authority, they are not forbidden to do so either. What makes this case even more interesting – and perhaps infuriating for the Protestant authorities – is a remark at the end of the solution added by Allen and Persons: although it is lawful to obey the Queen, 'there is a further comment on this case which must be given in secret'). See Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, Allen-Persons Cases, II.iii.27. (p. 121). The second reason why Elizabeth's ministers have no authority is because 'in this matter at least' the Queen 'exercises tyranny by persecuting religion'. Third, a priest is only bound to reply to an ecclesiastical judge, but not to a secular. Finally, the judge often proceeds from his own conjectures rather than from solid proofs. (Cf. Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, Allen-Persons Cases, I.1., p. 65. The Latin original (Lambeth MS 565, fos. 18^v–19^v.) is quoted in Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, p. 119. n. 7.)

[84] Cf. Navarrus, who argues that if the person is afraid of the judges, they can use some kind of evasion.

so plainly.[85] As for the problem of incriminating other Catholics, the response argues that to swear to do something unjust with the intention of doing so is a double sin, therefore the Catholic who promises to reveal information about other Catholics and then accordingly informs on them, sins twice. The case as quoted by Abbot ends here; however, perhaps because Holmes rearranged some of the cases,[86] Case J2 continues with further questions relating to obedience to the Queen: these may be the cases that Abbot only mentions summarily a few pages later.[87] The next case quoted by Abbot (corresponding to Douai-Rheims Case J5)[88] discusses whether a priest, who is arrested and interrogated by the highest authorities, can equivocate or change his name.[89] According to the resolution, in questions of faith, denial and equivocation are not allowed 'because by these interrogators one is asked in contempt of the religion, and in such cases everyone is bound to profess their faith'. However, there is no such prohibition if the real intention of the question is not governed by hatred of the religion itself.[90]

The following two cases which Abbot quotes correspond to Allen–Persons Case I.1 and I.7. The first of these cases relates to whether a priest, while travelling, can change his external appearance (e.g. wear a disguise, which they often did), deny his name, friends, place of origin or parents if interrogated because suspected as a Catholic. Abbot quotes only the short affirmative reply, but Holmes's version could enable us to reconstruct the underlying arguments, as well as broaden the

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[85] Abbot refers to Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* (*Secunda Secundae*, Quaestio 3, Articulus 2)

[86] Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, p. 10.; sadly, he does not specify to which cases this applies.

[87] *Praefatio*, sig. B3^r: 'Post unam et alteram interrogationem, de Regina (post Bullam Pii Quinti editam) oboedienda, vel non oboedienda...'

[88] Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, pp. 54–55. In Holmes, the question is quoted in Early Modern English, which might indicate the existence of still another text variant in circulation: the cases Holmes published are mostly in Latin, but some had the questions in English, while Abbot presumably quotes from an all-Latin version.

[89] 'Quomodo licitum est aequivocare vel nomina mutare'.

[90] Situations in which Catholics are not bound to confess their faith include being asked to pay tolls, or in an everyday conversation at an inn during a journey, out of simple curiosity: in these cases nobody is bound to profess their faith or that he is a priest, therefore he is allowed to keep silent or equivocate.

understanding and the range of applicability of evasion and equivocation.[91] The response claims that even though changing one's external appearance may seem to be lying (as if priests were simulating not to be what they are), in fact it is only pretence;[92] furthermore, clothes and hair are regulated merely by human (and not divine) laws, therefore they can be changed in the interest of service to the faith. Whether it is lawful to deny one's name depends on the authority of the person asking, and whether doing so may cause scandal or not: the possibility of scandal (for example, if ignorant Catholics witnessing the interrogation may believe their priest to be lying) rules out any kind of denial; if, however, there is no such danger, equivocation can be employed when questioned by someone without authority. The resolution of the case outlines several possible ways,[93] including denying anything 'to be the truth <as far as one is bound to reply to you as to one having no legitimate authority to ask me>', that is, to rely on the commonly accepted background assumption, without necessarily uttering it, that by default limits every testimony given at the court.[94]

To end his discussion of the Catholics' doctrines, Abbot quotes a series of related questions and replies, all pertaining to the issue of escaping self-incrimination and the endangering of other Catholics' lives without lying.[95] The first of them[96] corresponds to Case I.7 in the Allen–Persons collection, while the rest are missing

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[91] It is in instances like this when it turns out to be an interesting question whether the difference is due to different versions or to Abbot's 'editorial' process.

[92] Pretence is supported both by Jesus' example in Emmaus (Luke 24. 13) and by the assumption that it is lawful to set traps to the enemy in a lawful war (Joshua 8). Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, Allen–Persons Case I.1. (p. 63). The ethics of disguise, and its close association with deceit achieved through ambiguous speech, are among the characteristics of the discourse that connect it to the literary texts I deal with in the second half of the thesis, pointing to deeply rooted concerns about these issues.

[93] Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, Allen-Persons Cases, I.1. (p. 64).

[94] Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, Allen-Persons Cases, I.1. (pp. 65–66). In the quotation I added the angle brackets to highlight the mentally reserved qualification that makes the case relevant to the discussion of equivocation.

[95] *Praefatio*, sig. B3ʳ–B4ʳ.

[96] 'Whether a priest, when on a journey, interrogated about the places he has been to, or about his faith – if he is Roman Catholic or not – can reply with some indirect response to escape and delude the interrogation, or is he bound to confess the truth.'

from the latter.[97] Causing harm to fellow Catholics, or being instrumental in causing harm to them is a mortal sin, therefore Catholics are warned not to help the authorities in persecuting others, even if they have previously sworn to do whatever they are asked to do, or to confess plainly whatever they know (e.g. the whereabouts or identity of other Catholics, who attended mass, or where). Since harming others is a mortal sin, swearing to do so is unjust, therefore such oaths are not binding,[98] especially because the judges that forced those oaths are not competent. A further argument, to be found in the resolution of Allen–Persons case I.7 (to which Abbot, again, gives only the short version of the reply), explains that no one is bound to confess their faith if it endangers their life, but he is bound not to deny it, therefore the usual methods of evasion are applicable: 'equivocation, silence, returning the question, or any method he likes'.

Finally, further three cases from the Allen–Persons collection are worth mentioning, because even though Abbot does not cite them, he may have known them and because they demonstrate further the flexibility and wide applicability of the various techniques of evasion, especially because some of them pertain to everyday matters, rather than judicial procedures.

Denying the Queen's authority is dangerous ground, and exposes Catholics to easy attacks.[99] This problem, interestingly, arises, among others, in connection with a

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[97] Cf. Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, Chapter 10.

[98] Cf. Allen–Persons Case III.1, according to which every oath contains the implied condition that the swearer will fulfill it 'as long as it is just'. Cf. also Cicero, *De Officiis,* III. xxix. 107–108: Oaths given to an unlawful enemy are not binding.

[99] The series of questions that constitute the second half of Douai-Rheims Case J2 (and that is possibly alluded to by Abbot) give advice to those who are interrogated about their opinion on the Queen's authority, whether she is a heretic, or whether she can be deposed after the *Regnans in Excelsis*. The general strategy recommended is to evade stating a plain opinion by referring to lack of authority: the person should say he has no authority to judge whether the Queen is heretic – but if the interrogators think so, they have their own laws to judge her –, or that although he is bound to denounce heretics, he is not bound to 'accuse or denounce anyone to a judge who has no jurisdiction in matters of heresy'. Similarly, a potential reply to the question about the possibility of deposing the Queen is to maintain that he cannot reply until the authorities have decided whether the Queen has committed a crime worthy of deposition. These replies aim at turning the question back on the interrogating authorities, and even try to corner them into denouncing the Queen themselves. This

case on civil contracts.[100] The usual formula that validates any legal document, 'Elizabeth, Queen of England, France and Ireland etc.' contains an alarming loophole. The meaning of 'etc.' is assumed to be obvious and unambiguous, something of which both parties have a common understanding. However, since Henry VIII had changed the traditional title, the reference of 'etc.' also changed to 'the supreme head on earth of the Church of England', to which Catholics cannot subscribe for obvious reasons. The questions raised in the case, therefore, is 1. whether it is lawful to use the usual phrase ('Elizabeth, Queen of England, France and Ireland etc.') in documents and understand the old title; 2. whether it is lawful to sign the document, if the full phrase is spelt out by the other party.

The resolution argues that as long as the phrase is in the 'etc' form, there need not be any scruples, since it is exactly the same phrase as the one 'used before heresy broke out in England'. It is in fact the Protestants who interpret it maliciously, since their interpretation does not come from the word itself but a false attribution of meaning.[101] Even if the whole title is spelt out – which Catholics should try to prevent – Catholics do not sin by signing the contract, since it is the author of the document who commits heresy. Signing the contract does not mean assenting to the heresy, since the signature only subscribes to the title as far as it is relevant to the contract, that is, the legally binding force of Elizabeth's name as queen. Up to this point the resolution worked on the assumption that the queen is legitimate. However, the last sentence seems to open up the possibility for Catholics to deem any contract void that bears that signature: 'Moreover, even if she were not legitimate "Queen of England", as she calls herself, even that phrase could be dissimulated in a contract, because whether she really is Queen or not is not a matter for private persons but for

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tactic resembles the one suggested for priests to evade self-incrimination or the endangering of fellow Catholics (Cf. Zagorin, pp. 192–193).

[100] Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, Allen–Persons Case II.ii.28. (pp. 121–122).

[101] Note that, if, according to this, it is possible to attribute a wrong meaning to a phrase then meaning attribution is an arbitrary act.

the commonwealth'. This is a carefully phrased double-sided advice. Although its immediate implication is that Elizabeth *is* the legitimate Queen of England, it also allows Catholics to seemingly subscribe to contracts with the mentally reserved qualification that she is in fact not legitimate.

Case III. 3. examines whether Catholics are always bound to keep their word given to Protestants, for instance, if they have been captured and promised not to run away. Throughout Case III. 3. the influence of Roman rhetoric is more evident than elsewhere. The first half of the resolution contains the usual recommendation: if the captured Catholic swore with the intention to perform what he promised, he is bound to remain in captivity, because promises have to be kept even to enemies. Before moving on to the discussion of the other possibility that the person took the oath with some kind of mentally reserved meaning, the case takes a short detour to give moral guidance on promises in general. The author first dismisses Cajetan's doctrine that breaking a promise is merely a venial sin, and asserts that according to the majority of authorities, the essence of a promise is not simply that it is true, but that the speaker gives his word that it is true. Referring to Cicero (*De Officiis*, Book 1),[102] the text adds that keeping promises is 'the foundation of justice itself, on which all contracts and agreements are based',[103] therefore breaking an oath is a mortal sin. Promises have in all cases to be kept (an argument that Abbot also takes and quotes from Cicero when he refutes the doctrine of *mental reservation*), unless

> circumstances alter so that the promise cannot be kept without sin; or when something happens which has not been foreseen and if it had been foreseen would have meant that the promise would not have been made; or when the promise is about an evil thing; or when it prevents a greater good occurring; but these exceptions should be discussed in another place.[104]

Cicero's influence on this argument is unmistakable. As has already been pointed out in the first chapter, Cicero argues in Book 3 of *De Officiis* that promises must be kept

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[102] See also *De officiis*, III.xvii.69–72, cf. my Chapter 1, 2.2.
[103] Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, Allen-Persons Case III.3 (p. 125).
[104] Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, Allen-Persons Case III.3 (p. 125).

unless performing them endangers the promiser's life, causes greater moral wrong,[105] is inexpedient for the person to whom it was given, or the person to whom it was given is an unlawful enemy, or if at the moment the oath was sworn it was not meant in the mind to be performed.[106] After that, the case moves on to the discussion of the same promise having been taken with some mental reservation, but the rest of the manuscript is missing. This resolution is particularly intriguing because on the one hand it admits the importance of the general principle that oaths (and contracts based on them) are grounded on the assumption that the two parties express their mutual understanding in them; on the other hand, it once more emphasises that in certain cases it is morally a lesser evil to break a promise.

As the Douai-Rheims and Allen–Persons cases demonstrate, the idea of using mental reservation for self-defence in unjust inquiries was an integral part of Catholic thinking even before Navarrus published his *Commentary on* 'Humanae Aures...', although the casuists who compiled these two collections between 1578 and 1585 may have been influenced by his ideas, if the commentary had indeed been written before 1573. The cases show a wider range for possible applications of mental reservation than Navarrus's *Commentary*, and in accordance with the generic differences, the solutions they offer are more practical.

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[105] Cf. with Allen–Persons Case III.1, which is a rather ingenious application of the casuistic principle that every promise, even if confirmed with an oath, contains the never uttered but always assumed condition that it is binding only as long as fulfilling it would not result in an unjust action. A further point of interest in this case is that it encourages the dissemination of the doctrine to Protestants, which makes it doubly seditious from the point of view of the authorities. The case discusses whether an apprehended Catholic can lawfully bribe guards, escorts or magistrates to let him escape. The guards, the case argues, swore an unjust oath to capture Catholics because of their religion, thus the oath does not bind them. Therefore the captured Catholics should first teach their guards that they are not bound to obey their oath, hence they can accept the bribe because they are not breaking their oath, which is made void by its unjustness. The Catholic, on the other hand, does not sin in convincing the guard to let him escape, because he does not persuade them to break their oath (that is, commit perjury). Furthermore, it is a lesser sin to accept money than to imprison someone unjustly, therefore giving and accepting money is in this case acceptable. What makes this case seditious, then, is that if a flight is achieved this way, not only does a Catholic escape prosecution, but he does so with the help of a state official, a member of the system that was devised to prevent that from happening.

[106] Cicero, *De officiis*, III. 25. Cf. my Chapter1, 2.2.

The doctrine, and the potential threat it meant for the order of the society was made known to Protestants already in 1598, when Abbot published his *Quaestiones Sex*, seven years before political debate erupted around Jesuitical equivocation. With the printing of these lectures he, on the one hand, exposed the doctrine and warned Protestants of a language usage that could make virtually any Catholic speech deceitful, including court testimonies or common legal documents. On the other hand, he took advantage of the fact that Catholics kept these teachings secret: he had the possibility of selecting the cases (and perhaps even the arguments) that he exposed to the public, and consequently to a certain extent he could control the way they were received. Abbot's treatment of the doctrine of mental reservation is practical from yet another aspect. By quoting and denouncing the arguments of Catholic casuists, he makes the doctrine accessible, therefore debatable, for Protestant readers who otherwise would have been forbidden to read Catholic treatises, and at the same time guides them by establishing a moral judgment on the teachings.

The attack on and refutation of equivocation takes up the second half of Abbot's sermon *On Lying*: his decision to treat the topic under that title is itself revealing of his judgement. He is fully aware of the basic arguments and examples that form the backbone of the apologies for the doctrine.[107] His refutation is twofold. On the one hand, he argues that the Jesuits' arguments which claim that it is justified to mislead their examiners on the basis that they are being questioned unjustly and without authority, is false. On the other hand, his argument consists in a refutation of the interpretations of the biblical examples most commonly used in Catholic treatises that defend mental reservation.

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[107] Abbot refutes the arguments in ways which will become standard in later authors, therefore I will analyse them in more detail in their more developed forms in the following chapter.

Abbot begins by claiming that the idea of mentally reserved qualifications is so shameful and monstrous that nobody before dared to write about it openly,[108] but it has recently come to light during the interrogations of Robert Southwell and John Gerard who both defended the doctrine. According to Abbot, it was Southwell who first taught this pernicious type of lying to Catholics so that they would be able to deny having seen him.[109] Jesuits justify the application of this means of deception by the regulations that – according to them – unjustly expel them from England. However, Abbot claims, their expulsion is far from unjustified, it is in fact the necessary defence procedure of the state, devised after Pope Pius V's Bull *Regnans in Excelsis*. It is an 'antidote against poison', that is, against the treasonous behaviour of Catholics, 'to keep them out and deter them, like the fox from the herd or the wolf from the sheep'.[110] He quotes Catholic sources (most importantly Navarrus's *Enchiridion*) which defend ambiguous or equivocal responses in religious examinations, while denouncing them as unjust in civil matters. According to Abbot, Gerard argued that mental reservation is not dangerous in the everyday life of the society, since it can only be employed in matters of religion.[111] Abbot quotes from a certain 'Resolution of dilemmas pertaining to England' (claiming that the author was either Pius V or someone 'of more eloquence and authority' in his service)[112] which also argues that in England, because authorities are by definition unjust, ambiguity

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[108] *De mendacio*, sig. E3ᵛ–E4ʳ.

[109] *De mendacio*, sig. E4ᵛ–E5ʳ.

[110] *De mendacio*, sig. E4ʳ–E4ᵛ.

[111] *De mendacio*, sig. F1ʳ–F2ʳ. 'Addidit insuper, quod si cuiuspiam testimonium iuridice requiratur, et in causis seculi, cuiusmodi forenses esse solent, cum tali aequivocatione respondere non debere: verum in negociis ad religionem, et Catholicos spectantibus, ut hac Homonymia testis utatur, fas esse.'

[112] 'Verum, ut, quod res est, in apertam lucem proferam, vereor, ne ex illa radice haec iam tandem pullularint, quae ante annos aliquanto plures alicubi plantata est. Superioribus etenim temporibus, post Bullam Pii Quinti, contra Principem piissimam Romae effulminatam, e scrinio sui pectoris, aut deprompsit Pontifex, aut eruditione et authoritate celebrior apud illos Pontificius aliquis, nescio sane quis, conclusiones aliquot ad Angliam pertinentes, ut Eleusina tamen Sacra, Cererisque mysteria, nullo pacto divulgandas. Mihi tamen fas sit proloqui, cum obedientiae sacramento in Romanam sedem non distinear.' *De mendacio*, sig. G1ʳ.

and equivocation are allowed.[113] Abbot finds this distinction suspicious and hard to believe: it is surprising that more laxity is allowed in religious than in worldly matters.[114] If it can be used in matters of religion, why could it not it be used in everyday affairs? What will not be suspicious from now on, he demands.[115] But even if it is believed, why would it be justified? Jesus spoke plainly to his judges, and therefore he teaches that lying is not allowed even in the direst situations,[116] and the martyrs also teach people to speak the simple truth, rather than to use partly uttered, partly mentally retained lies.[117]

Abbot's other argument against the Jesuits is to refute their two most often quoted biblical examples for equivocation. Gerard, according to Abbot, argued that when Jesus told to his disciples to go to the feast where he will not go ('Vos ascendite ad diem festum hunc, ego enim non ascendam', John 7. 8), and then went nevertheless, he could not have lied; therefore it has to be understood that Jesus spoke with a mentally reserved qualification.[118] Abbot refutes this by arguing that *non* should be read as *nondum* based on the Greek ('οὔπω'), therefore there is no contradiction between Jesus' words and actions: he said he will not go to the feast *yet*.[119] Another stock example is when Jesus told his disciples he did not know the time of the day of Judgement. However, as the son of God he must have known everything, therefore what he says cannot be true if his speech is taken literally. As opposed to the Catholics, who argue that Jesus here used some kind of mental

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[113] *De mendacio*, sig. G1^r–G1^v

[114] *De mendacio*, sig. G2^v.

[115] *De mendacio*, sig. F2^r: 'Videre, fratres, si pervigili cautela, et prudentia serpentina hodie non sit opus, quandoquidem cum tam versatili, lubricoque virorum genere agendum sit? Quid etenim posthac sanctum, aut sincerum fiet? Cui tandem, aut qua in causa, non erit omnium suspecta fides?'

[116] *De mendacio*, sig. G2^v.

[117] *De mendacio*, sig. F2^v–F3^r: 'veritatem simplicem, confessionem apertam, constantiam virilem, patientiam & confidentiam Christianam praeferebant: non turpibus suffugiis, et diverticulis inhonestis, mentiendi, peierandi, dicendi partem, supprimendi reliqua, praesentis lucis usuram redimebant'.

[118] *De mendacio*, sig. F1^v: 'secretam animi intentionem apud se celavit: postea si quidem, profectus est'.

[119] *De mendacio*, sig. F3^r–F3^v.

reservation, Abbot takes the position that will become the standard Protestant opinion: Jesus said he did not know the day of judgement because what he meant was that he did not know it *as the son of man*.[120]

Abbot claims that he kept looking for some justification of equivocal and sophistical answers in the Bible, but all he could find about it was in Navarrus's *Enchiridion* (XII. 8), narrating the story of St Francis, who misled the pursuers of a homicide by putting his hand into his sleeve and saying to the pursuers that the murderer did not go that way.[121] If responses like St. Francis's are considered as just, then who would be called a liar?[122] He also points out that there seems to be a contradiction within the *Enchiridion*: in XII. 13 Navarrus argues that using sophistical oaths is a double sin, but in XII. 8 he claims that it is not a sin to swear according to the speaker's own meaning, rather than the hearer's.[123] Jesuits are like the sophists who (as a paraphrase from the *Sophistical Refutations* points out) are held in contempt by other philosophers. Abbot accuses the sophist-Jesuits of teaching people to reply sophistically, delude astutely, to speak only with equivocal or amphibological secret intentions.[124] The Jesuits 'in serious matters and those that pertain to God, swear and respond falsely and sophistically, therefore as liars and disseminators of perjury, should be expurged from the register of true Christians.'[125]

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[120] *De mendacio*, sig. F3ʳ–F3ᵛ: 'Cum expresse Salvator, *Non scit filius*, id est, quatenus filius hominis, et ex carne compositus, vel quatenus creatura esset, non habita ad coniunctam, et coünitam divinitatem relatione.

[121] 'Franciscus,[...] qui rogatus, qua perrexisset quidam homicida, qui iuxta eum transierat, manus per manicas immittens, respondit non transisse illac, intelligens non transisse per illas manicas.' *De mendacio*, sig. G3ᵛ–G4ʳ. The story is a standard justification of equivocation in Catholic treatises (it occurs in Navarrus as well as Garnet, where St Francis looks in one direction and points to another under his clothes), and a constant target of Protestant attacks.

[122] *De mendacio*, sig. H1ᵛ–H2ʳ: 'Quis unquam hominum, aut mendax, aut periurius appellabitur, si sana, solidaque ista sunt?'

[123] *De mendacio*, sig. H3ᵛ.

[124] *De mendacio*, sig. G3ʳ–G3ᵛ.

[125] *De mendacio*, sig. H3ʳ: 'Non immerito sibi nomen arripiunt Sophistarum, (id etenim eorum prorium est, qui Sophistice respondent) ut enim iam olim Sophistae dicebantur, qui σόφος non fuerunt, sed inflato tantum cum titulo et ventoso, gloriosi quidam; qui a recta Philosophorum secta distabant longissime, vehementer apud illos redarguti, contempti, ludibrio habiti, ita isti, in rebus seriis et ad Deum spectantibus, fraudulenter et sophistice, iurati, respondentes, ex albo verorum Christianorum, tanquam mendaces et periuriorum dissemnatores sint expugnendi.'

Abbot's sermon on lying included the major points of debate between Catholics and Protestants about the moral nature of mental reservation. His theological arguments are much less developed than those of the treatises written after the Gunpowder Plot, but the main concerns are already visible. The Jesuits use equivocation to mislead just as prophecies and sophists mislead their hearers; if equivocation is accepted as a lawful means in communication, then practically no speech can be regarded as free from deception; therefore equivocation destroys the common grounds that make everyday communication possible.

4. Engendering a False Conceit – Garnet and the *Treatise of Equivocation*

The key document which consolidated the association of deception through verbal manipulation and concealed meanings with the Catholics – and especially with the Jesuits – in England was Henry Garnet's *A Treatise of Equivocation*. The authorship of the *Treatise of Equivocation* was debated even in the early seventeenth century (Sir Edward Coke in a note attributed it to John Gerard, Thomas Morton in his *Full Satisfaction...* names Cresswell or Tresham as the potential author, while Robert Abbot, George's brother, simply talks of 'Sacerdos quidam Satanae'),[126] as well as whether it had ever been published or not.[127] Today most critics accept its attribution to Henry Garnet by Allison in 1951,[128] and since its first known printed edition was produced by David Jardine in 1851 (who was still reluctant to name an author),[129] it is also generally assumed that Garnet himself never published the *Treatise*.[130]

David Jardine's edition is based on a quarto manuscript found by Sir Edward Coke in the Gunpowder Plotter Francis Tresham's room, made (according to his own confession) around 1600–1601 by one of Tresham's servants of an original (written most probably around 1598, now lost),[131] except for 3 pages in Garnet's handwriting.[132] The copy furthermore bears the corrections and additions of Garnet (which he admitted at his trial),[133] as well as the claim that it has been 'newly overseen by the Author', all in Garnet's handwriting; two notes in Sir Edward

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[126] He does so in his *Antilogia adversus apologiam Andreae Eudaemon-Ioannis Iesuitae pro Henrico Garneto Iesuita proditore*. See Jardine's *Preface* to his edition of *A treatise of equivocation.* (*Henry Garnet: A Treatise of Equivocation*, ed. by David Jardine (London, 1851)), pp. xiii–xiv.

[127] Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', pp. 390–391.

[128] A. F. Allison, 'The Writings of Father Henry Garnet', *Biographical Studies I.* (=*Recusant History*), 7–21, pp. 14–15.

[129] Jardine, *Preface*, pp. xiii–xv.

[130] Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', p. 392.; Zagorin, p. 193.

[131] Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', p. 387; Zagorin, p. 193. (In the footnote, among further sources, he refers to Holmes, *Elizabethan Casuistry*, p. 121–3, while in fact it is to be found in his *Resistance and Compromise*.)

[132] Jardine, *Preface*, ix–xi, xv–xvii; Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', pp. 390–392.

[133] Jardine, *Preface*, p. ix.

Coke's hand are also attached to it.[134] Although the revisions (that must have taken place before 1603, because they still refer to the Queen) clearly suggest that Garnet intended to publish it, he never again mentions the *Treatise* after a letter in November 1600.[135] One may have guesses, but it still remains a mystery (and may even cast doubt on Garnet's authorship) why Sir Edward Coke never made the connection (or at least never used it during the trial) between Garnet's admission of correcting the treatise, and the remark on the title-page about the author.[136] It is a further puzzling fact that Thomas Morton in *The encounter against Mr Parsons...* (1610) seems to argue against this treatise, and refers to the author as 'M. Garnet' in a manner which suggests that the authorship was a well known fact rather than a mystery.[137]

The fact that Garnet's *Treatise* was not printed during the period when the political-religious debates about equivocation took place is significant because it gave an opportunity to both parties to present the *Treatise* and the doctrine of equivocation according to their own biases. The reason why Garnet never published

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[134] Jardine, *Preface* v–ix, xiii, xvii–xviii; see also the title page (Jardine, 1); Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation' pp. 391–2.

[135] Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', p. 390.

[136] Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', p. 390.

[137] 'Marke (good Reader) and maruell with me at this mans wit; he will seeme now to grant that it were a *palpable absurdity*, and *impossibilitie*, to teach a man sometime to sweare, by multiplying *Equiuocation vpon Equiuocation*, when he is vrged therunto; and therefore will onely be thought to suspect, that I haue abused *M. Garnets Treatise*, by misreporting his direction, which I alleadged most faithfully.' *The encounter*, Book 2, sig. Yy3^r. The copy, according to Jardine's speculation, must have been borrowed in 1612 by George Abbot (who was the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time), therefore it may have been used by Robert Abbot for writing his *Antilogia adversus apologiam Andreae Eudaemon-Ioannis Iesuitae pro Henrico Garneto Iesuita proditore* (Jardine, *Preface*, pp. xii–xiii). Another copy is known to be extant in the English College in Rome, but I found no reference whether this is the folio copy mentioned by Tresham's servant. Since all scholars rely on the Bodleian manuscript, it might be interesting to compare the two manuscripts to see whether the one in Rome contains the same corrections, and if so, then whether they are already applied to the text. Despite its official denunciation, there may have been a few more copies of the *Treatise*, since Thomas Morton quotes from it in his *Full satisfaction* (1606), *Preamble unto an Encounter* (1608), *The encounter against Mr Parsons* (1610), and Persons had a copy sent to him from England, from which he quotes in *A treatise tending to mitigation* (1607) and *A quiet and sober reckoning* (1609), the replies to Morton's attacks (Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', p. 392). According to Allison (p. 14), the copy in Rome is 'evidently' the one that Persons used, but he does not say why. According to him, it bears the new title, also in Garnet's handwriting.

the *Treatise of Equivocation* is unknown, and it is all the more surprising, in view of the revisions.

Most of the modifications in Garnet's handwriting are not very significant: they clarify sentences or add further examples or references to authorities. The most noteworthy change concerns the title of the treatise. The original title – which is still used – was *A Treatise of Equivocation wherein is largely discussed the question whether a Catholicke or any other person before a magistrate beyng demaunded uppon his oath whether a Prieste were in such a place, may (notwithstanding his perfect knowledge to the contrary) without Periury and securely in conscience answere, 'No', with this secreat meaning reserued in his mynde, That he was not there 'so that any man is bound to detect it'.*[138] This title, stating the central problem the treatise addresses – the problem discussed in Southwell's trial –, was crossed out and replaced with a shorter, more technically phrased version that at the same time emphasises its reconciliatory and educational purpose: *A Treatise against Lying and Fraudulent Dissimulation: Newly overseen by the Author, and Published for the defence of innocency and the instruction of ignorants.*

Garnet's treatise is a brief, systematic and clearly structured defence of the *doctrine of mental reservation*, adding a great number of examples (hardly any of them original) from the Bible, church fathers, philosophy and 'the light of reason'[139] to support the doctrine. It is the first, and most systematic treatment of the doctrine in English, written, according to its preface, in defence of Southwell, and intended for an audience of Protestants, rather than Catholics. This aim, however, creates tensions that are perceptible at different points throughout the treatise: Garnet had to make the doctrine acceptable to his hoped-for Protestant readers, but at the same time the justification that underlies the application of equivocation is that Catholics are treated

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[138] Jardine, p. 1. I have supplied punctuation marks to make the title more comprehensible.
[139] Jardine, p. 4 = MS p. 2.

unlawfully and unjustly by Protestants. Therefore, although the tone of the treatise is generally moderate, as Malloch points out,[140] Garnet occasionally makes subtle, but at times rather biting remarks about Protestants.

After an introductory chapter, in which Garnet establishes the threefold criteria for the validity of oaths (truth, judgement, justice), he sets out to prove that oaths taken with mental reservation or other means of ambiguity fulfil these criteria. He proves that propositions and oaths containing equivocation are true (Ch. 2–8), that they do not lack justice (Ch. 9), and judgement or discretion (Ch. 10), and finally, as a kind of summary, he gives advice to Catholics how to behave lawfully if they are summoned to court (Ch. 10). As a justification of the truthfulness of equivocation he introduces the concept of a proposition with reserved or implied meanings (Ch. 2–3); then gives examples for such mixed propositions in God's and Jesus's words (Ch. 4); presents the four types of equivocation with examples from the lives of Saints (Ch. 5); outlines in what situations it is and it is not lawful to equivocate (Ch. 6); explains what makes the application of equivocal oaths justified (Ch. 7); then as a conclusion discusses what truth is and how equivocal oaths conform to it (Ch. 8).

There are, Garnet argues, 'fower wayes how to conceale a trewth without makinge of a lye',[141] that is, for somebody being interrogated under oath to mislead his interrogator without actually uttering a lie. As Garnet seeks to demonstrate, writings by the church fathers, as well as the Bible, abound in examples that justify that kind of double dealing.

Propositions are true, Garnet argues, if they conform 'to the thinge itself; that is, whan they so affirme or denye as the matter it selfe in very deede doth stande'.[142] Referring to Navarrus's *Commentary on* 'Humanae aures...', Garnet introduces the

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[140] Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', p. 391.
[141] Jardine, p. 52.
[142] Jardine, p. 9 = MS pp. 4–5. Garnet here employs the standard definition of truth. Persons, as I will show in the next chapter, will use a slightly but significantly different definition, which asserts that a statement is true if it conforms to the speaker's mind.

idea of the four types of proposition, and argues that 'that other proposition of which we spake, beyng a mixte proposition, is not to be examined according to the veritye of the part expressed alone, but according to the part reserved also, they both togither compounding one entyre proposition'.[143] This is supported by referring to Aristotle who, according to Garnet, established that the essence of a proposition is in the mind, therefore the way a proposition is expressed (in speech, writing or mixed) does not alter the proposition itself. For instance, nobody would doubt that a proposition partly written and partly spoken is valid.[144] To the possible objection that, while both segments of a partly written and partly spoken proposition can be perceived by the addressee, it is only the uttered part of a proposition with mental reservation that the hearer can grasp, Garnet replies that the proposition is nevertheless true, because 'there is never falshood in the voyce but there is first falshood in the mynde'.[145] That is, God perceives the proposition in its complete and therefore true form, which validates that it is true, irrespective of the fact that the hearer may misconceive it, since the wise judge should be able to make inferences about the particulars of place, time and person, knowing the examined person's circumstances.[146]

The first way Garnet describes to avoid lying is to 'vse some equivocall word which hath many significations, and we vnderstand it in one sense, which is trewe, although the hearer conceave the other, which is false'.[147] This would explain why Abraham and Isaac called their wives their sisters: instead of the more usual (first) meaning of the word they used the more general meaning of 'near in kinship'. It may be used by interrogated Catholics, for example, to say that the priest being sought by

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[143] Jardine, p. 10. = MS p. 5.
[144] Jardine, pp. 12–13. = MS p. 6
[145] Jardine, p. 14. = MS p. 7. Cf. the definitions of lie as intentionally saying something that the speaker knows not to be true, noted earlier.
[146] Jardine, p. 18. = MS p. 9.
[147] Jardine, pp. 48–49. = MS p. 25. In Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise* (p. 122), the classification slightly differs. He does not make it clear whether he is working from Garnet or Persons's *A treatise tending to mitigation*, because he gives a reference to both (note 20: Garnet, 29–31; Persons, 310ff).

the questioner does not lie in their house (meaning that he is not telling falsehoods there). This type of equivocation relies on the ambiguity of one word.

The second method of concealing the truth involves cases in which 'vnto one question may be geven many aunsweres' of which 'we may yeelde one and conceale the other'.[148] To justify this method, he narrates the story of Samuel whom God sent to Bethlehem to anoint David.[149] If Saul, the reigning king, had found out his purpose, he would have killed Samuel, therefore God advised Samuel to bring a goat and, when asked about the reason for entering the city, to reply that he came to sacrifice to God. Along these lines, Garnet argues, it is possible to utter the secondary cause of one's actions, while remain silent about the primary one; which would justify a Catholic, when asked if he is going to a certain house to listen to Mass, in saying that he is going there for dinner.[150] This, while it seemingly copies Navarrus's suggestion exemplified by the man saying that he is not coming from the plague-stricken city <because he is not infected>, in fact reverses it. Navarrus claimed that it is justifiable to reply to a question that is phrased according to the secondary intention of the questioner (that is, according to the way it was phrased to hide the questioner's primary intention: 'Are you coming from that city?') in a way that the reply is false according to that secondary sense (such is the reply 'I am not coming from that particular city' to the question that asks where he comes from), while true according to the primary meaning (to find out whether he is infected). Garnet, on the contrary, argues that it is justifiable to give an answer that is true according to the secondary intention of the questioner (to know what the investigated

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[148] Jardine, p. 49 = MS p. 25.

[149] 1 Samuel 16. 1–5 (Garnet's manuscript mistakenly references 1 Reg. 16); Cf. 1 Samuel 16. 7 with Gregory's *Commentary on 'Humanae aures'*: 'Et dixit Dominus ad Samuelem: Ne respicias vultum eius, neque altitudinem staturae eius: quoniam abieci eum, nec juxta intuitum hominis ego iudico: homo enim videt ea quæ parent, Dominus autem intuetur cor.' (In the Douai-Rheims translation: 'And our Lord Said to Samuel: Respect not his countenance, nor the talnes of his stature: because I haue reiected him, neither doe I iudge according to the looke of man: for man seeth those things which appeare, but our Lord beholdeth the hart.')

[150] Jardine, p. 49–50. = MS p. 25–26.

person will do that evening), but false according to the primary intention (to find out whether there is a priest hiding in the house), or at least conceals the reply to it.[151] According to Garnet, then, it is not a sin to give an answer that is appropriate as regards the words of the question, even if it does not satisfy the intention (the spirit, as it were) of the question.

The third way in which Catholics can equivocate according to Garnet seems somewhat mixed. 'Thirdly, the whole sentence which we pronounce, or some word therof, or the manner of poynting or deviding the sentence, may be ambiguous, and we may speake it in one sense trewe for our owne advantage'.[152] The first two examples he quotes as justification contain a physical gesture as the qualification of the uttered words, like the standard case of St. Francis misleading the pursuers of a thief.[153] Then follow three examples that differ from the first type only because the ambiguity of the words derives from the presence of a literal and a metaphorical meaning,[154] like the case of the Angel Raphael telling Toby about his lineage: 'I am Azarias, the sonne of great Ananias', which Toby takes – literally – to mean an indication of his parentage, while in fact 'mystically' it means that Raphael is the helper of God (Azarias), and the Grace of God (Ananias).[155]

The fourth method of concealing the truth by words is mental reservation, 'whan we vtter certaine wordes, which of themselves may engendre a false conceite in the mynde of the hearers, and yet with somewhat which we vnderstand and reserve in

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[151] 'Here Samuel vttered the secundary cause of his comming, and warely dissembled the principall, which notwithstanding they principally intended to knowe, and by this answere put out of suspition thereof.'

[152] Jardine, p. 50. = MS p. 26.

[153] Jardine, pp. 50–51. = MS p. 26.

[154] However, when a word has two literal meanings (type 1) and when a literal and a metaphorical (type 3) is not easily distinguishable.

[155] Jardine, p. 51. = MS pp. 26–27. The last example in this category is supposed to contain a structural ambiguity in the sentence (telling a thief, 'Juro tibi numeraturum me 200 aureos') that can be interpreted in two ways depending on whether the sentence is taken in conjunction or separation, but *how* is not entirely clear to me. Jardine, pp. 51–52. = MS p. 27.

our myndes maketh a true proposition'.[156] This is achieved when 'besides the wordes vttered we vnderstand some thinge', the mentally reserved qualification, 'which according to the usuall speech cannot be vnderstood',[157] and which changes the meaning of the utterance. Garnet – with reference to Navarrus – quotes Psalm 1 and gives a possible interpretation of it with mental reservation: 'The wicked shall not arise againe in the iudgement <vnto euerlasting lyfe>'.[158] Similarly, if a Catholic is demanded whether he has heard Mass, he can in good conscience reply 'I did not heare masse <so that I can be lawfully charged therfore>'.[159]

In the case of the first type, the ambiguity of a word is exploited: what is said audibly is *true* (that is, the speech conforms to the things as they are) according to the way the speaker understands it, but it is false (it does not conform to reality) or irrelevant according to the way the hearer perceives it. It is deceptive and unnoticeable to the hearer because it seems to be a relevant reply to the interrogator's question, but in fact it is a response to a different, never asked question.

In the second type, what is pronounced conforms to reality according to both the speaker's and the hearer's understanding, but since the question is phrased too generally (that is, it admits of a number of possible understandings), it is only a seemingly relevant response, because the speaker arbitrarily chooses one possible interpretation of the question and replies according to that, although he is aware of the fact that the interrogator intended it in another sense. In the case of such evasive responses, then, the speaker deceives the hearer by relying on the common assumption that for a conversation to be meaningful, the reply has to be relevant to the question, and when it is not, then something is implied that will make it relevant. However, in the example given above, the speaker does not imply anything: it is as if

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[156] Jardine, p. 52. = MS p. 27.
[157] Jardine, p. 30. = MS p. 16.
[158] Jardine, p. 20. = MS p. 10.
[159] Jardine, p. 18. = MS p. 9.

he had not been reserving mentally some qualification that the hearer is expecting him to be reserving.

The tricks that belong to the third category result in an utterance that conforms to the things as they are only according to the speaker's, but not the hearer's interpretation. In some of the examples given here, the reply is a proper but false response to the question (e.g. St. Francis), in others it merely seems to be proper (e.g. Raphael's parentage). The reply that is accessible to the hearer contains lexical or syntactic ambiguity (therefore it could belong to the first category), or is modified by a secret gesture (which makes it similar to the last one).

In the cases of equivocation that belong to the fourth category (mental reservation), what is said aloud does not conform to reality either according to the speaker's or the hearer's understanding, but is a proper response to the question. It conforms to reality only when taken together with the mentally reserved part of the sentence. Here deception is achieved by giving a seemingly unambiguous and direct response that relies on a non-expressed qualification which makes it conform to reality by containing a piece of knowledge available only to the speaker and God. In the previous three methods of concealing the speaker's actual meaning, it would at least theoretically be possible for the hearer to uncover the context, and suspect that the response may allow for more than one understanding. However, in the case of equivocation proper, because the crucial piece of information is available only to the speaker, there is nothing in the response that would suggest the presence of meanings other than the surface one.

This fourfold methodology of equivocating originates in the desire to reconcile two moral obligations: not to tell a lie on the one hand, and save lives, on the other, by giving a reply that does not reveal the truth. The doctrine of equivocation seeks a way of giving responses that correspond to reality, that is, at least in some sense, the response is true. The response nevertheless misleads the hearer because (1) the truth

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that it states is not the truth that is relevant to the inquiry (cf. mass vs. dinner); (2) the context according to which the statement is interpreted is different for the hearer and the speaker; (3) not the entire context is available for the hearer.

If we look at the question–ambiguous reply from the point of view of how the reply is perceived by the hearer then understanding what is said seems to consist of two steps. 1. The hearer/questioner realises that the reply may have had more than one meaning (this is optimally possible in 1–3 but not in 4), 2. once ambiguity is recognised, it is the hearer's task to choose one of the possible interpretations. However, this step can still go wrong (the hearer still faces two equally plausible meanings), and rhetorical theory would advise the questioner to ask more questions and divide the meanings. However, the possibility of asking further questions never occurs in the debate.

In the final part of the treatise, in accordance with Navarrus and the casuistical tradition, Garnet sets down rules for occasions when equivocation can be lawfully employed. In this section in particular Garnet's aim of making the doctrine of mental reservation more acceptable to its Protestant and Catholic opponents becomes apparent through his constant references to the potential risk that unlawfully used equivocation would disrupt the social order.

> The usage of equivocation needs to be limited, Garnet argues, otherwise
>
> neyther God could be pleased, nor the lyncke and coniunction of humane societyes, eyther sivill [sic] or ecclesiasticall and spirituall, could be dewly mayntayned. For you shall fynde some more inconstant then Proteus, more variable than the cameleont, more deceiptfull than Sinon,[160] who in all theire speeches will equivocate. (...) These persons, as they are not fitte for any honest conversation, so may they be, and that not selldome, pernicious to any commoun wealthe.[161]

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[160] The name is Simon in Jardine's reading. I have not seen the manuscript, but because I found no relevant biblical characters of that name, and because the context suggests the often used classical example of the archetypical liar who convinced the Trojans to draw the horse within the city walls themselves, I believe Garnet must have referred to Sinon.

[161] Jardine, p. 54. = MS p. 28.

Garnet's frequent references to disruptions in human society (reminiscent of the consequences that Renaissance dialectical textbooks attribute to sophistical arguments) are characteristic of the whole treatise.

Not only is lying generally forbidden, but sincerity and plain speech are required as long as the health of one's body, soul, piety, charity, just profit, or necessity do not require otherwise.[162] Equivocation is explicitly forbidden under all circumstances in matters of religion, because it is a mortal sin to deny one's religion or pretend a false one.[163] It can be a breach of charity, and consequently either a mortal or a venial sin not to publish certain known truths in religious, political or civil matters if the lack of information endangers the state or the person. For instance, equivocation is a sin if used to testify falsely against someone, or to hide information that would save a person, or to obstruct the due course of a lawfully proceeding court.[164]

Generally, if the procedure in which a person is interrogated is lawful, equivocation is forbidden, and God will understand the words as the lawful interrogator understands them.[165] Everybody is bound to answer plainly if asked according to law, that is, when the following five requirements are fulfilled:

1. the examiner is a *lawful superior* with *authority invested on him* by public
   power to conduct the procedure;

2. the examiner has *authority over the person*

3. the matter itself *pertains to the examiner*

4. the examiner *proceeds according to law*

5. the proceedings/accusations are *well-grounded*.[166]

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[162] Jardine, pp. 56–57. = MS p. 30.

[163] Jardine, p. 60. = MS p. 32. However, it may be lawful to conceal one's true religion or passively allow others believe that the person is Protestant, but to expressly pretend false religion, act or speak in a way that would actively make others believe the person to be a follower of false faith is unlawful, even if done in order to save one's life or the whole world. See Jardine, pp. 57–58 = MS p. 30.

[164] Jardine, pp. 60–61. = MS p. 32. This is interesting because it is one of the charges against Garnet.

[165] Jardine, p. 62–63. = MS pp. 33–34.

[166] Jardine, pp. 67–71. = MS pp. 38–39.

The requirement for the lawfulness of the procedure introduces a possibility for equivocation. After a sarcastic remark,[167] Garnet expresses his, and all English Catholics', obedience to the queen and her appointed magistrates.[168] Although the magistrates are recognised as authorities, and Catholics must obey them in anything not contrary to the divine law, in cases when they persecute Catholics for their religion they do not act lawfully and therefore need not be obeyed or replied to directly: the religious cause exempts Catholics from obedience because a law that persecutes Christ's priests persecutes Christ himself, and is therefore unjust.[169] Persecutions against Catholics, furthermore, breach ancient laws that the state was built upon, and the breaking of which is the easiest way to the demolition of the state.[170] Therefore Catholics are not bound to deal plainly when interrogated to their own danger and the oaths taken with equivocation therefore do not lack truth.[171]

The end of the *Treatise*, in which Garnet provides Catholics with a short practical guide on the lawful behaviour at court, is largely in accordance with the casuistical tradition. When responding to questions under oath, Catholics should remember that every oath is only binding as long as fulfilling it does not cause greater injustice than breaching it. The safest way is to refuse to take an oath or refuse to swear to carry out the judge's or the examiner's order. If, however, the examinee is compelled to swear either a general or a particular oath, he should swear with the explicit limitation that

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[167] 'There is no doubte but when a pursevant cometh to search a howse, whether it be for a preist or for a purse, he would be most willing that every one should deale playnly with hym, and directly answere hym in those ordinarye questions: "Have you a preist ? where is he ?" "Have you any money? where is your purse?" And no mervayle; ffor if we may gather petigrees by the likenes of names, it is very likely that pursyvantes are nearer in kynred to purses than theeves. And although preistes have no very deepe purses, yet it may be that fyndinge preistes in houses, they may the easyer be moved to hunt after Robinhood's interest, which they have therby to the howsehoulders purses.' Jardine, pp. 82–83. = MS p. 45.

[168] 'Ffor although we beare them all manner of civill reverence, and acknowledge them as our liege and most dread Soveraigne her lawfull officers, and are ready to obay them in any thinge not contrary to the lawes of God, and the necessary meanes of our everlasting salvation, yet in this case we say we are not lawfully convented, nor so demaunded for many respectes that we are bound to answere directly.' p. 83. = MS p. 46.

[169] Jardine, pp. 83–84. = MS p. 46.

[170] Jardine, pp. 86. = MS p. 47: this argument deleted by Garnet. Notice the reference to disruption of the social order again.

[171] Jardine, p. 87. = MS p. 48.

he will satisfy the examiner only as far as his knowledge extends:[172] asserting knowledge of something has a direct connection with the thing itself, therefore it always contains a preconceived limitation about the transferability of what is known.[173] If the oath has to be taken more generally, not only pertaining to knowledge, the person should equivocate. If asked to swear the oath without equivocation, he should swear not to equivocate with the usual equivocation.[174] Oaths always contain the unuttered condition that one will act according to them 'until it is just' to do so.[175] Should the person be forced to take an oath on something patently unjust, he can do so with equivocation (by reserving a denial of intention) as long as the uttered part of his oath does not contain anything explicitly scandalous or anything causing dishonour to God. Otherwise the person is bound to refuse the oath plainly, regardless of the consequences.

In the modified title, Garnet promised both a defence of the doctrine of mental reservation (or equivocation, as he prefers to call it), and the instruction of the ignorant. The final paragraphs fulfil the latter undertaking, while most of the rest of the treatise is devoted to the defence. However, there is an inherent difficulty in endeavouring to convince Protestants about the moral acceptability of a doctrine which permits a practice that exempts Catholics from obedience to the authorities on the premise that the procedures carried out by Protestants against Catholics are morally unacceptable. This is most evident in those parts of the treatise in which Garnet's style changes from argumentative to the language of religious polemics.

As the justification for Catholics breaking the commonly accepted and assumed norms of human communication, Garnet summarises many ways in which English

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[172] Jardine, pp. 102–103. = MS p. 57: 'I sweare that I will syncerely and directly answere whatsoever I knowe'.

[173] Cf. the case of Jesus' words, 'all that which I haue heard of my father <for to tell you> I haue toulde you'.

[174] As Morton will point out in *A full satisfaction*, this provision renders basically any oath useless, because it allows for an infinity of equivocation even about equivocation.

[175] Jardine, p. 100–101. = MS pp. 55–56. Cf. this idea with Cicero (*De officiis*, III.25) and Allen–Persons Case III.3, noted above.

Catholics have to suffer injustice from the authorities. According to him Catholics are treated even worse than real thieves, murderers, or traitors (he remarks with sarcasm that the word 'traitor' seems in those days to be reserved only for Catholics): the authorities break into Catholic households, force unjust oaths, conduct invasive examinations and tortures, only to discover other Catholics' names and whereabouts.[176] Referring to Southwell's case he emphasises that the innocent have the right to defend themselves when the authorities breach the laws.[177] Garnet argues that religious persecution exempts Catholic priests from their obligation to deal plainly, because priests are Christ's representatives, therefore by persecuting them, the authorities in fact persecute Christ.[178] Equivocation saves Catholics from lying, whereas Protestants in certain cases need to lie to save themselves, which makes them sinners even when their cause is just:

> But wheras we, vpon dew care of our consciences for to auoide euen veniall vntruthes in the iust defence of our selues from iniuries, are so curiouse to examine this verity which we hope we have found out, by the grave definition of so many Doctours, we do in all Christian charity beseech the impugners of this opinion that what care and industry they bestow in carping at iust equiuocations, the same they will vse in auoiding to vtter so familierly as they do most manifest lyes.[179]

At the very end of the *Treatise* (as in a few other places) Garnet abandons the purpose of reconciling Protestants and seems to aim at offending them. He declares those who do not accept his teaching to be unjust and untrue: 'We have sufficiently proved, I hope, to such as have in them any veretye and justice, that this oath which we intreate of wanteth neither verety nor justice'.[180] In a set of rhetorical passages, he employs the idea of the afterlife in various ways to attack his opponents.[181] As

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[176] Jardine, pp. 85–86. = MS p. 47.
[177] Jardine, pp. 72–73. = MS pp. 39–40. Italics added.
[178] Jardine, pp. 83–84. = MS p. 46.
[179] Jardine, pp. 46–47. = MS p. 24.
[180] Jardine, p. 97. = MS p. 53.
[181] 'For otherwise, as hereticks need not to feare Purgatory, because hell is to be their home if they dye out of the Catholick vnity, so need not lyars to dispute of the lawfull vse of equiuocation, they taking a readier way to serue their turne, by plaine vntruthes and euident perjuries.' Jardine, pp. 46–47. = MS p. 24.

opposed to Protestants, Southwell (and presumably by implication everybody who followed his example and suffered martyrdom) is safe in heaven where Protestants cannot reach him anymore, or harm him with false accusations.[182] In the last sentence of the *Treatise*, through a subtle paraphrase of *Wisdom* 5. 1 and 5. 13 Garnet glorifies Catholics as 'the just' while he condemns Protestants as 'the wicked':

> The tyme will come whan he [i.e. Southwell] shall, togither with all the Sayntes of God, *stare in magna constantia* (face to face) *aduersus eos qui se angustiauerunt*, at wich tyme God graunte that wee may abide his lookes, and fynde hym a more favorable advocate than he hath found others here, that we may all togither at the length meete in the perfect vnitye of the knowledge and sight of God, and be consummated in Christe our Saviour.

In the original verse that Garnet deconstructs here it is the 'just' that *will stand with great constancy* and the 'wicked' who *have afflicted them*, and who will finally be *consumed in their wickedness*. In his sentence, Garnet substituted Southwell (as a metonymy for the persecuted Catholics) for *the just*, and although he does not complete the paraphrase, it is evidently implied who is meant by *the wicked*.

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[182] 'And this was that blessed Father Southwell his doctrine, whom some would glad with their calumniations fetch out of heaven if they could.' Jardine, pp. 46–47. = MS p. 24.

5. Conclusion

The doctrine of equivocation was developed as a response to a moral dilemma. It offers a solution for victims of unjust prosecution: it teaches them how to avoid both lying and telling the truth at the same time. Navarrus's justification rests on the exploitation of a widely accepted property of language that often meaning can only be grasped if it is sought beyond the mere words, from an intention that can only be assumed to be there. He advises people to exploit this, not only because it is a widely accepted feature of language that often the priority should be given to the spirit over the letter, but also because God's judgement depends on what is in the heart of the speaker, regardless of how that is translated to human speech with the mouth. Therefore, even if what is said aloud sounds like being a lie, it is not necessarily one in God's judgement.

If Navarrus's theological arguments – supplemented by Garnet's delimitations and practical advice of the possible ways of their application – are accepted, they render earlier definitions (most notably Augustine's) of what constitutes a lie practically useless. This recognition is present in Abbot's attack of the doctrine, and it will be at the centre of the polemics after the Gunpowder Plot, the topic of the next chapter.

Equivocation in the sense Jesuits understood it is not ambiguous on the surface. It is only the information hidden in the mentally reserved part that adds an extra meaning to these sentences, therefore equivocation is practically impossible to detect. From this point of view, there is a parallel between mental reservation and another pragmatic solution for concealing what one knows: the assumption of a disguise. As the cases of conscience that were in circulation in sixteenth century England argue, there are cases in which it is justifiable to wear a disguise that provides an altered identity, and changes the meaning of the assumer's statements

without the questioner noticing it (here the disguise works almost as a physical version of the spoken part of a statement with mental reservation).

Equivocation is particularly dangerous for the state. Melanchthon and John Case had already associated ambiguity with the possibility of the destruction of order. Confessions with mental reservation can only be interpreted with hindsight, when something has already happened that reveals the hidden qualification. Since the point of interrogation is to prevent something from happening, and equivocation puts the hearer into a false feeling of security, such a revelation inevitably comes too late, when the consequences are irreversible.

Chapter 3.

'different from that sense, which the words vttered doe beare': The Morton–Persons Controversy

1. Introduction

The controversy between the Protestant Thomas Morton and the Catholic Robert Persons was launched by the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. Beginning with Morton's anonymously published *An exact discoverie of Romish doctrine* and ending in his *The encounter against Mr Persons*, this exchange constitutes a distinct chapter in the history of equivocation. The debate about equivocation is often characterised as primarily ideological, a clash between Catholic and Protestant propaganda. While the majority of the polemical works written between 1605 and the 1620s may well be seen as propaganda literature, the controversy between Morton and Persons is somewhat different. Even if their works abound in *ad hominem* abuses, even if occasionally they argue with the intrinsic immorality of the other's denomination to disqualify his position, and even if it would be naive to assume that they were so naive as to think they would ever be able to convince one another, their writings demonstrate genuine interest in persuading, at least, the wider reading public. Not only is the Morton–Persons controversy exceptional in the amount of energy and intellectual skill employed in the debate, but also in at least keeping up the appearance of being an actual polemic, with the two sides directly refuting one another's arguments and supporting their own positions with new examples in response to the other's criticism of previous ones. This dialogical situation, and an audience that is not entirely biased towards either side, prompted both Morton and Persons to carefully frame and reframe their arguments in a way that is otherwise uncharacteristic in relation to equivocation.[1]

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[1] There was another anonymous contributor to the debate, usually identified as Richard Broughton (Peter Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Jacobean Age: A Survey of Printed Sources* (London: Scolar Press, 1978), p. 82). However, the arguments in his two treatises are not nearly as detailed and sophisticated as Persons's or Morton's. His main strategy in his short treatises is to invalidate Morton's arguments by demonstrating that notable Protestants also allowed and even applied some kind of evasion in certain cases where the judge or the procedure was unjust. His most significant contribution to the controversy is that Morton plays out some of his arguments against those of Persons in a short imaginary debate between the 'Moderate Answerer' and the 'Mitigator',

Catholic theologians were themselves divided on the issue of the justifiability of equivocation, but the advocates of both positions before the Gunpowder Plot treated the question of the lawfulness of mental reservation as a case of personal conscience: the aim of opponents like Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda or Francisco Suarez, and proponents like Doctor Navarrus, William Allen and Robert Persons was to give guidance to their Catholic audience as to whether they can employ mental reservation without endangering their soul. Suarez, one of the Catholic opponents of the doctrine speaking to a Catholic audience argued in his *Opus de virtute et statu religionis*[2] that employing mental reservation in responses is a sin and therefore it is in his readers' own interest to avoid it. According to him, spoken, written and 'internal' words come from different orders, and consequently serve different purposes. Spoken words 'signify' for those present, written words 'signify' for those not present, therefore they cannot combine to form one proposition. The same applies for the combination of mental and verbal propositions: the mental is a sign only to the mind that conceives it, and therefore it is not suitable for conveying a meaning to another person.[3] Mental reservation is no less dangerous to society than a plain lie, and if it were allowed then any lie could be justified with it.

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that is, Broughton and Persons (Thomas Morton, *A preamble vnto an incounter with P.R. the author of the deceitfull treatise of mitigation*, STC (2nd ed.) / 18191 (London: Printed by Melch. Bradwood for Iohn Bill and Edmond Weauer, 1608), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. E4^v–F1^r.)

[2] Cf. Francisco Suarez, *De Virtute et statu religionis, Tomus Secundus* (Mainz: Hermannus Meresius, 1623), Tractatus Quintus, Liber 3, Cap. IX–XI (An iuramentum assertorium cum amphibologia factum sit periurim, vel aliter peccaminosum?, An liceat iurare nec amphibologia sola mente concepta?, Quale peccatum sit sine rationabili causa uti amphibologia, praesertim mentali in iurando?), sig. Nn6^v–Oo3^r. (Earlier edition: Comimbra: Petrus Crasbeeck, 1609.)

[3] 'Et in ordine ad mores augentur difficultas, quia omnis oratio constituitur in genere signi: ergo ut termini componant unam orationem, quae unam significationem habeat, oportet, ut omnes termini sint eiusdem ordinis, et cum proportione significent. Hoc autem non invenitur in illis terminis, nam mentalis est signum spirituale, et de se solum significat concipienti, unde non est aptum signum aliis: vocalis autem oratio est signum sensibile, et de se ordinatur ad significandum aliis, et ex hac parte non videtur apte componi cum interno et mentali termino: neque inde potest resultare una oratio vera quatenus est sensibilis, et humana locutio. Et idem est de vocali, et scripto terminis, nam oratio vocalis est signum transiens, unde de se solum significat praesentibus, et quamdiu profertur, scriptura vero est signum permanens, et de se ordinatur ab absentes tam loco, quam tempore. Non ergo potest oratio scripta determinari veritatem, vel falsitatem per vocalem restrictionem, quia

Following the Gunpowder Plot, the focus of the debate shifts significantly from this personal to a more social one. Protestant attacks speak from the standpoint of the majority (supporting, and supported by, the official state position) mostly to a majority that will presumably be favourable to their position. The question on the surface remains the same throughout: whether a proposition with a mentally reserved qualification is a lie. But beginning with Garnet's *Treatise* (that aimed at justifying the lawfulness of the doctrine to Protestants), and becoming more and more evident in Morton and Persons, the controversy gradually transforms into the more practical issue of whether the Catholic minority has a right to defend themselves by concealing certain things, and whether using equivocation is a just way of doing that. Persons is forced to refute Morton's serious and detailed charges that he incited rebellion through Catholic doctrine, while Morton, given Persons's equally detailed and consistent responses, cannot freely pick and conflate arguments from a range of Catholic authors (as he did in his first pamphlet and as other Protestant treatises tended to do when they were in a monologic position), because he cannot assume that Persons will not rebuke him for doing so.

According to Zagorin,[4] Morton's arguments in the controversy are repetitive, and merely recycle arguments of Catholic theologians who also opposed mental reservation. This may be true from the point of view of the theological justification, but it is definitely a hasty judgement in terms of the linguistic phenomena both Morton and Persons explore in their several pamphlets. Persons and (perhaps more so) Morton come up with more and more subtle examples which will undermine the validity of the opponent's position, while supporting their own. In doing so, they

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transit, et permanet scripta oratio semper significans verum, vel falsum, prout scripta est.' sig. Oo2[r], Col. 1.

[4] Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 200.

both simply recall their theological stances about truth and lies, without providing any further arguments.

The controversy (apart from the theological arguments not directly related to equivocation) has at least three, not always entirely distinguishable dimensions: a political, an ethical and a linguistic. From the perspective of politics, the debate is between a religious minority that appeals to their right of self-defence against unjust regulations designed specifically to limit their rights, and the state whose sovereignty is endangered by that minority, as demonstrated by the consequences of excommunication, pamphlets propagating disobedience and rebellion, and the recent plot. The political controversy is also between competing theologies: the question of who is a heretic is present throughout the treatises, as well as a mutual attempt at demonising the opponent in order to dominate and even monopolise public opinion.

The ethical aspect of the debate mostly concerns the question of lying. The antithetical views present *mental reservation* as intentionally aiming to mislead the opponent or letting the opponent be misled by his own ignorance; as constituting a lie or merely a concealment of truth; as having to be considered primarily in relation to the temporal consequences to the state or to the eternal consequences to the soul.

These two dimensions have been discussed extensively.[5] They are the aspects in which reconciliation between the two sides was impossible, because the interests of Catholics and Protestants in England were diametrically opposed: Catholics

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[5] See Zagorin, Chapter 9 and 10; Malloch, 'Father Henry Garnet's Treatise of Equivocation', *Recusant History*, 15.6 (1981), 387–395; Malloch, 'Equivocation: A Circuit of Reasons', in *Familiar Colloquy: Essays Presented to A. E. Barker*, ed. by Patricia Bruckmann ([Ottawa]: Oberon Press, 1978), 132–143; Milward, pp. 82–86; Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise. The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Chapter 10; Frank L. Huntley, '*Macbeth* and the Background of Jesuitical Equivocation', *PMLA* 79.4 (1964), 390–400; Malloch and Huntley, 'Some Notes on Equivocation' *PMLA*, 81.1 (1966), 145–46; Steven Mullaney, 'Lying Like Truth: Riddle, Representation and Treason in Renaissance England', in *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 116–137; Elliot Rose, *Cases of Conscience: Alternatives Open to Recusants and Puritans Under Elizabeth I and James I.* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), Chapter 6; Johann Peter Sommerville, 'The "New Art of Lying": Equivocation, Mental Reservation and Casuistry', in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Edmund Leites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

inescapably needed to argue for their right to conceal, while Protestants crucially needed to insist on their right to know certain pieces of information. In this chapter I will concentrate on the third, linguistic aspect of the debate, that is, on those sections of Persons's and Morton's arguments in which they deal with issues concerning the interpretation of utterances in a conversation: their attempts at defining ambiguity, their explorations of how meaning is produced and perceived, and what context needs to be considered in establishing the meaning of an utterance.

2. The Theological and Political Context

2.1. St. Augustine on Lying

In the centre of Persons's defence of (and Morton's attack on) mentally reserved qualifications is St. Augustine's definition of the *lie*. Persons begins the treatment of the topic by defining *truth*, following Aquinas's exposition and interpretation of St. Augustine, as a *correspondence between a person's understanding and the thing itself*:

> [according to] *S. Augustine, Veritas est qua ostenditur id quod est;* Truth is that, wherby is shewed that which is in deed, to wit in the vnderstanding, as *S. Thomas* interpreteth, saying, that *Veritas principaliter est in intellectu, secundariò verò in rebus:* Truth consisteth principally in the mind and vnderstanding, and secondarily in the thinges themselues, for which cause he approueth wel this other definition set downe by a Philosopher, *Veritas est adaequatio rei, & intellectus;* Truth is an equalling of the thing it selfe with mans vnderstanding, that is to say, when a man vnderstandeth a thing as it is in it selfe, and the thing in it self is in deed as it is vnderstood, then is it truth, and when this is not obserued riseth falsity.[6]

To lie, then, is to wilfully utter something that the speaker knows not to be true.[7]

Persons quotes three versions of Augustine's definition (conflated with an argument for interpreting 'vox' with the general meaning of 'sign' to provide for the possibility of including non-verbal qualifications in the production of meaning), which will enable him to refute Morton's argument that equivocation is a lie, by pointing out that it fails to fulfil one or another condition:

> *S. Augustine* defineth thus a lye: *Mendacium est falsa vocis significatio, cum intentione fallendi:* A lye is a false signification of speach, with intention to deceaue. In which definition or description rather *Thomas Morton* doth interprete, that by the word *vox,* as the most vsuall and principall signe, wherby mans mind is vttered, *S. Augustine* doth meane all kindes of signes, or signification whatsoeuer, either by word, writing, signes, or actions: [...] And to the imitation of this definition of *S. Augustine,* doe Schoole-Doctors frame diuers definitions to the same effect, as the *Maister* of the *Sentences* first out of *S.*

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[6] Robert Persons, *A treatise tending to mitigation tovvardes Catholike-subiectes in England*, STC (2nd ed.) / 19417 ([Saint-Omer: Printed by F. Bellet], 1607), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. Tt4ᵛ–Vv1ʳ.

[7] See Zagorin's Chapter 2 on the sources of Renaissance arguments (pp. 15–37), but especially pp. 20–25 on Augustine.

> *Augustine: Mentiri est contra mentem ire,* to lye is to goe against a mans owne mind and vnderstanding: and then againe of himselfe: *Mentiri est loqui contra hoc quod animo quis sentit, siue illud verum sit, siue non;* To lye is to speake against that which a man thinketh in his mind, whether it be true, or false: [...] so as the very essence of a lye consisteth in this that the speaker doe vtter wittingly that which he knoweth to be vntrue, and not in deed meant by him.[8]

He also makes a distinction between lie and deceit, to which he will only occasionally stick, and which Morton never acknowledges: at certain points of his argument, it is essential for Persons to exclude the hearer's understanding from ethical judgement, whereas Morton has to insist on the idea that when a false understanding in the hearer is the result of the intentional manipulation of speech, it is a lie and consequently unlawful. Whether a speech is a lie, Persons claims, depends exclusively on the correspondence between the speaker's understanding and words. A speech which according to this definition is not a lie, can nevertheless result in a mistaken understanding in the hearer: deceit.

> For that a lye is essentially made by that as hath byn said, when a man wittingly & willingly vttereth for truth, that which he knoweth to be false, though he should haue no expresse intention to deceaue; which deceipt is defined by diuers thus: *Decipere est falsam existimationem in alterius animum inducere, diuersum ab eo, quem habet is qui loquitur;* To deceaue is to ingender in anothers mans mind a false existimation, iudgement, or opinion of a thing different from the vnderstanding of the speaker, which deception if it be in wordes or signes only, it is called *dolus* or *fallacia,* guyle or fallacy; but if it be in worke, or deedes, as is buying, selling, and the like, it is called *fraus,* fraudulent dealing, wherof *S. Augustine* is to be seene in his second booke *De doctrina Christiana,* and *S. Thomas* in the second Part of his Summe, where he handleth this matter at large.[9]

The suggestion that creating a false concept in the hearer's mind is not an essential quality of a lie seems to be in contradiction with the definition that Persons gave only a few lines earlier. However, it is necessary for his argument, because it allows him to limit the question of whether something is a lie to the speaker's understanding, without reference to the hearer's understanding. Later on, he reformulates his characterisation of the lie in a five part definition which attempts to

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[8] Persons, *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Vv2[r].
[9] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Vv2[v].

invalidate the argument that the speaker's intention is to deceive. After quoting the two basic requirements for something to be a lie (uttering something the speaker believes to be false; intention to deceive), he extends his definition with further conditions. He argues that in the model case of the priest who says he is not a priest, mentally reserving that 'so as he would be bound to disclose it' the principal aim is (1) not to deceive the questioner (2) to his hurt but to save himself by (3) concealing the truth (4) he was not bound to utter, which is in fact (5) letting the other be deceived, rather than actively deceiving him.[10]

The argument that an utterance completed with a mentally reserved clause is true if the whole proposition is true (implicit in this justification of the lawfulness of the priest's reply), had been proposed earlier. Equivocation lacks a necessary quality of deceit, because its intention is not primarily to deceive (that is only a consequence), but to preserve some secret that being uttered would cause even greater injustice than hiding it does.[11] Furthermore, this intention is not evil, because its aim was to defend someone (in most cases the speaker himself), rather than to cause harm to the hearer or anybody else (although Persons obviously disregards the possibility that the two do not mutually exclude each other – as, for instance, in Garnet's case). Even if the information given by the speaker is not complete, and therefore it causes the hearer to misconceive the state of affairs, it is merely the concealment of some truth, which is not the same as stating an explicit falsehood about the same fact. The deceit, furthermore, cannot be properly said to be entirely the speaker's fault, because he simply allows the other to deceive himself.[12] Finally, Persons's definition

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[10] '[N]either this clause of the definition of lying is found in the said proposition, for that the Answerers first & principall intent is not to deceaue the demaunder to his hurt, but to deliuer himselfe by concealing a truth only, which truth he is not bound to vtter, & this in effect is to permit the other to be deceaued, and not properly to deceaue, or to haue intention or cupidity of deceauing, as *S. Augustines* wordes are', *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Ddd2^v–Ddd3^r.

[11] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Ddd3^v–Eee2^v.

[12] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Vv3^v–Vv4^r: 'then may he answere, as though he were alone, and no man by; for that he hath no necessary reference to him at all, nor to his demaundes, questions, or speach, but that he may frame to him selfe any proposition that is true in it selfe, and in

incorporates the most fundamental condition, the one that ultimately justifies the usage of mental reservation, the well-known casuistical principle of the unbinding force of the incompetent judge.[13] This last element will be a central target of Morton's later attacks, when he argues that even the fact that someone is not bound to reply plainly cannot save equivocal sentences from being lies, since there is an obvious contradiction between the verbalised parts of the propositions and the speaker's mind. This point will receive the most thorough examination by Morton in *The encounter* (1610) after Persons in *A quiet and sober reckoning* (1609) claims that even the same proposition containing a mental reservation (i.e. not only the verbalised part) can be or not be a lie, depending on the competence of the judge.

2.2. Garnet's Trial[14]

As an indication of the political context and the main issues that were discussed publicly after the Gunpowder Plot, it is worth briefly looking at the proceedings of Henry Garnet's trial, published anonymously in English in 1606, and under William Camden's name in Latin in 1607. The account of Garnet's trial occupies roughly 300 of the approximately 400 page long *A True and perfect relation of the whole*

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his owne sense & meaning, though the other that heareth vnderstand it in a different sense and meaning, & be therby deceaued. Neither is this to deceaue another, but to permit him that offreth me iniury, and is no Superiour of mine in that cause, to be deceaued by my doubtfull speach, and by concealing that which I am not bound to vtter vnto him'.

[13] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Vv3^r–Vv3^v. pp. 341–342: 'Now then to apply all this to our present purpose, about the former proposition, *I am no Priest* reseruing in mind the other clause, *So as I am bound to vtter it vnto yow:* Schoole-Deuines doe easely shew that such a proposition, according to the definitions before set downe, of truth, falsity, deceipt, lying, and periury may be in certaine cases, and with due circumstances truly auouched, and sworne without incurring any sinne at all; and I say *in some cases,* and *with due circumstances,* for that hereupon dependeth much the lawfulnes of the thing. For that if a Priest (for example) should be asked this question by his lawful Superiour or Iudge, to whome the conusans [sic!] of the thing demaunded, did lawfully appertaine, and that the said Iudge demaunded lawfully, that is say, according to order of law and iustice; then were he bound vnder paine of mortall sinne to answere truly and directly: although it were with euident daunger of his owne life, or of others.'

[14] See Philip Caraman, *Henry Garnet, 1555–1606, and the Gunpowder Plot* (London: Longmans, 1964), pp. 396–440.

proceedings againſt the late moſt barbarous traitors, Garnet a Ieſuite, and his

confederats contayning sundry speeches deliuered by the Lords commissioners at

their arraignments for the better satisfaction of those that were hearers, as occasion

was offered: the Earle of Northamptons speech hauing bene enlarged vpon those

grounds which are set downe: and lastly all that passed at Garnets execution.[15]

The account begins with Sir Edward Coke's speech in which he lists the charges
against Garnet as the Superior of the Jesuit Order in England. According to the
authorities, even if Garnet did not personally participate in the plot, he knew about it
from Greenwell's confession, and encouraged the conspirators by not forbidding it,
by absolving the participants in advance, by not reporting it to the authorities, and
simply by representing the Pope's foreign authority in England.[16] He is also charged
with authorising the *Treatise of Equivocation*, 'wherein under the pretext of the
lawfulnesse of a mixt proposition to expresse one part of a man's mind, and retaine
another, people are indeed taught not onely simple lying,[17] but fearefull and
damnable blasphemie.' The doctrine of mental reservation makes interrogation
practically useless.[18]

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[15] [Anon.], *A True and perfect relation of the whole proceedings against the late most barbarous traitors, Garnet a Iesuite, and his confederats*, STC (2nd ed.) / 11619a.5 (London: Robert Barker, 1606), STC (2nd ed.) / 11619a.5., in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>, [accessed 1 July, 2011].

[16] Jesuits, as the 'authors' of the Gunpowder Plot, are argued to be like Satan who, for tempting Adam and Eve, got the most serious punishment: 'For the proper name of this offence, because I must speake of severall treasons, for distinction and separation of this from the other, I will name it the Jesuites treason, as belonging them to *ex congruo et condigno,* they were the proprietaries, plotters, and procurers of it, and in such crimes *plus peccat author quam actor,* the author or procurer offendeth more then the actor or executor, as may appeare by Gods owne judgement given against the first sinne in Paradise, where the serpent had three punishments inflicted upon him, as the original plotter; the woman two, being as the mediate procurer; and Adam but one, as the partie seduced.' *A true and perfect relation...*, sig. P1^v.

[17] Cf. also '*they doe outwardly to the world condemne lying* [...] *But it is open and broade lying and forswearing, not secret and close lying and perjurie, or swearing a falshoode which is most abominable, and without defence or example. And if they allow it not generally in others, yet a least in themselves, their confederates and associates in treasonable practises, they will both warrant and defend it, especially when it may serve their turne for such proposes and endes as they looke after.*' *A true and perfect relation...*, sig. Y4^v.

[18] 'whereas the Jesuites aske why wee convict and condemne them not for heresie, it is for that they will equivocate, and so cannot that that way be tryed or judged according to their words'. *A True and perfect relation...*, sig. T2^r.

To emphasise the hideousness of equivocation, Coke – followed by the authors of the ensuing pamphlets – uses markedly repulsive imagery, exploiting some of the most inexplicable, irrational human anxieties, centring around a discourse of sexual aberration. Apart from suggesting – but never explicitly stating – an unchaste relationship between Henry Garnet and the loyal Anne Vaux,[19] Sir Edward Coke also employs the seriously confused four lines from Walter Mapes's poem:

> For these *Iesuites*, they indeede make no vow of speaking trueth, and yet euen this Equiuocating, and lying is a kinde of vnchastitie, against which they vow and promise: For as it hath beene said of olde, *Cor linguae foederat naturae sanctio, veluti in quodam certo Connubio. Ergo cum dissonent cor et loquutio, Sermo concipitur in Adulterio*,[20] that is, The law and Sanction of Nature, hath (as it were) married the heart and tongue, by ioyning and knitting of them together in a certaine kinde of marriage; and therefore when there is discorde between them two, the speech that proceedes from them, is said to be conceiued in Adulterie, and he that breedes such bastard children offends against Chastitie. But note the heauy and wofull fruit of this doctrine of Equiuocation.[21]

Equivocation, according to Sir Edward Coke, means saying one thing while thinking something else. It is the law of nature that the tongue and the heart *should be* tied together by a kind of marriage bond. If the bond is broken (or is non-existent) and a speech is conceived, the act constitutes adultery. The speech born in this way is a bastard, a rotten fruit grown on the tree of equivocation. An internal tension almost

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[19] Cf. Garnet's almost final words on the scaffold: 'Then turning himselfe from the people to them about him, he made an apologie for Mistresse Anne Vaux, saying, *There is such an honourable gentlewoman who hath bene much wronged in report. For it is suspected and said that I should be married to her, or worse. But I protest the contrary. She is a vertuous gentlewoman, and for me a perfect pure virgin.' A true and perfect relation...*, sig. Fff2[v].

[20] These four lines come from a 797 line poem *De Palpone et Assentatore* (Of the Flatterer and Sycophant) attributed to Walter Mapes. See *Notes and Queries*, 72 (March, 1851), p. 213. The poem was published from a manuscript in Walter Mapes, *The Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes*, collected and edited by Thomas Wright (London: printed for the Camden Society by John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1841). The lines are a slightly altered version of ll. 209–212. The poem begins with an approximately 200-line mock praise of the sycophant, after which it turns into a serious warning against such deceit. The heart should be the head of the tongue (just like man to wife), otherwise the flattering lie that leaves the mouth corrupts it, prostitutes the tongue and what is brought forth is adulterous: 'Palpo turpissimus et praeco turpium, / linguam prostituit ob leve pretium; / os enim violat omne mendacium, / et linguam polluit per adulterium. / Cor linguae caput est, sicut vir feminae, / ut ejus copula foetetur famine, / maechatur igitur in verbi germine, / quod non concipitur ex cordis semine. / *Cor linguae foederat naturae sanctio, / tanquam legitimo quodam connubio; / ergo cum dissonant cor et locutio, / sermo concipitur ex adulterio.* / Lingua pro conjuge cordi se copulat; / sed quando famina mente non regulat, / viri legitimi thorum commaculat, / et matrimonii foedus effibulat.' (201–216).

[21] *A True and perfect relation...*, sig. T2[v]–T3[r].

bursts this image into pieces: on the one hand, it demonstrates a desire for a natural necessity of a mutual correspondence between the heart and the tongue (that the heart could be unequivocally read from the tongue), but on the other hand it suggests that speech, after all, can be born without their unity.[22]

Garnet's response, in which he admits having used and taught equivocation, and that the English laws against such concealment are just, is followed by the Earl of Salisbury's speech. He argues that Catholics' claim that what they did was all in the service of their faith is hypocritical,[23] and that Garnet's equivocation was in fact not merely the concealment of truth, but a plain lie: 'Such have been the iniquitie of false tongues, who have always sought to proove the trueth a liar'.[24] Garnet defends his actions (and using equivocation in general) by arguing that nobody is bound to incriminate him/herself.[25] Salisbury here employs a form of the 'bloody question':[26] if James was excommunicated (like Elizabeth), would his subjects still be bound to remain obedient? According to the account, Garnet did not reply anything, which, although Catholic authorities considered this the best response, Salisbury interpreted to the worst: '*Master Garnet, give mee but one argument that you were not consenting to it, that can hold in any indifferent mans eare or sense, besides your bare negative.* But Garnet replyed not.'[27] Salisbury's interrogation is followed by

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[22] Cf Morton's less confused imagery combining puns with the equivocation as adultery trope: 'the craft of Vintners in the mixing and colouring of their wines is called *Adulterare,* adulterating of the wine. Compare this craft of mixture of wine with your Aequiuocation, which you call *A mixt proposition*, and what shall you perceiue else but an artificiall adultery?' Thomas Morton, *A full satisfaction concerning a double Romish iniquitie*, STC (2nd ed.) / 18185 (London: Printed by Richard Field for Edmond Weauer, 1606), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], Part III, sig. L2^v–L3^r. Signatures restart at the beginning of Part III, therefore I indicate it every time when the reference is to this section.

[23] 'what horrible Treasons haue bene couered vnder the mantle of Religion', sig. Y2^r–Y2^v.

[24] *A True and perfect relation…*, sig. Y2^v. Cf. Macbeth's 'lies like truth'.

[25] Gary Wills (*Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth* (New York: New York Public Library; New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)) draws a parallel between this argument and the Fifth Amendment to the US Constitution (p. 94. n. 4).

[26] Cf. Huntley, pp. 392–395, Zagorin, p. 190.

[27] *A True and perfect relation…*, sig. Y4^r; Cf. also the narrator's comment: 'by which the hearers might see his mind'. As Brian Cummings points out ('Swearing in Public: More and Shakespeare', *English Literary Renaissance*, 27.2 (1997), 197–232, p. 207), this was standard procedure in cases

Northampton's speech, which is more interesting because of its application of the imagery frequently employed throughout the controversy than the depth of its arguments.[28] At this point Garnet is allowed to give his response, which is then greeted with a rather equivocal acknowledgement: 'Hereupon my Lord Admirall said to Garnet that he had done more good this day in that pulpit which he stood in (for it was made like unto a pulpit wherein he stood) then hee had done all the dayes of his life in any other pulpit',[29] after which Garnet was found guilty in fifteen minutes.[30]

Most of what remains of the account (approximately one half of the whole) is occupied by Northampton's speech, in which he employs historical and biblical examples to refute several Catholic arguments that according to him destabilise independent countries, including the Pope's superiority and right to depose princes.[31] In an interesting passage, he envisages the apocalyptic consequences of the Catholics' ungratefulness for the leniency that King James showed to them:

> his [James's] right, his heart, his tongue hath wished happinesse and brought
> securitie to this State, which if you and your confederats disdaine or wilfully
> reiect, his owne good wishes shall returne to himselfe, and the dust of those
> harmelesse feet, that neuer were *veloces ad effundendum sanguinem,* swift or
> hasty to shed blood, shall raise a cloud betweene you and that eternall Iudge in
> the dreadfull day to plague your ingratitude. For what is the fault (in the Name of
> God) that can offend the most precise and captious conceits (excepting

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where swearing was required from witnesses or convicts: 'Once under oath, a refusal to answer any particular question was also tantamount to confession, and was read in the wrst possible light'.

[28] Northampton mocks and denounces Catholics employing such favourite *topoi* as e.g. the pun on bull as a Papal document and as an animal (Z4[v], Aa1[r]), the comparison of equivocation to Gyges' ring ('By shaping such weake answeres to demonstrations so manifest, you must either worke by the ring of Giges in making your audacitie and presumption invisible, or hold a very weake conceipt of our capacities in supposing that they can be either daselled or deluded by such poore sophistry', Bb1[r]), and a series of attacks drawing parallels between Satan, the snake and gunpowder.

[29] *A True and perfect relation…*, sig. Cc4[r]. Cf. the description of the Thane of Cawdor's execution: 'MALCOLM. My liege, / They are not yet come back. But I have spoke / With one that saw him die, who did report / That very frankly he confessed his treasons, / Implored your highness' pardon, and set forth / A deep repentance. *Nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving it.* He died / As one that had been studied in his death / To throw away the dearest thing he owed, / As 'twere a careless trifle.' Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by Nicholas Brooke, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1.4.2–11.

[30] *A True and perfect relation…*, sig. Cc4[v].

[31] 'For what prince under heaven can repute his state secure, so long as every small distaste to the Popes desire may ground a chalenge, the chalenge may procure a citation, the citation may produce a sentence, the sentence either neglected or not satisfied inferres contumacy, and contumacy deprives the supposed delinquent of that honour which nature gives, conscience avowes, and consent fortified?'

conscience, for which he must neither account to *Bruno* or *Ignatius*, but to God alone), wherein the King may bee said to haue cast dust in their eyes, that were most violent and diligent in preparing fuell, and making fire for the sacrificing of a Lambe, whose innocent blood, like that of *Abel*, would have cried for vengeance in the eare of God, against the cursed crew of all the conspirators, if their successe had bin fortunate.[32]

King James's dusts will form a cloud that blocks Catholics' access to the divine grace on the Judgement Day. The king caused no harm to Catholics ('cast dust in their eyes') that would justify murdering him, therefore, had the Gunpowder Plot been successful, his 'innocent blood... would have cried for vengeance in the eare of God'. The imagery that Northampton uses to envisage the working of divine judgement on Catholics (a deed returning to oneself, the crime plaguing the criminal, the dust in the eye, the victim's qualities crying out for judgement) is strikingly similar to Macbeth's vision (even though the functions of the specific elements are radically different):[33]

> But in these cases
> We still have judgement here, that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which being taught, return
> To plague th'inventor. This even-handed justice
> Commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice
> To our own lips. (...)
> Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtue
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off;
> And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or Heaven's cherubim, horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye[34]
> That tears shall drown the wind.
>
> (*Macbeth*, 1.7.7–24.)[35]

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[32] *A True and perfect relation*…, sig. Ccc2ᵛ.

[33] Gary Wills finds parallels between the second half of the soliloquy and Southwell's *The Burning Babe* (pp. 131–136).

[34] Wills connects this image more generally to the (gun)powder imagery of the aftermath of the plot (pp. 28–29).

[35] The text of *Macbeth* is quoted according to Nicholas Brooke's edition (The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)).

In my last chapter, I examine the complex relationship between the text of *Macbeth* and the controversy about equivocation. This might be an example of the discourse's influence on Shakespeare's text, although, as I will attempt to demonstrate, the extent of that influence might be less significant than is usually assumed.

After Northampton's speech, the verdict is announced: Garnet will be hung, drawn and quartered.[36] The final pages of the volume narrate Garnet's execution.[37] In line with the tradition of scaffold narratives, Garnet is presented acknowledging the sin he committed, and being repentant for it, while simultaneously emphasising the King's justness.[38] While it is suggested twice in the short account that the authorities are still not certain whether Garnet had confessed everything he knew without mentally reserving part of it,[39] the account ends with a grim pun:

> requiring him not to Equiuocate with his last breath, if he knew any thing that might bee danger to the King or State, he should now vtter it. *Garnet* said it is no time now to Equiuocate: how it was lawfull, and when, he had shewed his minde elsewhere. But sayth he, I doe not now Equiuocate, and more then I haue confessed I doe not know. At his ascending up the Ladder, hee desired to have warning before he was turned off. But it was tolde him he must looke for no other turne but death.[40]

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[36] [Anon.] *A True and perfect relation…*, sig. Eee4ᵛ.

[37] [Anon.] *A True and perfect relation…*, sig. Fff1ʳ–Fff3ᵛ.

[38] Cf. Rebecca Lemon, 'Scaffolds of Treason in *Macbeth*', *Theatre Journal*, 54.1, *Tragedy* (2002), 25–43 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25069019>, [accessed 6 February, 2012], who gives further references. Interestingly, even though she mentions Garnet's trial, and even quotes scaffold speeches by other conspirators from *A true and perfect relation…* as a background to her analysis of Cawdor's execution in *Macbeth*, she does not make the connection between Garnet's and Cawdor's behaviour. See also Mullaney (p. 117), who mentions Cawdor in connection with the Gowrie conspiracy.

[39] This discourse of anxiety and uncertainty of what is within Garnet's conscience, although especially relevant in this particular case, also follows the well-established pattern of heresy, treason and adultery trials. Cf. Cummings, 'Swearing in Public: More and Shakespeare', pp. 223–224.

[40] [Anon.] *A True and perfect relation…*, sig. Fff3ʳ.

3. The Controversy

3.1. Morton, *An exact discoverie of Romish Doctrine*

The controversy begins with Thomas Morton's *An exact discoverie of Romish doctrine*, presumably written in the immediate aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot and, according to the title page, published in 1605.[41] The *An exact discoverie* consists of quotations from Catholic teachings on the left page and their translation and explanation on the right, with examples for their application. Morton's main purpose is to expose the moral corruption of the Catholics in England, and most of all, of their priests who are the masterminds and organisers of all recent plots.[42] He promises to prove through ten reasons, that Catholics in general, and seminary priests in particular, are seditious and instigate subjects to renounce their duties to their lawful sovereign,[43] which is manifest in their permission to use mental reservation with her officers.

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[41] Milward (p. 82; pp. 86–87.) believes that it had been published before the Gunpowder Plot was revealed, but it is likely that he overlooked two references in the book. In Chapter 6, arguing that whoever intends, plans or carries out the murder of a king is a traitor, after a list of conspirators from the past, Morton turns to the present: '*And now at this present, behold, and be astonished. A fornace prouided to consume at once, not onely the King, but also (because an absolute state assembled) the whole kingdome.*' (*An exact discoverie of Romish doctrine*, STC (2nd ed.) / 18184.5 (London: Imprinted by Felix Kyngston, for C. B[urby] and E. W[eaver], 1605), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. E1^r). He goes on to suggest – like Sir Edward Coke on Garnet's trial – that Catholic priests were the actual masterminds behind the Plot. In his conclusion, he returns to the same topic: 'Now in conclusion, doe but consider the last (I pray God euer the last) treason, and see whether it may not challenge the name of *Legion*, seeing there is found in it so many murderous spirits, intending and attempting in one *blow* so many execrable murders' (sig. H3^r–H3^v). Furthermore, in *A treatise tending to mitigation*, Persons rebukes Morton's book for inciting hatred against all Catholics in general, while the Plot was the work of 'priuate and particuler passion', condemned by the obedient majority of Catholic subjects (Persons, *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. B2^v).

[42] 'Durst these Inginers doe any such thing without direction from their priests? First, they conspire by oath vnder the seale of the (here is a priest) *Sacrament*. Secondly, he that was to put fire to it runneth once and againe to the Seminarie at Doway, doubtlesse to consult with that priestly Oracle. Thirdly, he will not bewray his complices, except he may be warranted by a priest. And that this kinde of act is their priestly function, will appeare in the subsequents.' *An exact discoverie*, sig. E1^r–E2^r.

[43] Morton quotes Gregory, Gratian and cases from the Allen–Persons collection to demonstrate his points. *An exact discoverie*, sig. B1^r–C1^r.

Illustration 1: Morton, *An exact discoverie of Romish Doctrine*

Morton devotes only a few pages to the presentation of equivocation, therefore his treatise lacks detail in its discussion of the technicalities.[44] The doctrine is a common practice with Catholic priests, and, as Morton jests quoting Navarrus, 'it is thought to have crept out of their S. Francis sleeues'. Catholics commit perfidy and treachery because they violate their oaths when they swear with mental reservation. Morton's judgement on what should be done to Catholics is plain: 'Those Snakes that doe naturally sting, as soone as they get warmth, may not be harboured in the bosome of the Common-wealth'.[45]

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[44] *An Exact Discoverie*, G1ʳ–G2ʳ.
[45] *An Exact Discoverie*, E4ʳ–F3ʳ.

3.2. Morton, *A full satisfaction concerning Romish Doctrine*

The book that eventually dragged Persons into the controversy was Morton's *A full satisfaction*, published in 1606, in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot.[46] At the beginning of the refutation of 'the wicked doctrine of equivocation', Morton's densely abusive language sums up most of the charges he lays against mental reservation and those who practise it:

> I am now to encounter this new-bred Hydra, and vglie Monster, which lurked a while in the inuisible practise of the Aequiuocating sect; but at length being discouered, is now by the Arch-priest drawen into publicke by a solemne Approbation, as it were a golden chaine, that it might heereby appeare lesse monstrous.[47]

Equivocation is a recently hatched monster, an unnatural mixture of verbal and mental clauses, the product of rape committed on the virgin truth, the chastity of the soul: 'the craft of Vintners in the mixing and colouring of their wines is called *Adulterare,* adulterating of the wine. Compare this craft of mixture of wine with your Aequiuocation, which you call *A mixt proposition,* and what shall you perceiue else but an artificiall adultery?'[48] Its creation is to be attributed exclusively to the Jesuits, 'the new Theologicall Alchymists of our time, able to abstract *Aurum ex carbone, Truth out of a lie*'.[49] There is a double sense of concealing involved. On the one hand, Jesuits have been keeping the doctrine hidden, but now that it has been exposed, they are forced to change their strategy and defend what even they know to be contemptible. On the other hand, equivocation itself is about hiding what the other has the right to know. The act of equivocating is like turning Gyges' ring in Plato's

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[46] Milward, pp. 82–83.
[47] *A full satisfaction*, sig. F4ʳ.
[48] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. L2ᵛ–L3ʳ.
[49] *A full satisfaction*, Part III. sig. N3ᵛ.

Republic[50] (Morton's reference is to Cicero's *De officiis,* Book 3[, 38]), which no honest man would do:

> So our Aequiuocator, when happily he shall turne his aequiuocating clause outward to manifest it in speech, he lieth open and is easily knowen for a disloial subiect: but when he keepeth it close in his mind, hee is imboldened to practise against his King. But the Heathen Oratour intreating of the property of an honest man, he would haue him tried by the opportunity of Gyges ring: *No good man* (saith he) *would abuse it, because honest men do not seeke meanes how they may be secretly euill, but alwaies resolue to be absolutely good*.[51]

Morton sums up the effects of equivocation in four points: 1. Equivocation '[d]issolueth the naturall policie of all kingdomes'. Equivocation eliminates the basis of any kind of commerce (the trust in the given word confirmed by oath), by allowing for formulating oaths in a way that they can be misunderstood: 'if the secret intention might excuse from lying, then could neuer any haue beene iustly condemned for periury or false witnesse.'[52] 2. Equivocation '[c]hallengeth all Romish Priests and their adherents in this kingdome to the racke', because according to the Catholic doctrine it is only when Catholics are tortured that they cease to be bound to conceal their knowledge with the help of equivocation.[53] 3. Equivocation '[g]aineth the infamie of deceit and lying vpon the professed Aequiuocators.' The doctrine allows its practisers to equivocate even when they are asked whether they are speaking plainly or not, therefore potentially producing a circle of equivocal denials. 'This is that monster which I called *Hydra,* which, as Poets faine, Hercules did impugne; in the which as often as one head was strucke off, immediatly there

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[50] 2.359c–360d. Gyges and his ring of invisibility occur in an argument which Glaucon puts forward to challenge Socrates into proving his claim that being moral is intrinsically good. When Gyges figures out that the ring he accidentally found can make him invisible, he uses it to usurp the throne. According to Glaucon, whether a good or a bad person had Gyges' ring, they would both use it to commit immoral actions, because it would save them from being found out. According to Glaucon, Gyges' story demonstrates nobody acts morally out of their free choice, but only if they are forced to do so.

[51] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, L2ᵛ.

[52] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. N1ᵛ. Cf. Sir Edward Coke's argument at Garnet's trial ('And whereas the Jesuites aske why wee convict and condemne them not for heresie, it is for that they will equivocate, and so cannot that way be tried or judged according to their words…' [Anon.] *A True and perfect relation*…, sig. T2ʳ.)

[53] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. N1ᵛ–N2r.

sprung vp another; signifying an endlesse businesse.' Thus, Catholics who are known to practice equivocation will not be believed any more at any time, even though they sometimes may be telling the truth.[54] 4. Equivocation '[b]egetteth scandall to soules, blasphemies against Christ in the profession of the holy faith.' Equivocating 'by *a clause reserued and concealed in your thought,* (which God onely, *The only searcher of the heart seeth)* no man can discerne in your speech any thing but *apparance* of damnable lying', therefore Catholics commit blasphemy and act against God's prohibition of wickedness and are worse than some heathens, because by actively supporting the doctrine, they in fact 'hinder vnbeleeuers from the faith'.[55]

Morton's reason for writing his treatise was, first, to protect subjects from being deceived by equivocation, and second, to discourage subjects from deceiving with it.[56] As these points demonstrate, equivocation is harmful for both parties: it endangers the proper functioning of the state, and as a means of defence, the state will have to employ extraordinary measures against those who use, or are likely to use, equivocation. Those who employ equivocation in oaths 'swear Sophistically, turning *esse* into *edere*, thereby to deceiue the hearer', and nevertheless expect their fellow citizens to believe them.[57] If their answers are taken at face value (like Odysseus's 'Nobody'), because of the deceptive feeling of confidence they create with deceitful speech, it will be already too late when the hidden qualification comes to the light, and the Jesuits will have committed treachery with the help of their ring of invisibility, *equivocation*. The only effective strategy against them is overall disbelief in whatever they claim, because otherwise they would be able to fool the state by blinding it with unnoticeable equivocations, and making it miserable like Polyphemus, who lost his only eye by the treachery of Odysseus:

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[54] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. N2[r].
[55] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. N2[v]–N3[r].
[56] *A full satisfaction*, Epistle Dedicatory, [no pg. number], sig. A4[r].
[57] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. M1[r].

the authors of Aequiuocation are by it, as by a *Gyges* ring, made in a sort inuisible vnto Protestants to plot and practise against them what & when they wil, and Vlysses-like make a verie *Polyphemus* of your most noble State, that whensoeuer they be asked, who is the Traitor, licence themselues during life to answer (till they be conuicted) by that aequiuocating οὖτις[58]: that therefore against such as cannot hurt vs but by our credulitie, there may be enacted, (the onely refuge of Tullie) *Lex non credendi; a law of not beleeuing them.*[59]

Morton exposes deceit incorporated in Catholic doctrine by citing several authorities (Toletus, Allen, Persons, Gregory Martin) who argue that it is lawful to reply ambiguously in unjust inquiries or to incompetent judges, and that as a result of Pope Pius V's Bull *Regnans in Excelsis*, Catholics regard English judges as incompetent;[60] for instance, when Navarrus speaks of heretics, he specifically means the English: '*It is lawfull for a Catholike (except it be in question concerning his faith) to equiuocate* (speaking expresly of English Magistrates) *before Heretikes*'.[61] Among the examples for cases in which equivocation occurred, he mentions the charges from Garnet's trial: that he equivocated about speaking to Hall when they were imprisoned in adjacent cells,[62] and that according to Garnet's own admission, Tresham must have equivocated when he revoked his earlier confession in which he incriminated Garnet as familiar with the conspirators' plans.[63]

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[58] 'Nobody', the reply Odysseus, as a gesture of accepting hospitality, gave to Polyphemos before blinding him, when he, drunk with the wine he got from Odysseus, asked for his name. Cf. *Odyssey*, IX. 364–370; the story is partially also told by Achaemenides in *Aeneid*, 3.588–691. Later in the story, when those of the crew who survived are already safe from Polyphemus, Odysseus boastingly tells him his real name, in response to which Polyphemus recalls the prophecy that warned him that he would loose his sight by the hands of Odysseus, but he expected the person to be of more than human looks, therefore he did not suspect Odysseus. The ensuing troubles over sea are Poseidon's revenge for Odysseus' mutilation of his son the Cyclops (*Odyssey*, IX. 500–566). Odysseus's disguising of his identity is ambiguous: on the one hand, it saves them from the Cyclops, but on the other hand, it is ultimately the cause of the loss of his men. The parallels between Odysseus and the priests hiding their identities with false names and ambiguous replies are obvious, and the ever-deceitful oracle also fits nicely in the topic.

[59] *A full satisfaction*, Epistle Dedicatory, [no pg. number], sig. A4ʳ.

[60] *A full satisfaction*, sig. M3ʳ–M4ʳ.

[61] According to a marginal note, 'Coram haereticis *(loquitur de Iudicibus Anglicanis)* potest Catholicus vel recusare (quod est prudentius) vel sophistice iurans et interrogatis, nisi quantum interrogatur de fide, sophistice respondere. *Nauar. cap, 12. num.* 8.', sig. M4ʳ.

[62] This was a trick of the English authorities to be able to eavesdrop on them, and to prove that Garnet used equivocation in a situation in which he would, even according to his own judgement, be bound to confess it without equivocation.

[63] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. M4ᵛ–N1ʳ.

General disbelief towards Catholics, therefore, is justified, as it would be towards the seemingly true prophecies of pagan oracles (the closest parallels one can find to the way Catholics deceive),[64] as in Pyrrhus's case where 'the aequiuocating Oracle might be found to haue sayd trueth'. In making this argument palpable, Morton is definitely aided by one of the less carefully chosen examples that authorities suggest as a possible clause to be reserved:

> You will aequiuocate in the question concerning your Priesthood, saying and swearing *against your knowledge* that you are *no Priest,* by some secret reseruation of minde; as according to the example of one of your fellowes, *I am no Priest;* meaning, *No Priest <Apollonis>:* as though an aequiuocating Priest can consort with any better than with those Satanicall Priests of the Pagan god *Apollo.* For all their answers (as euery scholar knoweth) from their Oracles was by Amphibologies and Aequiuocations.[65]

Morton's attack on the doctrine of equivocation itself consists of four main arguments. Firstly, the word 'equivocation' is not used in the proper sense, and it is important to distinguish between verbal and mental equivocation.[66] Secondly, the distinction that is allowed in equivocation between a primary and a secondary intended meaning is false and results in deceitful speeches.[67] Thirdly, the fact that the mentally reserved qualification is necessarily imperceptible to the hearer makes it equally deceptive.[68] Finally, because it provides the possibility of an infinite chain of equivocating about equivocation, no oaths can be taken seriously anymore.[69]

The distinction between *verbal* and *mental* equivocation is central to Morton's argument throughout the controversy. While what is properly called equivocation is a word, a phrase or a sentence structure that inherently bears more than one meaning present in the utterance itself, mental reservation consists of two contradictory and in no way related propositions, one uttered, the other only thought, and therefore it

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[64] Cf. Puttenham's discussion of the ambiguity of prophecies; see my Chapter 6, Section 3.2.
[65] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. M2[v].
[66] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. F4[v]–G4[r]. pp. 48–55.
[67] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. G2[v]–G3[r].
[68] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. H1[r]–H2[v], Part III, sig. I3[r], Part III, N2[v]–N3[r].
[69] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, N2[r].

qualifies as a lie according to St. Augustine's definition.[70] Morton quotes Aristotle's definition for *homonymia* from the *Sophistical Refutations* to establish what proper equivocation is:

> *Aequiuocation in word or speech* (sayth the Oracle of all Logicians)[71] *is when one word or one speech doth equally signifie diuers things.* ... But your *mixt* and patched *proposition* is not one word or speech signifying equally diuers things; but contrarily (as you pretend) diuers parts of speech (one in the minde, and another in the mouth) signifying one thing: for, *I am no Priest,* and *To tell it to the,* what words can be more different?[72]

In that light, Morton sets out to reinterpret some of the most common biblical examples that Catholic theologians used to justify mental reservation, and to demonstrate that they contain verbal, rather than mental, ambiguity. His aim is to prove that the figures in the Bible, most importantly Christ, used speeches that may have been misleading to some that were unaware of how to interpret them properly, but all depended on words or phrases that were 'naturally' ambiguous.

He begins the examination of the *New Testament* examples with Jesus's words to his disciples 'All things which I haue heard of my Father haue I manifested vnto you' (John, 15. 15). It is not a concealed reservation that completes this statement so that it accords with the doctrine (that he could not have told everything to the disciples), but the circumstances of 'state, place, time, or condition of the persons speaking, or to whom they were spoken'; more specifically, in this case it is the common

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[70] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. F4ᵛ: '*verball* Aequiuocation, whether it be *vocall,* that is, vttered in the voice, or *literall,* that is, expressed in writing: when one word shall import two or moe different significations'; '*mentall* reseruation [is] in the mind, differing from that which I outwardly expresse, whether it be by voice or writing.'

[71] 'Dare you appeale vnto Logicke? This is the Art of all Arts, and the high Tribunall of reason and truth it selfe, which no man in any matter, whether it be case of humanity or diuinity can iustly refuse. Consult therefore with the ancient Logicians, and proue (marke what scope I yeeld vnto you) that from the beginning of the world in the whole currant of so many thousand generations of mankinde, till within the compasse of these last foure hundred yeeres, and lesse, that euer any Logician, whether Infidell or Beleeuer, did allow your *mixt proposition* (which is partly *mentall,* and partly *verball*) or thinke it a Proposition: and I will be (which my soule vtterly detesteth) an Aequiuocator.' *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. G3ᵛ–G4ʳ. This is a challenge Persons will happily accept and, taking Morton's hyperbole literally, mocks him for not knowing how many generations have passed since the creation. It is also important from the perspective of the later treatises that Morton acknowledges the infallibility of Aristotle.

[72] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. G3ᵛ–G4ʳ.

understanding that he told them all the things 'that appertaine vnto you to be knowen'. 'So then heere is no concealed sense to deceiue the hearer, but it is euident by circumstance of speech.'[73]

His discussion of the second example (taken from Garnet) reveals more of the way in which seemingly unambiguous words can be seen as ambiguous. Jesus told his disciples that he did not know the day of the Last Judgement (Mark, 13. 32), whereas because of his omniscience, he must have known it. The disciples, however, already know that it is not fit for them to know the day of judgement, therefore there is no need to suppose an unspoken reservation in this case, where the qualification is obvious from earlier knowledge. Christ's sentence, furthermore, is not a lie because 'nescio' is ambiguous: 'he maketh the sense of the word *Nescio,* I know it not, to be a figuratiue speech, and by the emphasis of pronunciation to signifie so much to his Disciples, as you *shall not know.*' Just as 'drowsy or pleasant day' can refer to a quality of the day, as well as the day's potential to make us pleased or drowsy, 'nescio' can mean 'I do not know' and 'I do not know it for you to know'.[74]

One further example taken from Garnet should also be considered. Morton enters into a textual critical debate with Garnet about the problem of whether in Jesus's sentence 'I will not go not vp to the feast at Hierusalem',[75] 'non' (not) or 'nondum' (not yet) should be understood.[76] It already seemed somewhat unconvincing when Garnet made the argument from probability that because the Vulgate has 'non', Catholics are supposed to stick to this reading, even as he admited that all the Greek and some Latin versions have 'οὔπω' ('nondum', not yet). Once the 'not yet' reading is accepted, Morton's task is easy: Christ said he will not go yet, but that is not in contradiction with his later deeds at all. What is more relevant, however, is the

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[73] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. J4^v–K1^r.
[74] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. K2^r.
[75] John 7. 8, as quoted by Morton, Part III, p. K3^v.
[76] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. K3^v–K4^v. In *De mendacio*, Abbot refuted the same example on similar grounds.

problem that, as Persons will point out,[77] even the disciples understood Christ's words as if he had said he would not go to the festival at all, and it was only a few pages earlier that Morton reproved his contemporary Catholics for thinking that they can understand Jesus's words better than his disciples who had firsthand knowledge of his language usage.[78] The example reveals another problem: if the disciples indeed misunderstood Christ, then even if his sentence was verbally ambiguous, it was just as misleading as if it had been mentally equivocal. From the point of view of the hearer the two types of ambiguity are equally misleading. Such interpretation of the statement as ambiguous is made possible only with the hindsight that Jesus later did actually appear at the festival, which reveals that both the Catholic and the Protestant parties assume a position that is quite different from that of someone involved in an actual situation where he would have to choose the correct interpretation without such insight. The theologian's position is fundamentally different, even though they supposedly examine such situation as if they had been participants.

As can be seen from the two examples above, Morton's interpretation does not differ substantially from the way Catholics understand these texts: his main counterargument is that the qualification lies in the words themselves. Morton's argument throughout is that the condition that qualifies these speeches is not in Christ's mind, but implicit in the speech, logically deducible from the circumstances in which it is spoken. Morton even manages to reverse the arguments that are supposed to support the Catholic reasoning in such a way that they seem to backfire. Catholics argue that equivocation is lawful because Christ (and others in the Bible) used it. But since the equivocator's purpose with the manipulation of meaning is to delude the hearer, 'will you say now therefore that Christ did aequiuocate, that is,

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[77] Persons, *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Tt1ʳ–Tt1ᵛ.
[78] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. K2ʳ.

delude and deceiue his Disciples? This were blasphemy.'[79] Finally, Morton argues,

even if ambiguous words can sometimes be lawful to use 'in common speech', both

types of equivocation would be unlawful with oaths,[80] since simplicity is a

requirement, and God takes the hearer's, not the speaker's understanding in oaths.[81]

The second argument that Morton proposes against equivocation aims at proving

that priests who use mental reservation to conceal their priesthood, abuse the notion

of intention and consequently lie in Augustinian terms. His discussion comes as the

conclusion of a short *ad hoc* Socratic dialogue, which is worth quoting in full,

because it reveals more of his assumptions about how meaning is produced.

> *Q.* When being asked, whether you are a Priest, you answer *No*, what signification hath this word *No*?
> *R.* It doth signifie directly, I am no Priest.
> *Q.* And yet you thinke you are a Priest.
> *R.* Yea I know it.
> *Q.* Wherewith doe you know it?
> *R.* By my inward mind and vnderstanding, my conscience testifying this vnto me.
> *Q.* Can conscience beare witnesse? then can it also speake.
> *R.* It speaketh as verily to my inward soule, as my tongue speaketh sensibly to your eares.
> *Q.* When therefore I aske you whether you be a Priest, your conscience saying to your selfe, *I am*; would it not say the same to me likewise if I could heare it?
> *R.* Certainly it would.
> *Q.* Yet it may be your mind may demurre or varie in that which it thinketh, as namely, thinking thus, *I am a Priest* yet to be able to perswade your soule, and say, *I am no Priest*.
> *R.* Vnpossible, for this is an infallible position, *Mens non potest non intelligere quod intelligit*: The mind cannot possibly but thinke that which it thinketh.
> *Q.* And it is as vnpossible but, *I am* the direct voice of your conscience, and *I am not* the expresse voice of your tongue, must be as contrary as *yea* and *nay*.
> *R.* True.
> *Q.* Then will this be as true, that when your conscience affirmeth that which your tongue denieth, that your tongue speaketh, against your Conscience. And this is that which we haue proued to be flat lying, a conclusion which no art of Aequiuocation can possibly auoid.
>   Our Aequiuocator conceiteth a double intention of the mind, the one directly respecting the signification of the words; and thus they grant that the *Nay* of their tongue was contrary to the *yea* of their vnderstanding: the second is an indirect intention, which is a clause of Reseruation, *Vt dicam tibi*. Whereby they would reconcile their tongue to their mind. Whereas our Witnesses haue thus

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[79] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. K2[r].
[80] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. G1[r].
[81] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. L3[r]–M3[r].

determined, that truth and falsity doth consist only in the conformity or contrariety of the signification of the words, and direct intention of the mind, plainely calling it a lie, *When one shall speake words* (saith Aquinas) *which doe not signifie that which he intendeth*: *When he speaketh otherwise then he thinketh*, saith S. Hierome: *When he speaketh that which hee thinketh is false, saith* S. Augustine. But the indirect intention of the speaker *Vt reuelem tibi* cannot alter the signification of his outward words, *I am no Priest* which his direct intention of conscience doth contradict, saying, *But I am a Priest*. Ergo our Aequiuocating Priest cannot possibly reconcile such a contradiction of his hart and his tongue. Wherefore we will desire S. Augustine to conclude against our Aequiuocatours; *Whosoeuer shall sweare that which he knoweth is false, is but a detestable beast*.[82]

With the first question, Morton separates inner from outer meaning, which implies that the meaning of an utterance can be examined without reference to the speaker's intention.[83] The next few questions similarly examine the mind (or knowledge) of the speaker, assuming that it is entirely independent from external circumstances like the hearer. Once he has established that the speaker's conscience, if it could speak directly to the hearer, would say the opposite of what the mouth of the speaker said, he can point out that this is exactly how Augustine (and others) define a lie. Morton identifies two separate intentions: one (the direct intention) produces the utterance that misleads the hearer (and is contrary to what the conscience of the speaker believes), and another (indirect intention) which aims at reconciling the conflicting messages, as if the qualification had been a separate proposition, not part of what was in the mind of the speaker.

Another objection is hinted at in this dialogue: Morton denies that it is possible for anyone to deceive themselves. This forms part of the broader argument that attacks equivocation by examining the differences between the understandings of the speaker and of the hearer. 'The mind cannot possibly but thinke that which it thinketh,' the respondent declares. It is a recurring argument in Catholic treatises that if the examiner is not competent or the procedure is unjust, the examinee is not

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[82] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, G2^v–G3^r. For clarity's sake, I have set Morton's running text as a dialogue and slightly altered punctuation.

[83] Cf. Cicero, *De inventione*, II.xlii.121–II.xlviii.143 (see Chapter 1, Section 3.1.2 above).

bound to reply in the questioner's sense, but can instead formulate his statements as if he was speaking to himself, retaining information that is not accessible to the questioner, but that will make his not fully expressed propositions true, because they are in his mind.[84] However, Morton objects, everybody knows what they will say before they say it, therefore speaking to oneself is unrealistic, because people in their right mind do not need speech to interpret their own thoughts, whereas the only way another person can have access to someone else's thoughts is through speech. Consequently, it is not possible for someone to lie to himself:

> he cannot be said properly to speake vnto himselfe, who cannot properly be said to lie to himselfe: but whosoeuer can lie to himselfe may also by speech properly deceaue himself; because *a lie* is described to be a false speech, to this end, *To deceiue*. And can any by any wilfull lie deceiue his owneselfe, as thereby be made ignorant of his owne meaning? This were to distract a man from himselfe. Therefore this *naturall reason* taken from the *speech of man with himselfe*, might best befit a pure naturall, or some person distracted; namely, such a one as being beside himselfe can best talke with himselfe.[85]

It is exactly this feature of speech, its purpose of transmitting information from one person to another, which is the most problematic in connection with equivocation. Morton quotes *De interpretatione* to formulate his requirement for verbal utterances: they have to be perceptible by the other person. Mentally uttered propositions cannot fulfil this requirement.

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[84] This argument is one of the reasons why critics like Zagorin or Malloch believe that Catholics eliminate the role of the hearer in order to be able to form an argument which justifies equivocating to authorities. However, as I will demonstrate later, the hearer has an inevitable role in all defences of the doctrine, because it is exactly the hearer's lack of authority that justifies using equivocation in the first place. Cf. Malloch, 'Equivocation: A circuit of reasons', p.134: 'For those theologians who follow the path marked out by Azpilcueta, the prototype of human speech is a man talking to himself. The hearer becomes a supernumerary figure, a person who is not really there.'; Zagorin, p. 176.: 'It is this apparently innocuous conception that informed Navarrus' defense [sic–MV] of mental reservation; for when the lie was conceived simply as speech not in accord with the speaker's mind, the questioner or interlocutor seemed either to disappear or to become completely irrelevant. All that counted in Navarrus' view was the conformity of speech, including the portion not expressed, to the meaning in the speaker's mind. That this meaning must be inaccessible to the questioner or hearer made no difference. Thus the communicative relationship existed only between the speaker and himself and the speaker and God, who of course knew the reserved mental part and therefore understood the true meaning of his utterance.'

[85] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. I3^r. This passage suggests that critics who claim that at times Macbeth equivocates with himself, or with his conscience, might be taking an anachronistic position.

> For the foresaid Oracle [...] saith, that Euery proposition enunciatiue (that is, euery outward speech, whether by word or writing, whether affirming or denying) is ordained for signification: that is, (as you haue well said) to expresse some thing. But no mentall, or inward conceit of the minde is ordained of God as a signe to expresse or signifie (as words and writings doe) but as a thing signified hath need to be expressed and expounded. Such is your mentall clause reserued <Vt narrem tibi>. Can you make this a signe or instrument to expresse & signifie your true meaning, which you haue purposely deuised for a den to lurke in, lest your false meaning might be signified and reuealed?[86]

Enunciative propositions have to give a meaningful statement to the person who put the question. Analysing the stock example of the man arriving at a city where they believe that the other city he is coming from is infected by the plague, Morton argues that even if there is a sense (the speaker's intended meaning) in which the reply is true, it would still be a lie: 1. even if it were true that it is not a lie to say he did not come from the city allegedly haunted by the plague, in the case of 'I am no Priest' the purpose of the utterance is to deceive the examiner. 2. Whoever asks a question expects a direct answer (one that is formulated according to his understanding), therefore it is not true that the response that he did not come from that city is not a lie, because it does not satisfy the hearer's expectation. 3. Even if there is a remote intention of the hearer that such a reply satisfies, it is still a lie from the point of view of the speaker because his speech does not conform to his own intention:

> If this one instance were true, yet could it not iustifie your other Aequiuocations, as that *I am no Priest:* whereby your whole purpose is to delude the intention of the examiner. *For this is an intention to deceiue,* (saith your Iesuite) *to seeke to beget a signification of your speech in the mind of your hearer, diuers to that which you conceiue your selfe.*
>   Secondly, this your instance is false; for euery one that asketh a Question, doth intend to receiue a direct answer: and therefore his answer, *I came not from Couentry* who came from Couentrie, cannot satisfie the intention of the Examiner.
>   Thirdly, though it shall satisfie the remote intention of the Examiner, yet is it a lewd lie in the speaker, because he that speaketh truth hath alway [sic] a conformity betweene the intention of his mind and his speech: but to deny, *He*

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[86] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. G4ᵛ.

came not from that place from whence he knoweth he *came,* is no conformity, but infinite contrariety between his speech and his owne intention.[87]

Thus, Morton concludes, equivocation in the sense of a reply uttered with a mentally reserved qualification is a lie, because it fails to be discernible by the person to whom it is uttered: 'But in your Aequiuocating by *a clause reserued and concealed in your thought,* (which God onely, *The only searcher of the heart seeth*) no man can discerne in your speech any thing but *apparance* of damnable lying.'[88]

3.3. Persons, *A treatise tending to mitigation*

According to Zagorin, Persons's intention in writing *A treatise tending to mitigation* was to produce 'an argument for the toleration of Catholics by the English government'.[89] Michael C. Carrafiello contested this view and claimed that 'Persons could not have pleaded for toleration and defended equivocation at the same time. Persons already knew that making an argument for toleration in and of itself was extremely difficult, given the Gunpowder Plot'.[90] He suggests that Persons's intention throughout his works was, in fact, to advise Catholics to avoid using equivocation whenever possible.[91]

Persons does, indeed, state in the conclusion of *A treatise tending to mitigation*, that his aim was to advise Catholics against rebellion, disobedience, and the too

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[87] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. H1ᵛ.
[88] *A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. N2ᵛ.
[89] Zagorin, p. 208.
[90] Michael L. Carrafiello, 'Robert Persons and Equivocation, 1606-1610', *The Catholic Historical Review* 79.4 (Oct., 1993), pp. 671–680, p. 672.
[91] Carrafiello, p. 672. 'Persons [...] argued that English Catholics should set aside equivocation, regardless of its objective merits.' Note that one half of the criticised statement ('the most detailed exposition and defense of the doctrine of mental reservation in English') relates to Persons' works in general, while the other half (that it is an 'argument for the toleration of Catholics') relates to *A treatise tending to mitigation* in particular.

frequent usage of mental reservation.[92] He continues by warning Catholics that even if something is lawful, it is not necessarily expedient, and devotes three pages to advise against using mental reservation (by priests in particular) whenever it is possible.[93] However, at the beginning of the conclusion Persons expresses his hope that he has *justified* the 'Catholicke doctrine in the eyes and Iudgments of all indifferent men, from the two odious imputations of *Rebellion* and *Equiuocation*'.[94] In a passage that could be regarded as the summary of Persons's position in the book[95] he makes it explicit that his reason for doing so is not that he thinks the Protestants are right in accusing equivocation of being wrong, but, on the contrary, that this is the way for Catholics to regain the confidence of the Protestant majority, undermined not so much by Catholics' actions, as by malicious propaganda which has misrepresented their doctrines and projected the atypical deeds of particular members on the whole community.[96] Persons believes that in the unjust and intolerant atmosphere Protestants created in England, what is needed for preserving Catholicism in the country is the complete avoidance of scandal and a more than usually perfect confession of the faith, therefore the safest way, especially for priests, is to refrain from equivocation even when it would save their lives, unless it is used to protect someone exceptionally important to the whole cause.[97]

Persons, in the *Preface* too, mentions unjust treatment of Catholics, the lawfulness of equivocation, and the desire and hope for peaceful coexistence

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[92] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Zzz2^r–Zzz2^v.

[93] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Zzz3^r–Zzz4^v.

[94] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Zzz2^r.

[95] Carrafiello quotes a part of this.

[96] 'So I say in this case, that albeit a man may without breach of truth, or offence of almighty God in certayne cases, equiuocate, or vse a doubtfull speach for a good and necessary end, either in oath, or out of oath, though the hearer doe not always vnderstand it, or be deceyued therwith, and that many holy men haue done the same, yea Christ himselfe, that is the example, and paterne of all holinesse and truth in speach, as by many examples before at large hath byn declared: yet considering the tymes, and condition therof, wherin Catholicks at this day liue in England, the offence, and scandall which Protestants, and some others, that vnderstand not the lawfulnes therof, or will not vnderstand the same, do receyue, or raise thervpon; my wish and counsell to Catholickes should be to vse the benefit of this liberty most sparingly euen in lawfull thinges, and neuer but vpon great and vrgent causes, and occasions.' *A treatise tending to mitigation*, p. 546 = Zzz2^v.

[97] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Zzz3^r–Zzz3^v.

between Protestant and Catholic subjects in England, whereas the warning against using equivocation is missing. He takes good care to emphasise at every opportunity that the majority of Catholics condemn the Gunpowder Plot:[98]

> And to this effect haue vve heard and seene many speeches and sermons made, sundry Bookes and pamphlets cast abroad or set forth in print, some before the late cruell and hatefull conspiracy (which might perhaps be some incitation to the designement or hastening therof),[99] and some presently therupon, not only to exaggerate that fact (whose atrocity by it self is such, as scarsely it leaueth any place to exaggeration) but also to extend and draw out the hatred and participation therof to others of the same Religion most innocent therin, yea vnto the whole multitude, so far as in them lieth, a matter of exorbitant iniustice and intemperate malice.[100]

As this passage demonstrates, he suggests throughout the *Preface* that the reason for such a desperate attempt as the Gunpowder Plot was the general oppression of Catholics. He complains about the presentation of Catholics in several Protestant pamphlets as a homogenous group of conspirators and rebels. Among them is Morton's *An Exact Discoverie*, of which he writes,

> he that shall weigh it well, shall finde it a more exacte discouery of English Ministeriall malice, in case of sycophancy and calumniation; the Authour endeauoring to ascribe that to publicke and generall doctrine, which proceeded from priuate and particuler passion, as also to drawe the temerity of a few, to the hatred and condemnation of the whole.[101]

He nevertheless trusts in James's wisdom to distinguish between the conspirators and all other obedient Catholic subjects, and that he will end their persecution.[102]

After this hoped-for mitigation of undeservedly harsh treatment of Catholics, Persons anticipates the topic of the second half of his book (pp. 273–556), the justification of equivocation. Since this will later be treated in great detail, here he merely summarises the main points: that equivocation is not new, that it is supported

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[98] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, Preface, sig. A3ʳ, sig. B2ᵛ, sig. C2ʳ.
[99] The closing bracket is missing in the original. This place for it was suggested to me by Peter Mack.
[100] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, Preface, sig. A3ʳ–A3ᵛ.
[101] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, Preface, sig. B2ᵛ.
[102] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, Preface, sig. C1ᵛ–C2ʳ. Even Carrafiello (p. 679) quotes from the *Reckoning* that Persons's long term aim was the peaceful living together of Catholics and Protestants (*A quiet and Sober reckoning*, STC (2nd ed.) / 19412 ([Saint-Omer: English College Press], 1609), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. M1ʳ–M1ᵛ.)

by reason, authorities of theology, and examples from the Bible, and that – contrary to the allegation of its opponents – it is not a threat to everyday conversation and by extension, society. The doctrine of equivocation, a necessary means to avoid revealing unjustly demanded secrets, is

> ordinary and vsually to be seene in all the bookes of Catholicke Deuines for the space of *these three or foure hundred yeares* [...], the greatest wittes of Christendome, for so long at least, haue held for learned, and *founded not only vpon euident groundes of reason, nature, equity, and iustice* in diuers cases [...] warranted also by *authority of many expresse examples of Holy Scriptures and Fathers*, and in some cases so necessary for auoiding the sinne of lying, periury, discouering of secrettes, iniuring our neighbours, and other such inconueniences, [...]I presume his Lordship [Salisbury] as so great a *common-vvealthesman* would allow therof with due circumstances, as iust and necessary, and recall that part of his censure wherin he saith: '*That it teareth in sunder all the bandes of humane conuersation,*' especially if he remember, that we doe except from the licence of Equiuocation, the *common conuersation of men in contractes, bargaines, and other like affaires, wherby any dammage or preiudice may grow to another man, and much more in matters appertaining to the cleare and manifest profession of our faith.*[103]

The thoroughness of the discussion and the number of examples Persons employs to prove that replies with mental reservation given to (incompetent) Protestant judges are lawful, as well as the full title of the work,[104] suggest that he indeed intended to defend the doctrine.

The detailed discussion of equivocation begins in Chapter 8. First, Persons examines in what sense mental reservation can be called equivocation; then whether such mixed propositions qualify as true logical propositions and how the well-known example of the equivocating priest fits into the paradigm; then he reaches his central argument about why equivocation is not a kind of lying and under what

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[103] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, Preface, sig. D2^r–D2^v. Italics added to emphasise the main points.

[104] *A treatise tending to mitigation tovvardes Catholike-subiectes in England VVherin is declared, that it is not impossible for subiects of different religion, (especially Catholikes and Protestantes) to liue togeather in dutifull obedience and subiection, vnder the gouernment of his Maiesty of Great Britany. Against the seditions wrytings of Thomas Morton minister, & some others to the contrary. Whose two false and slaunderous groundes, pretended to be dravvne from Catholike doctrine & practice, concerning rebellion and equiuocation, are ouerthrowne, and cast vpon himselfe. Dedicated to the learned schoole-deuines, cyuill and canon lavvyers of the tvvo vniuersities of England. By P.R.*

circumstances it can be lawfully employed; and finally he agues, in line with other Catholic treatments of equivocation, that equivocation in oaths is not perjury, because it is only a confirmation of a true (although) mixed proposition.

It was an important element in Morton's argument against mental reservation that, while he acknowledged that some of the biblical examples that Catholic authors use to justify the application of mental reservation, do in fact require a qualification of the meaning that is missing from the letters of the text, he denied that these qualifications are mentally uttered clauses, and reinterpreted them as verbally ambiguous speeches in which the qualification that reveals the correct meaning can be inferred from the circumstances of the case. Even though the meaning is incomplete as regards only the letter of the text, it becomes complete as soon as the spirit and the context of the text are taken into account. Persons, exploiting the implication that it is lawful to use verbally ambiguous speeches, undertakes to justify the way in which mental reservation has recently come to be called 'equivocation'.

Whereas earlier Catholic theorists stated that the idea of mixed propositions comes directly from Aristotle's analysis of different types of proposition at the beginning of *De interpretatione*, Persons admits that it is there only by implication. Aristotle does not explicitly mention mixed propositions (when talking of mental, verbal and written propositions), but there is nothing in his theory that would rule them out either. The reason why Aristotle did not talk about mixed propositions is that they would have fallen outside his topic: his aim was to describe how propositions are used in enthymemes and syllogisms to form arguments, and since there is no point in using mental (or mixed) propositions in arguments (where the aim is to find, not conceal, the truth), they did not have to be treated. Consequently, he excluded them, just as he excluded deprecatory speeches, rhetorical and poetic

tropes.[105] To Morton's objection that mental (and consequently mixed) propositions cannot form part of human communication because due to their imperceptibility by the hearer they cannot signify, Persons replies that Aristotle did not require that utterances had to signify in order to be propositions: the only condition for a proposition to be enunciative is that it has to affirm or deny something true or false, regardless of whether it is perceived or understood by a hearer.[106] If the audience's understanding of an enunciative proposition was a requirement, then Morton would have to claim that even some of Christ's propositions were not propositions, since, as Persons points out, in a number of cases even his disciples did not understand his speech.[107]

Persons here attacks a crucial argument in Morton's treatise. The Catholic strategy was to justify using mental reservation by invoking biblical examples in which the words uttered turn out to be misconceived by the hearers, or seem to contradict fundamental Christian doctrine. Morton undertook to disprove this argument by reinterpreting the biblical examples as instances of verbal ambiguity. According to Morton, the proper meaning of these utterances can be inferred through examination of the circumstances. However, as Persons points out, this amounts to admitting that some of Christ's speeches could (and were intended to) be misunderstood by members of his audience. Although the meaning can theoretically be inferred from the circumstances (the disciples' belief in Christ's divine nature), the speech still remains doubtful or ambiguous to its audience, therefore Morton's objection that priests' speeches are lies if they can be misunderstood by the authorities, is invalid. If Christ could, for example, reply 'No' when he was asked whether he knew the day of the last judgement, then why should not priests be allowed to reply 'No' in the same way, regardless of whether Christ's reply is

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[105] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Ss2ᵛ–Ss4ʳ.
[106] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Tt1ʳ.
[107] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Tt1ʳ–Tt1ᵛ.

analysed as verbally ambiguous, or as containing a mental qualification. What matters, according to Persons, is the speech's capability to deceive its hearer.[108]

> *Ipse se finxit longius ire,* saith the text; himself feigned that he would goe further: wherupon they forced him to stay with them, and heerof is inferred, that Christ vsed at that time some doubtfull action or wordes, importing a different externall signification to his disciples, from his inward meaning, which may truly be called ambiguity, amphibology, or Equiuocation in fact, for that Equiuocation as hath byn said, may be vsed either in factes or speach, and consequently that our Sauiour did heere Equiuocate with his disciples making them belieue a different thing from that he meant.[109]

Persons admits that mental reservation is not equivocation in a narrow Aristotelian sense. He claims, however, that mental reservation is indeed equivocation in a broader sense, and that if Morton accepts that Aristotle has defined several types of ambiguity (as he does), he will also have to accept that using mental reservation is not a lie. According to Aristotle, says Persons, a sentence can be equivocal in one of the following ways: equivocation of speech or words, equivocation by custom of phrase, and equivocation by composition of single and simple parts together.[110] When a proposition is uttered with mental reservation, the hearer potentially conceives what is uttered in a different sense from the speaker. Its effect, therefore, resembles that of any other type of properly Aristotelian ambiguity.[111]

Persons presents the classification of mental reservation as a merely terminological problem (he admits that mental reservation is not equivocation in the proper sense).[112] While seemingly he is apologetic about the broad usage of

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[108] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Aaa3^v–Ccc2^r.

[109] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Ccc1v–Ccc2^r.

[110] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Qq4^v–Rr1^r.

[111] Note that here Persons needs to rely on the understanding of the hearer (and its difference from the speaker's), whereas at other places he argues that the hearer is not an important consideration in connection with mental reservation.

[112] 'Now then whereas our proposition before mentioned with mental reseruation, tendeth not directly to any of these two purposes intended by Aristotle, and further hath no doubtfull sense of speach or wordes *by nature of the wordes themselues, or their double or doubtfull significations*, but only that it vttereth not all the whole sense of the speaker; it cannot properely be called Equiuocall according to Aristotles meaning and definition; but rather *in a more large & ample signification, as Equiuocall may signify an amphibologicall, doubtfull, or double-sensed proposition, in respect of the speaker*

'equivocation', he simultaneously emancipates the doctrine by suggesting that it is implied in the theories of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian.[113] By singling out the effect as the definitive quality of ambiguous speech, while suppressing the role played by the actual formulation of the sentence, he blurs the distinction between utterances that immediately strike the hearer as ambiguous, and utterances that, even if they are ambiguous in the speaker's mind, are indistinguishable from plain statements. As Morton will demonstrate in *The encounter*, the consequence of accepting 'Jesuitically' equivocal speeches as generally ambiguous, would lead to the complete breakdown of communication, since in that case any sentence could be argued (and thought) to be ambiguous. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the hearer, properly ambiguous speeches are not necessarily less misleading, because even if they call attention to their potentially deceptive nature, they still do not provide a solid point of reference on the basis of which the hearer could select the right signification (or at least the one the speaker meant).

What Morton analyses as ambiguity that can be disambiguated by reference to circumstances is, according to Persons, still not obviously clear to everybody, as can be demonstrated from the fact that it is misunderstood by some. Thus, since even Christ used speeches that allow his hearers to be deceived, it cannot be a sin or lie to act in this way. Deception is not inherently immoral, but it is permissible under the

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and hearer, whereof the one sometime vnderstandeth the same in one sense, and the other in another.' Persons, *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Rr1[r]. Italics added.

[113] 'For which cause the most ancient Schoole-Doctors, Fathers, and other Authors doe vse in deed rather the word Amphibology then Equiuocation in expressing like kind of speaches as our proposition is; which of later yeares only hath byn accustomed to be vsed in this sense, but the other is most ordinary with antiquity, not only among Philosophers, but also (and that especially) among Orators and Rhetoricians, in which science it is held for lawfull & most commendable in diuers occasions, whereof both Cicero often maketh mention, and Quintilian writeth a whole Chapter. The cause then why the answering by such reserued proposition, as before hath byn mentioned, is called by some Equiuocation, is rather by a certain similitude, then propriety of speach, to wit that euen as Equiuocation properly by community of name in things of different natures by variety of significations in the selfe same words or speach, by custome of phrase, and composition of sundry sortes *doth make different and doubtfull senses, & meanings to the hearer*; so in this case by mentall reseruation of some part of the foresaid mixt proposition, *the like effect of doubtfulnes is bred in the hearers vderstanding and thereby consequently is named Equiuocation, although improperly* as Equiuocation is taken for any doubtfull word or speach that may haue diuersity of senses or vnderstandings.' Persons, *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Rr1[r]–Rr1[v]. Italics added.

right circumstances. Morton implicitly and Persons explicitly claim that in a number

of biblical speeches, it is not enough to take only the letter of the text, because a

purely literal interpretation will run against accepted dogmas. Persons cites *Humanae*

aures, interpreting it in line with the tradition established by Navarrus (once more

disregarding Sepúlveda's objections), and reiterates the position that, from the

perspective of divine judgement, it is the formulation intended by the speaker that

has to be considered, and suggests that equivocation is not different from other cases

that Morton also approved, in which the full meaning is inferred from the

circumstances. It is a general rule, according to Persons and to some extent Morton,

that when a proposition seems incomplete, the missing part has to be supplied from

the circumstances of place, time, and persons of both the speaker and hearer (and

those clauses need not always be expressed in words).[114] Persons here obviously

passes over the fact that propositions with mental reservation appear to be

incomplete only to those who are already aware of the mentally reserved

qualification (most eminently, God), but not to the immediate hearer to whom it is

primarily addressed (the questioner).

3.4. Morton, *A preamble unto an incounter*

Morton's response, *A preamble unto an Incounter* is more a political pamphlet than a

carefully crafted argumentation against Persons's doctrine (equivocation is described

as the venereal disease of the soul),[115] at least in comparison to his earlier *A full*

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[114] *A treatise tending to mitigation*, sig. Ggg3ᵛ–Ggg4ʳ.

[115] 'Let me affirme with some Historians, that not aboue an hundred yeres agoe (or thereabout) the Neapolitane disease, commonly called the French pocks, tooke possession in Christendome, since which time some parties haue beene miserably afflicted therewith. Vpon this Assertion, by the consequent of our *Mitigator,* it must follow, That since these hundred yeeres haue all Cities, Townes, Villages, Schooles, People, Priests in Christendome, yea euen our *Mitigatour* himselfe, become such a kinde of *Neapolitanes.* And why may not this example fit? Sure I am, that *mentall* Equiuocating, whomsoeuer it infecteth, is nothing els than a pocke and pestilence in the soule.' *A*

satisfaction and the later *Encounter*. In this somewhat self-satisfied piece, Morton relies more on embellished abuses (Persons's *A treatise of mitigation* is described as 'an Apothecaries box of poison, with the outward inscription of *Antidote*')[116] than actual logical refutation, thus Persons's sarcastic remarks throughout his reply *A quiet and sober reckoning*, but especially in its dedicatory epistles, do not seem entirely unfair.

The most significant section is the six-page comparison of the standard example of the priest who equivocates about his priesthood with the case of Saphira (*Acts*, 5. 1–11),[117] which occasioned much of Persons's reply in his ensuing *A quiet and sober reckoning*, and is prominent in Morton's final contribution to the debate, *The encounter*.

Saphira and her husband sell their possessions but fail to present the total sum to Peter.

> *Then sayd Peter, Why hath Satan filled thine heart that thou should'st lie? thou hast not lied vnto men, but vnto God. When Ananias heard these words, he fell downe and gaue vp the ghost. After this came in his wife, ignorant of that which was done; and Peter sayd vnto her, Tell me, Sold you the land for so much? and she sayd, Yea, for so much: and Peter sayd, Why haue you agreed together to tempt the spirit of the Lord? and she fell downe, and yeelded vp the ghost.*[118]

To demonstrate that any lie could be excused with mental reservation, Morton argues that Saphira's reply may have contained a mentally reserved qualification like *ut in commune bonum conferamus* or, *ut aliis largiamur* or *ut vobis significemus*,[119] which would make it perfectly parallel with the priest who says 'I am no priest <to tell it unto you>'. Since Persons argued that 'no clause of reseruation could saue her speech from lying', what can the difference be between Saphira's case and the

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preamble vnto an incounter with P.R. the author of the deceitfull treatise of mitigation, STC (2nd ed.) / 18191 (London: Printed by Melch. Bradwood for Iohn Bill and Edmond Weauer, 1608), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. M2ᵛ.

[116] *A preamble*, sig. N1ᵛ.

[117] *A preamble*, sig. G2ʳ–H1ʳ. Ananias and Saphira are briefly mentioned as parallels to the lying Catholics in Abbot, *De mendacio*, sig. I2ᵛ. In the controversy, it had been first brought up in Morton's *A full satisfaction*.

[118] I quote the biblical story in Morton's account (*A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. H4ᵛ).

[119] 'in order to add it to the common', 'in order to bestow it on others', 'in order to indicate it to you'.

equivocating priest's, Morton asks. He examines whether the two speakers or the two hearers are so different in the two situations that it could make the almost identical utterances a lie in one case, but true in the other. As Morton recounts, Persons claims that the question to be examined is not whether the speech deceives the hearer (thus, whether the judge is competent is irrelevant), but whether the proposition accords with the speaker's understanding, because only that correspondence determines whether something is a lie or not. Since Morton finds no difference in the (lack of) correspondence of the speaker's mind and the speech, he declares that both are equally lies, and if no reservation could save Saphira's reply from being considered a lie, then the same applies for equivocating priests too. He concludes:

> Let vs, for conclusion, parallel both these examples which are very neere a kinne: for if we doe compare speaker with speaker, that is, the *woman* and a *Priest,* both will be thought to be Votaries: if outward speech with outward speech, that is, *I haue solde it but for so much,* and, *I am no Priest,* both are negatiues: if Reseruation with Reseruation, as *<To tell it vnto you>* or *<To giue vnto you>* both are mentall: if the forme with forme, both equally answerable to the mind of the speaker: if, finally, end with end, both are to deceiue the hearer. Wherefore *P. R.* granting, that *No clause of Reseruation could saue her speech from a lie,* must by irrepugnable consequence be forced to confesse, that his *I am no Priest* vttered by a Priest, to whomsoeuer it be spoken notwithstanding any mentall Reseruation of *<To tell it vnto you &c.>* is a Satanicall and damnable lie.[120]

3.5. Persons, *A quiet and sober reckoning*

In his reply, Persons accepts the challenge and takes every opportunity to direct attacks at Morton's personality, rather than his ideas.[121]

Persons refutes Morton's arguments in three steps. First, he states that, contrary to Morton's attempt to see Saphira's reply as containing equivocation, it was a

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[120] *A preamble*, sig. G4ᵛ.

[121] His strategy of carefully dressing up insults as praises and assuming the infuriating position of the wiser party who will try to sooth his more hot-headed opponent who got carried away is most evident in the dedicatory *Epistles*, but already begins in the title, *A quiet and sober reckoning vvith M. Thomas Morton somewhat set in choler by his aduersary P.R.*

simple lie, because Saphira and Ananias never intended to tell the truth or to avoid lying by equivocation, as St. Peter's question '*Why hath Satan filled thine heart that thou should'st lie?*', and the fact that they were immediately punished with death, prove. Second, even if it is accepted that Saphira wanted to equivocate, contrary to Morton's conclusion, the cases of Saphira and the equivocating priest do actually differ both in speaker and hearer. On the hearer's side, because Peter is a competent judge with the authority to ask the question from Saphira, which is not the case with the Protestant examiners of English Catholics. On the speaker's side, because consequently Saphira was bound to reply plainly and according to the understanding of the questioner, whereas priests who appear before the incompetent judge are not bound to reply plainly. The truthfulness of an answer, Persons acknowledges, depends on the meaning and mind of the speaker, and not the hearer's understanding of it, but the meaning depends on the competence of the judge. The ambivalent phrasing of his argument on this point makes it somewhat suspicious: 'I grant that the truth of any answere made vnto a Iudge dependeth not vpon the vnderstanding, conceipt, or capacity of the said Iudge, but vpon the meaning of the speaker, *which meaning notwithstanding is to be measured by the competency, or incompetency of the Iudge.*'[122] If the hearer is a competent judge, it puts an obligation on the speaker to frame both his reply and his mind according to the understanding of the hearer:

> this meaning and intention of the Speaker must be gouerned and directed by the lawfulnes and competencie of the hearer or Iudge to whome we speake, or by whome we are demanded [...] the respect of competency in a Iudge that demandeth, put obligation, as now hath byn sayd, vpon the speaker to haue this or that mind & meaning correspondent to his, that demandeth, which is not in a Iudge incompetent.[123]

He concludes by a daring statement that Morton will pick up in *The encounter* and use as the basis for his attacks: while he admits that the truth of a sentence depends on the correspondence of the speaker's mind and the utterance, he also

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[122] *A quiet and sober reckoning*, sig. N2ᵛ. Italics added to emphasise the unexplained argument.
[123] *A quiet and sober reckoning*, sig. N3ʳ.

claims that the same utterance can be not only lawful or unlawful, but true and false, depending on the hearer:

> So heere the selfe same answere, made to a competent or incompetent Iudge is made lawfull or vnlawful, true or false, by that circumstance of his competency, or incompetency, that layeth or not layeth the said obligation vpon the speaker, to speake directly to the Iudges meaning.[124]

The speeches, according to Morton, agree in five points – speaker, outward parts, reserved parts, form (i.e. agreement with the speaker's mind), and aim (to deceive) –, but he also admits that they differ in the question of competence. According to Persons, this is the decisive point which determines whether what is said is a lie or not.[125]

Persons's third argument against Morton's comparison of the two cases is that even if both Saphira's and the priest's speeches are taken to be mixed propositions, Saphira's reservation can never be justified, because her response is false with and without reservation. Even together with the reserved clauses that Morton supposes (she did not earn more money <so that she would have been bound to utter>; or <give to him>; or <bring it into the common>), her speech is false because, on the one hand, she *was* bound to bring the whole sum into the common, on the other hand, Peter was competent, therefore she *was* bound to give him a plain answer.[126] In this last argument, Persons seems to be exploiting Morton's carelessness in choosing his examples: the qualifications he suggested would still lead to lies, as Persons demonstrates. Nevertheless, with this last point Persons has not proven that there could not have been other qualifications which could have made Saphira's statement more similar to the priest's true reservations.

At the end of the discussion of the case of Saphira, Persons complains that Morton has misrepresented his position. Morton claimed that Persons had said that

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[124] *A quiet and sober reckoning*, sig. N3^v.
[125] *A quiet and sober reckoning*, sig. O2^v.
[126] *A quiet and sober reckoning*, sig. O2^r.

there are equivocations that cannot in any way be made just, whereas Persons's own statement was that Saphira's case was not an equivocation, but a lie, and that therefore it was necessarily unjust:

> for that my saying is, that the answer of Saphyra to S. Peter, could not by any reseruation of mynd be defended from a lye, for that he was her lawfull Iudg; and consequently, I doe proue, that her said speach was no equiuocation at all; and yet are you not ashamed to say, yea and to stand vpon it, and to vrge the matter in sundry places, as graunted by me, that there is a mentall equiuocation which no clause of reseruation can saue from a lye, wheras I doe hold, auerr, & proue the quite contrary, to witt, that such a speach cannot be truly equiuocation, for that it is a lye.[127]

Persons then briefly refutes some of the statements about equivocation in John King's 1608 Gunpowder Plot sermon delivered at court, and then argues that the complete prohibition of equivocation can be just as dangerous to the state as equivocation, because there must be a way to protect certain secrets without lying.[128] Finally, Persons gives further examples in favour of equivocation from the Bible, and indicates that it contains many more instances than even he had recognised earlier.[129]

A quiet and sober reckoning was Persons's last contribution to the controversy, because, as Morton acknowledges in *The encounter*, he died before the reply was published.[130]

3.6. Morton, *The encounter*

Morton's main counterproof throughout *The encounter* is that all of Persons's scriptural examples are in fact equivocal verbally, and not mentally. Instead of a

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[127] *A quiet and sober reckoning*, sig. P1^r.

[128] *A quiet and sober reckoning*, sig.Qqqq2^r–Rrrr1^r.

[129] *A quiet and sober reckoning*, sig. Rrrr1^r–Rrrr4^v.

[130] Morton, *The encounter against M. Parsons, by a revievv of his last sober reckoning*, STC (2nd ed.) / 18183 (London: [W. Stansby at Eliot's Court Press] for Iohn Bill, 1610), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. Oo4^v. Persons died in 1610 in Rome, as the Rector of the English College. (Victor Houliston, 'Persons [Parsons], Robert (1546– 1610)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21474>, [accessed 7 Dec 2012])

mental reservation, he argues, such words are used that are either naturally ambiguous, or are commonly known and accepted to be capable of taking up a second – less obvious – sense under certain well-established circumstances. Morton thus implicitly seems to accept the existence of an intended meaning as opposed to the literal one, a distinction parallel to the rhetorical one between the letter and the spirit of the law.

Morton first returns to his comparison between the equivocating priest and Saphira, and examines what Persons means when he declares Saphira's speech to be a lie. To support his argument, he introduces further examples which seem parallel to him. This is important according to him, because if a reservation like 'with the purpose to tell it to you' can turn a false sentence into a true one then the doctrine of equivocation is a doctrine of lying, because with such a reservation any concealment of truth could be justified.[131] (Morton later on employs a similar argument when he objects to Persons's distinction between primary and secondary intentions behind an action: if that distinction was accepted, any action could be excused from being a misdeed, since it is possible to find such a primary intention for every action: the thief could argue that his main intention was not to steal but to enrich himself.)[132]

Morton then seizes on Persons's bold assertion that the same utterance can be both true and false, depending on the hearer to whom it is addressed.[133] According to Morton, Persons had acknowledged previously that the truthfulness of an utterance does not depend on the hearer's understanding but the correspondence of the speaker's mind with the outward speech. However, if those two rules apply for utterances with mental reservation, they have to be applicable for verbally ambiguous utterances as well, therefore in his first attempt he challenges Persons's doctrine by demonstrating that this would lead to a contradiction.

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[131] *The encounter*, sig. G1ᵛ–G2ʳ.
[132] *The encounter*, sig. (f2)ʳ.
[133] *The encounter*, sig. G3ᵛ–G4ʳ.

Morton proposes a hypothetical case in which a schoolboy shoots a hart in a knight's garden and when his fellow student asks him, he replies 'I shot not at the Knight's h[e]art' (meaning his vital organ), 'which sense although it be not direct, yet euen in the iudgement of Mr. Persons, it is true'. He then is asked by the schoolmaster and replies the same way, and when they discover the truth, he is

> whipped, and iustly; but why? Not because he spake lesse truely vnto his Schoolemaster then vnto his Schoolfellow, but because he spake not more directly, when he was challenged thereunto by the bond of duetie and obedience.[134]

The 'directness' of the reply is dependent on the hearer's understanding, and the boy's sin consists not in replying 'more falsely' (less directly) to his superior, but in replying falsely at all. That, however, appears to contradict the conclusion of the previous paragraph: 'And shall not this same sense haue the same [indirect] truth? Shall it now become a lie? Impossible', which seems to suggest that misleading the hearer is acceptable as long as it is done with the help of an 'indirect' truth, and not an apparent lie. That assumption, of course, is necessary if Morton wants to sustain his argument that the biblical examples Catholics quote are indeed ambiguous, but only verbally so and without involving mental reservation. However, as is clear from the example of the boy above, speeches with verbal ambiguity are equally dangerous, since their ambiguity and the 'indirect' meaning are in most of the cases revealed by some external cause which is outside the examination and which the questioner is not in control of. The boy is whipped *after* 'the fact', i.e. the dead animal, 'is discouered', and not because the schoolmaster recognised the potential ambiguity in the word 'h(e)art', which he should have been able to with his sufficiently 'discreet' understanding, which is Morton's criterion of distinguishing mental from verbal ambiguity.

Morton argues that it is absurd to assume that a true proposition can be rendered false if it is given to a lawful judge. Morton apparently conflates two meanings of

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[134] *The encounter*, G4ᵛ.

'true': true according to the speaker's understanding, and true in that it conforms to reality. In a verbally ambiguous sentence the speaker refers to a different entity in reality (the knight's organ) from what the hearer refers to in his question (the knight's animal). The statement itself conforms to one entity in reality and not to the other. The same ambiguous response cannot conform to both the speaker's and the hearer's reality at the same time, therefore, while the proposition is true in the speaker's sense, it can be true or false in an independent reality, but it will necessarily be false in the hearer's sense. (However, to distinguish between true and false becomes even more complicated once the reality it is supposed to conform to does not consist of discreet entities. An animal is clearly not a human organ and vice versa. To anticipate how complex an issue making such distinction can be when it depends more on definition than on discreet objects, we can refer to the problem of Macduff's birth in Shakespeare' *Macbeth*, the topic of my last chapter: is a baby brought to the world with a C-section performed on a dead woman born of her or not?)

In his second attack on the idea that being bound to speak plainly can turn a truth into falsity, Morton charges Persons with modifying the original problem by supposing a mentally reserved qualification that explicitly refers to an obligation towards the hearer. He then lists a number of potential reserved clauses that could be added (as a second shell of reservation) to the proposition as formulated by Persons ('I sold it but for so much <as bound to tell you>') and demands whether any of these could make Saphira's reply true.[135] If Persons were to insist that none of those secondary reservations (not containing a reference to Saphira being bound to tell the truth) could make Saphira's statement true, then the conclusion would necessarily be that no mental reservation can make a speech true that is false as it is uttered.[136] However, Morton here once more disregards the fact that according to Persons, no

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[135] E.g. 'I sold it but for so much, <as bound to tell you *<as you are a private man>>*' or 'I sold it but for so much, <as bound to tell you *<with an intention to kill you>>*'.
[136] *The encounter*, sig. G4ᵛ–H3ᵛ.

mental reservation can make Saphira's statement true, irrespective of the qualification in the reservation. There is no lawful and unlawful mental reservation in Persons's doctrine: what Morton would call an 'unlawful' reservation, Persons would call a lie. And since Saphira is bound to speak plainly to St. Peter, her response is not equivocation, but a lie, with or without a reservation.

Morton touches on a central problem of any kind of ambiguity when he gives a school-like analysis of a seemingly unambiguous sentence to argue that, were mental restrictions allowed in speech, any sentence could be argued to have as many meanings as its words themselves have.

> As for example, suppose M. Persons should haue deliuered this speech saying, *I will as long as I liue go vnto the Church to pray vnto God*. Which in the vnderstanding of any man of sence is sensible enough, yet the first particle is *I* meaning a man, and no woman: the second word *will*, meaning, with a resolued and not a dissembling will: 3. *As long*, meaning the length of time, and not the length of body: 4. *As I liue*, meaning, a life animall in this flesh, and not Angelicall out of the body: 5. *Go*, meaning, by walking, and not by danceing: 6. *Vnto the Church*, meaning of Catholikes, and not of Heretikes: 7. *To pray*, meaning, mediately by Saints and not immediately by my selfe, 8. *vnto God*, meaning, the God of Christians, & not any God of the Pagans. What can be more plainely spoken then the sentence aforesaid, and yet how many meanings suppressed, which may not therfore be called Mentall Reseruations, otherwise M. Persons might as well infer that he neuer promised any lawful thing vnto any man neuer tooke an oath by any lawfull authority of man, without some Mentall reseruation, the vse whereof he himselfe hath iudged in all such cases to be detestable.[137]

The way Morton presents the problem seems to imply that according to him, it is absurd to assume that every expression in a sentence has several meanings, depending on the circumstances (of the situation, of the speaker, of the hearer). He insists that there are words which 'naturally' have more than one meaning, and there are words that 'naturally' have only one. But even that natural ambiguity depends on the hearer's knowledge, as biblical examples in which Christ's speeches are misunderstood by certain people, but not by others ('Dissolue you this Temple, and I will raise it vp againe in three daies')[138] demonstrate. He argues for the exclusion of

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[137] *The encounter*, Book 2, sig. Ss3^r–Ss3^v.
[138] John 2. 19, as quoted by Morton (*The encounter*, Book 2, sig. Xx4^r).

context from establishing the sense of sentences which contradicts his own acknowledgement of the role circumstances play in the interpretation of utterances.

Refuting Persons's charges that he can cite only one Catholic authority who opposed mental reservation, Morton quotes from a number of theologians, who either disallowed any type of equivocation (like Sepúlveda who was that only one already referred to by Morton), or only allowed equivocation as verbal ambiguity.[139] The longest discussion is devoted to Azorius,[140] and the citations from Emmanuel Sa[141] and Maldonatus[142] mostly do no more than reinforce what has already been said. The argumentation, once more, depends on the distinction between *mental* and *verbal* equivocation, which, as Morton points it out, Persons also acknowledges.[143]

Later on, Morton also questions whether Sotus[144] would have allowed mental reservation. In his interpretation, Sotus only approves of verbal ambiguity when he, for instance, argues that a priest may say 'I do not know', because everyone knows that 'to know' has two meanings in connection with priests: to know through confession (which he cannot tell), and not through confession (which he is bound to tell just like everybody else). Furthermore, the same applies to any person who knows something only from someone else: he may say 'I do not know', because someone only knows something in the proper sense of knowing if he himself

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[139] *The encounter*, sig. (c1)ʳ–(f2)ᵛ.

[140] Juan Azor (1535–1603) was a Spanish Jesuit, casuist, who criticised Navarrus for allowing a too broad scope for the lawful applicability of mental reservation. See in more detail in Zagorin, pp. 181–182; Arthur McCaffray, 'Juan Azor', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02167b.htm>, [accessed 22 April, 2013].

[141] Emmanuel Sa (1530–1596) was a Portugese Jesuit who argued for the justifiability of mental reservation from the casuistic principle of probability. See Zagorin, p. 200; Francis Gigot 'Manoel de Sa', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13285a.htm>, [accessed 22 April, 2013].

[142] Juan Maldonado (1533–1583) was a Spanish Jesuit, student of Domingo Soto (see below). See Antonio Pérez Goyena, 'Juan Maldonado' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 9. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09567a.htm>, [accessed 22 April, 2013].

[143] *The encounter*, sig. (d1)ʳ.

[144] Domingo Soto (1494–1560) was a Dominican theologian, who argued that both verbal and mental equivocation are allowed, as long as the hearer could not fail to recognise the concealed qualification. See Zagorin, pp. 178–179; Charles Callan, 'Dominic Soto' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14152a.htm>, [accessed 22 April, 2013].

comprehended it with his own reason. Therefore 'I do not know' has a well-known double sense in both cases, which is the reason why Sotus approves of using it as a reply.[145] Sotus, according to Morton, disallows mental reservation, even when it agrees with the understanding of the speaker, and judges it no better than any lie, because 'the outward speech will not carry the secret sense, in the vnderstanding of discreet hearers.'[146] Morton seems to subscribe to Sotus's view, even though such an 'I do not know' is equally deceptive and potentially dangerous from the state's point of view, since the hearer (for instance, a questioner of a suspected conspiracy member) will not be able to differentiate between 'I do not know, that is, I have no knowledge whatsoever' and 'I do not know because I only heard it from someone else': even if the first appears less a lie from the speaker's perspective, from the hearer's point of view they give the same non-information. In the reply to Persons's Appendix, Morton repeats the same argument: mental reservation is in no way implied in the spoken words, therefore it is 'vnsearchable' and 'degenerate from the proper or figurative vse of mans speech'.[147]

At the end of the treatise, Morton briefly discusses the effects of mental reservation, giving a slightly different version of his earlier five points.[148] In the course of this, he briefly returns to Garnet's *Treatise of Equivocation*. He rebukes Persons for accusing him of misrepresenting the 'Manu-Script Treatise' when he wrote in *A full satisfacion...* that it allows equivocating about equivocation:

> Marke (good Reader) and maruell with me at this mans wit; he will seeme now to grant that it were a palpable absurdity, and impossibilitie to teach a man sometime to sweare, by multiplying Equiuocation vpon Equiuocation, when he is

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[145] Cf. this argument with my examples from Sidney and Shakespeare in the following chapters. In these literary instances, characters avoid lying by exploiting the same ambiguity.

[146] *The encounter*, Book 2, sig. Ee4[r].

[147] *The encounter*, Book 2, sig. Rr1[r].

[148] If mental reservation were to be considered an acceptable practice then 1. the concept of lying would cease to exist, because all lies could be explained by it. 2. Consequently there would be no perjury (since this is a lie in a speech with an oath) 3. With this doctrine, Catholics ask to be tortured, because according to Toletus, it is only the rack that frees them from the obligation of keeping others' secrets 4. It would allow for laying equivocation on equivocation, which leads to an infinity of doubts 5. Protestants have to be wary about anything that a Catholic says, because most probably followers of Persons will equivocate in their writings. *The encounter*, Book 2, sig. Yy1[r]–Yy4[v]. Cf. my discussion of *A full satisfaction*, Part III, Nn1[v]–Nn3[r], in Section 3.2. of this chapter.

vrged therunto; and therefore will onely be thought to suspect, that I haue abused M. Garnets Treatise, by misreporting his direction, which I alleadged most faithfully.[149]

What is noteworthy here is the fact that it appears from this sentence that Garnet's authorship was taken for granted. It is possible then that the reason why neither Morton in his earlier treatises, nor Sir Edward Coke at Garnet's trial mentioned this is not because they were unaware of it, but, on the contrary, because it was so obvious for everybody that it went without saying.

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[149] *The encounter*, Book 2, sig. Yy3[r].

4. Conclusion

The pamphlet war between Thomas Morton and Robert Persons has been often scrutinised for its theological arguments, therefore it seemed necessary to have a closer look at its impact on attitudes towards ambiguity from the point of view of theories of meaning. The debate revolves around the interpretation of biblical passages, but at the same time it reveals their assumptions about how meaning is produced, conveyed, understood, misunderstood, or allowed to be misunderstood. While Persons seeks to distinguish equivocation from lying and argues that equivocation is a type of ambiguity, Morton separates (verbal) ambiguity from mental reservation (or equivocation), and subsumes the latter under lying. They disagree about who is morally responsible when misunderstanding occurs (the hearer or the speaker), which also highlights the irresolvable conflict of interests that underlies the whole debate – the self-defence of the state and the self-defence of a persecuted religious minority.

In the most general terms, the doctrine of equivocation teaches how to conceal vital information even while apparently giving a relevant response to a question which seeks that very information. According to Morton, the most prolific speaker for the Protestant position, this is highly immoral (and dangerous to the English state), since Catholics hide information that would be beneficial (or even essential) for the authorities to know. Persons, on the other hand, points out that there are cases in which it was necessary for Catholics to find a way to evade revealing knowledge which was – in their perception – asked unjustly from them. One possibility is to refuse the reply and be tortured and eventually executed – but martyrdom is not for everyone. During an examination, then, Catholics found themselves in a position where they would have had to choose between lying about what they know (which

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would be a mortal sin) and thus endangering their soul in front of the Divine Judgement; and between telling the truth and thus endangering others' lives (an equally mortal sin), the lives of people, for example, whose crime was to celebrate Masses for recusants or closet Catholics. Equivocation, according to Persons and the other Catholics, is the narrow middle way. Nevertheless, as Morton argues, if speaking with mentally reserved qualifications is permitted, then it undermines communication in general (and consequently causes distrust and harm to the state) by eliminating the assurance of what an oath meant. Persons, in response, emphasised that equivocation is only permitted in cases of religious persecution, and it is not applicable in everyday matters.

From the point of view of the different ways in which communication is conceptualised, the most important distinction Morton makes between *ambiguous* and *equivocal* speeches is that the latter is necessarily imperceptible by the hearer, and therefore it is always misleading. The speaker utters a sentence that appears to be complete and absolute. By allowing for the possibility of a concealed restriction on the meaning, the advocates of the doctrine of mental reservation argue for an ever present uncertainty of language as a result of the implication that no sentence is unambiguous, as there is always a possibility that circumstances exist that change the meaning of the statement. Since the hearer is likely not to be aware of these circumstances, every utterance will be potentially ambiguous from his/her perspective, while the speaker is always aware of his own intentions. In cases where the speech contains mental reservation, the interpretation that conforms to reality does not correspond to what is uttered and accessible to the hearer. As Persons points out, verbal ambiguity can be equally deceptive, since even if the hearer recognises the ambiguity, he will still not know in which sense it has to be taken to be true. Whether the speaker uses ambiguity or equivocation to mislead the hearer, it is almost as if s/he had not been given a response to the question, because the hearer

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will lack the frame of reference which determines the meaning of the speech. The problems that both Morton and Persons disregard are that the hearer can never ascertain whether 1. there is a mental reservation; 2. if there is, what it is.[150]

Although Persons's concept of language which endorses the presence of this uncertainty seems more convincing to a present day reader than Morton's (who simply dismisses this possibility as absurd, even as he makes the recognition), he nevertheless downplays the significance of an important difference between ambiguity and equivocation. Verbal ambiguity at least gives the chance to the hearer to exercise their judgement to choose between the potential interpretations, whereas equivocation is never revealed until it has already taken effect.[151] Persons blurs the distinction between speeches that immediately strike the hearer as ambiguous and speeches where the potential extra meaning remains undetected, and which are therefore inevitably deceitful.[152]

A final interesting and influential though perhaps predictable trait of the debate is Morton's portrayal of the intention of Catholics in devising the doctrine of equivocation. He presents the reasons Catholics might have had to invent

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[150] The idea that the hearer can 'misconceive' speeches presupposes that there is one unambiguous truth to which a statement can conform. This model works with simple examples like the ones discussed in the pamphlets, but it becomes a more complicated issue in cases where it is not obvious what 'conforms to reality'. Could one say that Orsino misconceives Viola's description of her love when he grasps the emotion, even though he mistakes its object? Is it possible to say that Macbeth misconceives the Weird Sisters' prophecies when neither he, nor the audience can be sure in which of the many possible significations the Weird Sisters meant their words? It is an interesting, although unintentional, demonstration of the difficulties of reconstructing the mentally reserved qualification when Huntley in his article attempts to complete the Weird Sisters' prophecies: if the reader has an ever so slightly different interpretation of the play, Huntley's suggestions will seem completely arbitrary.

[151] Although ambiguity and equivocation *can* be equally deceptive, it is an interesting dilemma, whether one is more immoral than the other.

[152] There is an important distinction to be made between the situation in which the readers of the Bible who read and judge Jesus's words are and between the interrogators of e.g. a Catholic. A reader of the Bible who conceives Jesus's speeches correctly (that is, according to his meaning, as it conforms to reality), is aware of a relevant circumstance, his divinity (the mentally reserved qualification in the case of the examined Catholic) that renders a potentially ambiguous speech unambiguous. Therefore in fact such a reader (including Morton) is not in the position of the Protestant examiner of the Catholic priest, but in the position of someone with a detailed contextual knowledge (like God's). In this sense all examples which are intended to demonstrate that ambiguity or equivocation in Jesus's speeches is resolvable, are in fact misleading, and not applicable as a proper parallel for cases in which authorities have to determine the truthfulness of convicts' speeches.

equivocation as entirely cynical. Their only aim with the doctrine was to find a justification for carrying out crimes in secret. As he argues on several occasions, the qualifications that are most often suggested (e.g. 'with the purpose to tell you') make their users capable of justifying any crime, and if equivocation is allowed then basically any lie could be argued to have been in fact a true statement with a mentally reserved qualification. Put that way, it is difficult not to share Morton's moral objection against equivocation: it indeed is a dangerous device if applied by criminals. However, this is based on the presumption that Catholics will only use equivocation to commit something immoral. As opposed to that, Persons emphasises that equivocation is devised primarily as a means of self-defence against the injustice Protestant authorities might inflict on Catholics. It is designed principally to be used in cases when it is necessary for the member of an unjustly oppressed religious minority to be able to conceal the knowledge of unjustly demanded secrets.

From the point of view of an abstract morality, it is hard to sympathise with someone who argues that what in effect is a lie is not a lie. However, Catholics were a persecuted religious minority that struggled to defend themselves, which should emphasise the fact that – contrary to Morton's rather hypocritical assumption – equivocation is not only useful for those who abuse it (like the Gunpowder Plotters), but also for those who were forced to struggle to save the lives of others (and of themselves) without sinning.

Chapter 4.

Deception in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*

1. Introduction

Sidney's *Arcadia* is a many-layered political allegory that explores through an almost boundless variety of instructive stories the questions of governance, the good, the bad and the absentee ruler, the duty of the subject, obedience and disobedience. Sidney's outlook seems disturbingly aristocratic to the present-day reader.[1] Nobility is perceived as unalterably born with the person, class hierarchy is observed at every point and any attempt at breaching the limits is seriously punished.[2] But *Arcadia* also examines the questions of identity, faith, and the limits and weaknesses of human understanding, and the ways in which these can be exploited. In my previous chapters I presented contemporary debates about situations in which what is morally right for one side is inexpedient and potentially even suicidal for the other and vice versa. For Catholics, equivocation and other methods of manipulating the interlocutor's understanding or perception (such as assuming a disguise) seemed to

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[1] This is perceptible, for instance, in the treatment of low characters like Mopsa (cf. the piercing contempt of the sonnet that introduces her). It becomes most upsetting in the way the commons' rebellions are treated, especially in the narrator's sense of satisfaction in their cruel slaughtering by the two protagonists (and later by Philanax's men). Steven R. Mentz gives an equally striking example: 'The servants do not present their sacrifice in zero-sum terms, but their deaths suggest that the politics of Musidorus's wreck are strikingly cold-blooded: either servants or masters must die. Musidorus accepts their sacrifice as a matter of course, explaining that he and Pyrocles had ransomed them from captivity'. ('Reason, Faith, and Shipwreck in Sidney's *New Arcadia*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 44.1, The English Renaissance (Winter, 2004), 1–18, in JStor <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3844656>, [accessed 3 August 2012], p. 11).

[2] In my discussion, I will omit the questions of class politics in *Arcadia*. It is noteworthy, however, that dissenting opinions are also voiced every now and then. For instance, Kalander argues that low birth should not be an obstacle of advancement if the person proves to deserve it (Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia: (the New Arcadia)*, edited with introduction and commentary by Victor Skretkowicz (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p. 25). His opinion is at least partly influenced by the fact that the helots do not execute his son because their captain ('who seemed to have a heart of more manly pity than the rest') dissuades them from it – the captain being Daiphantus, that is, Pyrocles in disguise. Kalander's narrative thus becomes both a challenge to and a confirmation of the innate nobility of highborn characters. I will similarly not tackle in detail the gender issues and the ethical problems of the effeminate hero brought to the front by Pyrocles' disguise. See e.g. Linda Woodbridge *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540–1620* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), 'Part Two: Toward the Hermaphrodite', 139–271, especially pp. 158–9; Mary Ellen Lamb, 'Class and Displaying the Body in Sidney's *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 37.1, *The English Renaissance* (Winter, 1997), pp. 55–72, in JStor <http://www.jstor.org/stable/450773>, [accessed 03 August 2012]). I would merely refer to Musidorus's rant against the female disguise and women (Sidney, *New Arcadia*, pp. 70–72) and Pyrocles' response defending women's moral and intellectual integrity, and his refutation of Musidorus's charges of passion overruling virtue (Sidney, *New Arcadia*, pp. 72–73) as an example of the representation of the ambivalence of available attitudes in the *New Arcadia*.

offer a compromise between risking one's life and committing the mortal sin of lying. For the Protestant authorities, the doctrine of equivocation and other ways of evasion carried the risk that however well they employ their reasoning skills, the information concealed by an ambiguous or equivocal sentence might be crucial in preventing the discovery of traitors. This called attention to the various ways in which ambiguity is capable of misleading the unsuspecting. Pamphlets therefore often insisted on only that being morally sound which is without doubt perceptible: language without hidden or multiple meanings, and single, unalterable identities.

I will explore three ways in which deceit occurs in *Arcadia*. Prophecy – long associated with ambiguity in public discourse, and also central to my reading of *Macbeth* – promises an opportunity to gain more than human knowledge. But because comprehending it falls beyond the limits of human understanding, attempts at doing so are likely to fail eventually. The disguises that the two protagonists wear throughout most of the narrative allow the questioning of their effect on the identity of the characters. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which understanding is manipulated by characters.

2. 'either be vanity or infallibleness': Prophecy in *Arcadia*

According to Michael McCanles,[3] the prophecies enable Sidney to include the central problem of the plot, the question of predestination and free will, within the plot itself. Sidney presents a 'deterministic pattern behind the appearance of freedom, creating characters whose actions conform to a model visible "over their heads" to the reader but invisible to themselves', which makes the disconcerting paradox behind the plot perceptible: 'Basilius fulfills the oracular prediction (i.e. Sidney's fore-conceit) through actions intended to escape and thwart it, and it is clear to reader and characters alike by the end (in the conclusion of the *Old Arcadia*) that these actions have been at once totally free and totally determined'.[4] McCanles is primarily concerned with the 'structural and thematic significance' the oracle has for the plot, while I will focus on the way in which the fact that certain characters seem to know the pre-ordained end affects the plot.

Arcadia features an ambivalent attitude to prophecy. There is a strong and explicit mistrust of it, expressed by the narrator and various characters. Nevertheless, the prophecies eventually prove true – although, predictably, not in the most obvious sense. Several prophecies are mentioned in *Arcadia*: the two knights, Aeschylus and Memnon, who fight against Amphialus receive and misunderstand prophecies about their deaths;[5] Musidorus's bright future is predicted by a number of soothsayers;[6] and

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[3] Michael McCanles, 'Prediction and the Fore-Conceit of Sidney's Arcadia', *ELH*, 50.2 (Summer, 1983), 233–244.

[4] McCanles, 'Prediction and the Fore-Conceit of Sidney's Arcadia', pp. 241–242.

[5] *New Arcadia*, Book 3, pp. 341–342. They become the victim of their overconfidence in the prophecy given to them by the same soothsayer. They trust their respective prophecies (the one predicting that Aeschylus would die in his son's arms, the other that Memnon will not be killed unless by his fellows) because other fulfilled prophecies they received suggest that the oracle is credible. What they do not consider, however, is that the prophecy might have to be understood differently than would seem most obvious in the given context. These two prophecies ultimately turn out to be true, nevertheless, they mislead the two knights because they come grouped with other predictions that come true in some obvious, literal sense, while these are only true in a certain – and definitely not the most obvious – sense of the words. They are true and not true at the same time.

[6] *New Arcadia*, Book 2, p. 162.

the induction of the two princes to the Arcadian state begins with the copy of Philanax's letter in response to Basilius's interpretation of a prophecy.

The oracle about Musidorus serves a number of functions and is fundamental to the understanding of the whole of the book. It comes as an episode in the narrative of the two princes' adventures before their arrival in Arcadia.[7] Musidorus (disguised as Dorus) speaks about himself in the third person as part of the deception of Mopsa that enables him and Pamela to talk unnoticed. He describes the oracles contemptuously as either the gods' practical joke, or the pretended divine mask of a human weakness (flattery), and judges those who believe in them superstitious. However, the story of the prophecies is enveloped in a narrative of the two princes 'strange and incredible' series of successful adventures, and even as he calls the belief in the predictions 'vain fears', they are seen by the reader to be fulfilled within one sentence. It turns out that what is dangerous is not to believe the prophecies, but to attempt to prevent them from coming true.

Thus the sceptical narration of the prophecy in fact serves to confirm the readers' suspicions that the oracles in the Arcadian text, however unlikely or impossible they may sound, will eventually be fulfilled. The stories Pyrocles/Zelmane and Musidorus/Dorus tell about their past suggest that the two princes will survive even when it seems impossible, that they indeed carry out extraordinary deeds, because there is a benevolent force behind all the adventures which will not allow them to

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[7] 'For scarcely was Musidorus made partaker of this oft-blinding light when there were found numbers of soothsayers who affirmed strange and incredible things should be performed by that child. Whether the heavens at that time listed to play with ignorant mankind, or that flattery be so presumptuous as even at times to borrow the face of divinity, but certainly so did the boldness of their affirmation accompany the greatness of what they did affirm (even, descending to particularities, what kingdoms he should overcome) that the king of Phrygia, who over-superstitiously thought himself touched in the matter, sought by force to destroy the infant to prevent his after-expectations, because a skilful man, having compared his nativity with the child, so told him: foolish man, either vainly fearing what was not to be feared, or not considering that, if it were a work of the superior powers, the heavens at length are never children.' *New Arcadia*, p. 162.

perish.[8] Musidorus's disbelief in the prophecies is mistaken, even though it fits well into the more general sense of distrust in them.

The prophecy given to Basilius – the only prophecy quoted verbatim – is inextricably intertwined with the whole plot, indeed, it causes most of the action.[9] Thus McCanles attributes a double function to the prophecy: on the one hand it provides the reader with Sidney's 'blueprint' of the plot (the 'fore-conceit' in the often quoted terms of the *Apology*), on the other hand it 'becomes the formal cause of the main plot precisely by generating a set of actions – Basilius's maneuvers to escape this predictive model of his own biography – that fulfill this fore-conceit in the process of attempting to escape it'.[10] Although this exceptional role might be a bit exaggerated, since a number of other causes are equally indispensable (e.g. the princes' adventures, the shipwreck, the disguises), the fact that we read about them at the very beginning of the story from an all but purloined letter by Philanax, written in the past, undoubtedly lends the prophecy a special emphasis. It is all the more significant, then, that neither Philanax, nor the reader learns the actual contents of the

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[8] The other effect of the long narratives of the two princes' adventures is to establish their 'real' character, the character that is morally acceptable but at the time of the narrative is hidden beneath their perspicuous disguises. Their stories explain their reputation, hint at what is to be expected from them, prove their worth of being where they are and justify doing what they do, even against the apparent interest of the Arcadian state.

[9] Regina Schneider (*Sidney's (Re)Writing of the 'Arcadia'* (New York: AMS Perss, 2008), pp. 27–31) argues that the ending of the fully revised *Arcadia* would not have remained as we know it from the *Old Arcadia*. According to her, '[i]t is true that the oracle is mentioned once more close to the end of Book III, that is, in text that was written at a very late stage, but the description of how the second message was delivered to Philanax is so ironic that it undermines the validity of any such prediction' (p. 28). However, as I argue below, irony does not seem to make the prophecy less credible, especially because it is not aimed at the prophecy but the much too sceptical Philanax. Therefore, in examining the prophecies, and generally in my analysis, I follow McCanles in assuming that the plot would have developed in a way similar to what is depicted in Books 4 and 5 of the *Old Arcadia*. See Michael McCanles, *The Text of Sidney's Arcadian World* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 1989), p. 163: 'The value of old *Arcadia* Books 3–5 in interpreting the conclusion Sidney planned for the new *Arcadia* must necessarily be limited.' and p. 164: 'What exactly the old *Arcadia* ending would have looked like had Sidney recomposed it is something we shall never know. The evidence suggests that little would have been changed, although much might have been added [...] Since the revised oracle retains most of the details of the first version while adding others, Sidney was not free to change very much in the sequence of events in old *Arcadia* Books 3–5. [...] Sidney's plan to keep the discovery, indictment, trial, and condemnation of the princes and Gynecia pretty much as in the first version is further indicated by two apparently authorial revisionary passages that appear for the first time in the 1593 composite *Arcadia*.'

[10] McCanles, 'Prediction and the Fore-Conceit of Sidney's *Arcadia*', pp. 237–238.

prophecy until much later, the very end of Book 2,[11] as this draws the readers' attention to the need for reflection on the process of interpretation itself.[12] It is clear from Philanax's letter that the prophecy influences every aspect of political (and everyday) life of Arcadia (it is arguably the cause of the instability of the state), but it is only at this later point, when Musidorus and Pyrocles have long been entangled in the troubles in the royal court, that they (and the readers) understand the actual reasons that led to those troubles.[13] Basilius finally recounts the very words of the prophecy to Philanax after defeating the attack of the commons, when he believes that most of the warnings of the prophecy have come true ('now I have some notable trial of the truth thereof') and have been evaded:

> Thy elder care shall from thy careful face
> By princely mean be stol'n and yet not lost;
> Thy younger shall with nature's bliss embrace
> An uncouth love, which nature hateth most.
> Both they themselves unto such two shall wed,
> Who at thy bier, as at a bar, shall plead
> Why thee (a living man) they had made dead.
> In thy own seat a foreign state shall sit.
> And ere that all these blows thy head do hit,
> Thou with thy wife adult'ry shall commit.[14]

As the reader might suspect by this point, and as the narrator makes sufficiently explicit ('[b]ut having (as he thought) gotten thus much understanding of the oracle'), Basilius misunderstands the prophecy for a second time.[15] For the first time,

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[11] Cf. McCanles, 'Prediction and the Fore-Conceit of Sidney's *Arcadia*', p. 237.

[12] Cf. McCanles, 'Prediction and the Fore-Conceit of Sidney's *Arcadia*', p. 239: 'The focus is now not merely on the unspecified determinism the oracular text claims for itself, but also on the specific problem of interpretation itself. In other words, at the point in the plot where the reader first reads the oracle it is presented to him as at once (partially) fulfilled and yet mysterious, and the latter all the more so because the former.'

[13] By revealing the actual words of the prophecy here rather than in its original place at the beginning of *Old Arcadia* Sidney changes the reader's perception. Because by this point the prophecy has partly been fulfilled (which nevertheless Basilius is still unaware of), in its new place it confirms the reader's suspicion that even what seems impossible will come true, and in a way that it is prosperous for the protagonists.

[14] *New Arcadia*, pp. 295–296.

[15] Cf. McCanles, 'Prediction and the Fore-Conceit of Sidney's *Arcadia*', p. 239: 'The significance of this passage lies in the ironic interplay between Basilius' conviction that he now commands his own destiny because he has interpreted the oracle correctly, and the reader's awareness of important facts

he had nothing else to base his interpretation on but these words (which he then declined to reveal even to Philanax), and as a result, he retreated to the forest and decided to prevent his daughters' marriages. His understanding – as far as it is possible to reconstruct it – was mostly literal: if his two daughters marry, their husbands will kill him and his reign will be overthrown by a foreign power. In his second attempt at interpreting the riddle, he understands certain parts literally, others metaphorically, and the ones that do not seem to have been fulfilled yet as ones that still can be changed. All in all, his interpretation is determined by his desires that existed before, and irrespective of, the events that led to the reinterpretation:

> 'Only now know that the thing I most feared is already performed – I mean, that a foreign state should possess my throne, for that hath been done by Zelmane, but not as I feared to my ruin, but to my preservation.' [...]
>
> Basilius returned into the lodge, thus by himself construing the oracle: that, in that he said his elder care should by princely mean be stolen away from him and yet not lost, it was now performed, since Zelmane had as it were robbed from him the care of his first-begotten child – yet was it not lost, since in his heart the ground of it remained; that his younger should with nature's bliss embrace the love of Zelmane because he had so commanded her for his sake to do – yet should it be with as much hate of nature, for being so hateful an opposite to the jealousy he thought her mother had of him; the sitting in his seat he deemed by her already performed; but that which most comforted him was his interpretation of the adultery, which he thought he should commit with Zelmane whom afterwards he should have to his wife. The point of his daughters' marriage, because it threatened his death withal, he determined to prevent with keeping them, while he lived, unmarried.[16]

The constant repetition of Zelmane's name suggests Basilius's obsession with her, implicitly giving an explanation (beyond his already mentioned lack of skills) why he might mistake the words of the oracle this time. In order to find an interpretation which fits his frame of mind, Basilius takes 'elder care' to have two functions: on the one hand, it is a metonymy for Pamela, on the other hand, literally, his care for his daughter, which the neuter pronoun 'it' indicates. This way, Basilius

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that Basilius remains ignorant of, namely the presence of the two princes on the scene and their wooing of his two daughters.'

[16] *New Arcadia*, p. 296.

avoids considering the possibility (which in Book 4 comes true), that it is not the care but his daughter herself that gets stolen from him. He interprets the second element of the prophecy in relation to Zelmane again. To resolve the apparent paradox in the two lines (that Philoclea's love is accompanied by nature's bliss *and* hatred) Basilius employs a credible solution: that the first *nature* refers to Philoclea's father, while the second to her mother. At this point, however, readers can already suspect that the resolution of the apparent contradiction is that nature's bliss embraces a love that only seems to be uncouth and hated by nature, since Zelmane is not in fact a woman, and contrary to the allegations, he does not rape Philoclea.

It appears that Basilius believes that he has found the key that made this interpretation possible in his understanding of the line about the foreign state sitting on his throne. This line exhibits a number of characteristics of vague prophetic language. First, it exploits the ambiguity between the metonymic and the literal sense of 'state' and 'sit'. 'State', apart from its literal meaning as a political unit, can metonymically refer to the ruler. Basilius seems to have previously taken and now to take it in the former sense (someone *from a foreign state* rules my country), but while previously he thought this to be a threat (as suggested by 'blow' in the next line), now he understands it as a reassurance. This interpretation is made possible by the interaction of the two meanings of 'state' with the equally ambiguous 'sit'. Previously Basilius thought that 'sit' occurs in its metaphorical sense, meaning 'to rule', while now, because Zelmane convinced the commons to give up their siege sitting on Basilius's throne, he understands 'sit' in its literal sense.[17]

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[17] The lack of specificity in the time scale of 'sit' contributes to these interpretations: in its original context it seemed to be a permanent seizing of power, after the rebellion, it seems to be a temporary necessity which ends as soon as Basilius is capable of holding his powers again. By the end of the story, it turns out that in the person of Euarchus, it will indeed be a foreign *ruler* who sits in Basilius's place, however, the line also turns out to be a reassurance rather than a threat, since Euarchus's reign is temporary and in fact it serves to hold up *Basilius's* state by authority, just as he ultimately understands it (even though with a different subject).

There is only one plain mistake in Basilius's interpretation of the prophecy: his reading of the line about adultery. The paradox in the line (commit adultery with his wife) indicates to him that there has to be a meaning beyond the plain words, and his solution is not entirely implausible. When he commits adultery (as he intends to), it will still be adulterous, but as his further intention is to make Zelmane his wife, when that comes true, it will eventually make the contradiction disappear. However, he disregards one small but straightforward condition that could have made him recognise that his whole interpretation of the prophecy is flawed: that his adultery should occur 'ere these blows', that is, before everything else that has been contained in the prophecy, whereas even he does not think this has come true.

Perhaps the most deceptive part of the prophecy is the one to which Basilius gives the least thought. His interpretation, in the case of his daughters' marriage, does not change compared to his original one, which is not surprising given the fact that this is the part that still has not come true and gives no sign (to Basilius) of coming true. This time, the interpretation depends on the ambiguity of the sequence of events. The state described in the key phrase, 'a living man', because of being a non-finite clause, can either precede its main clause ('you, who until that time when they killed you had been a living man'), or be contemporaneous with it ('you, who at the time of the pleading will be a living man'). Basilius takes the first meaning, and not unjustifiably so, since it is infinitely more likely in the given context than the second, even though the second is grammatically also possible, and as it will turn out in Book 5, it is the one that is the accurate description of the state of affairs. The second interpretation would require the assumption that the two husbands have to defend themselves against charges for a crime which they have not committed. This points to a further layer of obscurity that is added by the inclusion of the phrase ('Why thee (a living man) they had made dead') in reported speech. By this means, the prophecy avoids stating a plain falsehood (that the princes would commit

murder) as it would seem at the beginning of the final trial: it does not claim that Basilius had been murdered, just that there is a belief that he was murdered, and by the husbands. The introduction of such an intermediary step between truth and what is thought to be the truth was commonly believed to exempt such statements from being a lie: if someone claims something to be true which s/he believes to be true, it is not considered a lie even if the statement does not conform to reality. Therefore the prophecy, although it seemingly lies, in fact tells the truth.

Basilius's interpretation misses the meaning in which the prophecy is ultimately fulfilled. However, without the knowledge of the readers (and the hindsight that even the readers gain only once they have finished reading the book), Basilius could not have guessed this meaning. The way in which he understands the prediction, in the given contexts, seems a lot more plausible.[18] It also demonstrates Basilius's ambiguous appreciation of the binding force of the prophecy: he believes that those elements which seem to have been fulfilled already, *must have* happened that way *because* the prophecy predicted them (which supposes a supernatural power, an inevitable fate expressed in the prophecy), while concerning the elements that still seem to be in the future, he believes he has the power to change them.

As a contrast to Basilius's short sighted confidence in the prophecy (or rather in *his* interpretation of the prophecy), Philanax's reactions are also noteworthy as he is the main representative of rationalised disbelief in prophecies. Basilius feels himself

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[18] Cf. McCanles, 'Prediction and the Fore-Conceit of Sidney's *Arcadia*', pp. 239–240: 'Putatively ignorant of the events to come, which will elucidate the oracle's true import, the reader has no choice but to admit at least the plausibility of Basilius' interpretation. But such an admission is necessarily tempered by the reader's possessing crucial information that Basilius does not, namely the fact that his daughters are already on the road to fulfilling the clauses concerned with wooing. How much credibility, then, can the reader allow Basilius' interpretation? The point is that he cannot be sure. And at the center of this uncertainty lies the realization that interpretation may be at once plausible and wrong.' However, I would take this argument one step further, because the claim that realising that plausibility does not make an inference necessarily correct, is rather obvious. This realisation also reveals that even if Basilius possessed perfect reasoning skills, because of the limits of the human intellect, he would still misunderstand the prophecy: for an attentive reader, on the one hand, the trust in logical reasoning is undermined, on the other hand, it becomes clear how easy it is to manipulate human understanding by exploiting the weaknesses of the interpretative process.

justified in not taking Philanax's earlier advice not to trust the prophecies, because, as he believes, they have just proven true. He reproaches Philanax for arguing that prophecies do not come from the divine sphere, but instead are the creations of the human body.[19] Indeed, in his letter addressed to Basilius, Philanax gave several reasons why he mistrusts prophecies in general, and why he believes that Basilius's interpretation in the particular case is mistaken.

Prophecies are suspicious because of the uncertainty about the origin of the knowledge they convey, or in fact, if what they convey can be called knowledge at all: Philanax believes 'these kind of soothsayers [...] to be nothing but fancy, wherein there must either be vanity or infallibleness, and so either not to be respected, or not to be prevented'.[20] Philanax's opinion is theologically sound: prophecies that occur now are either false, or if they are true then the truths they convey are unchangeable even if the future seems unfavourable. In Philanax's interpretation, they carry the danger of inciting the demander to act against the divine will. Philanax's firm belief is that the human understanding should be sufficient in determining the right course of actions in one's life ('since they [the "heavenly powers"] have left us in ourselves sufficient guides').[21] Such reasoning is based on facts and logical principles. As opposed to that, prophecies look into the future, and therefore suggest actions based on assumptions that lack such certainty. Furthermore, their formulation is often also misleading, therefore there is a danger of misunderstanding their suggestions.

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[19] ' "For you, forsooth," said he, "when I told you that some supernatural cause sent me strange visions (which being confirmed with presagious chances, I had gone to Delphos and there received this answer), you replied to me that the only supernatural causes were the humours of my body which bred such melancholy dreams, and that both they framed a mind full of conceits apt to make presages of things which in themselves were merely chanceable, and withal, as I say, you remember what you wrote unto me touching authority of the oracle. But now I have some notable trial of the truth thereof, which hereafter I will more largely communicate unto you." ' *New Arcadia*, p. 296.

[20] *New Arcadia*, p. 21. For a detailed analysis of the concept of providence and the theological background of this argument by Philanax, see Weiner, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Protestantism* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1978), pp. 3–18. E.g. p. 16.: 'Consequently, nothing that we do (or fail to do) can frustrate God's will and impede the fulfillment [sic] of his providential plan.'

[21] *New Arcadia*, p. 21.

Philanax believes that personal action should primarily be informed by introspection, and that the divine will should not be directly sought: 'I would have said the heavenly powers to be reverenced, and not searched into, and their mercies rather by prayers to be sought than their hidden counsels by curiosity'.[22]

Philanax's pedagogical optimism is closely connected to his ethics. His arguments against choosing Dametas as Pamela's guard show that according to him, good actions can only follow from knowing and understanding moral principles: he claims that Basilius's ideal of virtuous simplicity is non-existent.[23] In Philanax's ideal of ethics, virtuous behaviour can only result from full understanding of the moral implications of every action: a good action can only be the result of the knowledge of good itself,[24] which gives one explanation for his general distrust in prophecies. According to Philanax, Basilius and his family had been living a good and safe life, before (driven by the prophecy) they decided to abandon the court. On the one hand, Philanax argues, they have given up a life that had been proven to be secure for an uncertain future, which is merely assumed to be better,[25] if the

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[22] *New Arcadia*, p. 21.

[23] 'it comes of a very evil ground that ignorance should be the mother of faithfulness. Oh no, he cannot be good that knows not why he is good, but stands so far good as his fortune may keep him unassayed. But coming once to that, his rude simplicity is either easily changed or easily deceived; and so grows that to be the last excuse of his fault which seemed to have been the first foundation of his faith.' *New Arcadia*, p. 22.

[24] This view, of course, is parallel with Sidney's own main argument in the *Apology*: 'And that moving is of a higher degree than teaching, it may by this appear, that it is well nigh the cause and the effect of teaching. For who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught? and what so much good doth that teaching bring forth (I speak still of moral doctrine) as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach? For, as Aristotle saith, it is not *gnosis* but *praxis* must be the fruit. And how *praxis* cannot be, without being moved to practise, it is no hard matter to consider.' Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or The Defence of Poesy*, ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd, rev. and expanded by R. W. Maslen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 94. Although Sidney here argues for the superiority of the effect of poetry to philosophical and historical teaching, it is implicit throughout his discussion that the value of poetry is in making *learning* – understanding the *good* – easier, or even possible. Cf. Nandini Das, *Renaissance Romance: The Transformation of English Prose Fiction, 1570–1620* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), p. 21. In her book on Renaissance romance, she reads *Arcadia* as an attempt for negotiation between 'abstract "well knowing" and public "well doing", *gnosis* and *praxis*' ('Sidney's Arcadian Expectations', 55–87, p. 58). What is at stake in the process of this negotiation, according to her, is the renewal of the genre, as well as the birth of new strategies of reading romances (cf. her discussion of the role of humanist obsession with maps in the reworking of the *Arcadia*, pp. 71–84).

[25] 'If this [i.e. the happiness and wellbeing of Basilius' subjects as well as the king, and that the neighbours see him to be so strong that they do not dare to attack him], then, have proceeded out of

prophecy is actually telling the truth, and if Basilius's interpretation of the prophecy is correct at all.[26] On the other hand, what it seems to suggest according to Basilius's interpretation contradicts commonly accepted general principles about the divine will. A sign of this is that God would never advise anything unnatural, and keeping his daughters from marriage and hence procreation is unnatural:[27]

> to keep them both unmarried and, as it were to kill the joy of posterity which in your time you may enjoy – moved perchance by a misunderstood oracle. What shall I say if the affection of a father to his own children cannot plead sufficiently against such fancies? Once, certain it is, the god which is god of nature doth never teach unnaturalness. And even the same mind hold I touching your banishing them from company.[28]

The contrast between Philanax's well-argued warnings and Basilius's hasty conclusions suggest that the former represents a more sensible attitude to prophecies, but the reader might suspect that he is not entirely in the right either because of the tendency of prophecies to come true.

At the very end of Book 3 comes Philanax's conversion. When Anaxius, who is holding Pamela, Philoclea and Pyrocles captive, asks for Pamela's hand in return for their freedom, Basilius sends Philanax to consult the oracle once more. This time the narrator leaves no space for doubt that not only is there an actual spirit talking through the prophetess, but also that it is slightly annoyed at Philanax's scepticism. Upon Philanax entering, the spirit 'attended not his demand, but, as if it would argue

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the good constitution of your state, and out of a wise providence generally to prevent all those things which might encumber your happiness, why should you now seek new courses, since your own ensample comforts you to continue, and that it is to me most certain (though it please you not to tell me the very words of the oracle) that yet no destiny nor influence whatsoever can bring man's wit to a higher point than wisdom and goodness?' *New Arcadia*, p. 21.

[26] 'I, like a man in a valley that may discern hills, or like a poor passenger that may spy a rock, so humbly submit to your gracious consideration, beseech[...] you again to stand wholly upon your own virtue as the surest way to maintain you in that you are, and to avoid any evil which may be imagined.' *New Arcadia*, p. 22.

[27] Cf. McCanles, 'Prediction and the Fore-Conceit of Sidney's *Arcadia*', p. 236: 'Philanax points out that in the very act of trying to avoid catastrophe Basilius may well incur it: "Why should you deprive your selfe of government, for feare of loosing your government? like one that should kill himselfe for feare of death?" (*NA*, 25 [p. 21 in Skretkovicz's edition]) Then Philanax predicts that in hiding his daughters from suitors Basilius may bring about the same "unnaturalness" that the oracle predicts if he allows them suitors'.

[28] *New Arcadia*, pp. 21–22.

him of incredulity, told him not in dark, wonted speeches, but plainly to be understood, what he came for'.[29] The oracle, instead of vaguely referring to the future gives plain orders about what they should do. The prophetic spirit privileges Philanax's way of reasoning over Basilius's (it even gives the politically charged order to Basilius that he should not take any further action based on the prophecy until he and Philanax 'fully agree' on the interpretation), but it is also evident, and becomes evident for Philanax too, that he was utterly mistaken in disbelieving in the capability of the oracle to convey metaphysical truth:

> Philanax, then finding that reason cannot show itself more reasonable than to leave reasoning in things above reason, returns to his lord; and like one that preferred truth before maintaining of an opinion, hid nothing from him, nor from thenceforth durst any more dissuade him from that which he found by the celestial providence directed.[30]

This narratorial statement, heavily relying on paronomasia, perhaps with the purpose of emphasis, indicates that although the humans' task is to exercise their reasoning skills as far as it can gain knowledge, they also have to be aware of (and respect) the existence of knowledge which they will never be able to reach with their limited understanding. They ought to exercise their reason to recognise that limit, and reaching it, learn to trust the prophecy which thus is represented as the assurance that there is a divine providence that already knows and takes care of their fate.[31] It appears that both Basilius's blind trust in the institution of the oracle, and Philanax's

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[29] *New Arcadia*, p. 457.

[30] *New Arcadia*, p. 457.

[31] Cf. Mentz (p. 4), who explores, through the three shipwrecks, different characters' difficulties in recognising and understanding the significance of the divine providence that directs and limits their seemingly free actions. Shipwreck symbolises the possibility of the partial penetrability of the divine by the human, see p. 6: 'Wrecks drive the two young princes to Asia Minor (initiating the adventures of book 2) and later to Arcadia (for book 1), and a final wreck brings Euarchus to them for the denouement (book 5). These episodes are structurally identical: shipwreck wrenches control from the heroes' hands, and Sidney's plot shifts direction.'; p. 8: 'Wisdom alone is inadequate, but the text does not quite abandon its reader to the hopelessness Greenblatt and others have suggested. The *New Arcadia* suggests that human reason can be trusted only so far, but it replaces "wisdom" with a combination of reason and a partial perception of extrahuman Providence.'

unqualified distrust were equally flawed.[32] Thus, *Arcadia* emphasises that the divine

will needs to be sought, and that when it somehow becomes plausibly manifest, it has

to be accepted, but with the constant awareness that because of the limited nature of

human reason, misunderstanding is always a danger, and therefore absolute certainty

is never possible.[33] In *Arcadia*, as it is often the case when an oracle is involved, it is

the characteristically ambiguous prophetic language that leads to misunderstanding.

It is not only Basilius's fault that he is deceived by the prophecy: equally importantly

the prophecy deceives him. The readers know he is mistaken because the narrator

tells them so. But even without that indication, they had already been in possession

of information which suggested that Basilius's interpretation is flawed, although they

still do not have enough knowledge to make out what the correct one would be. The

readers can, therefore, experience both a more privileged position (they know he is

wrong), and a similarly vulnerable one (they do not know what the absolute truth is).

This emphasises the fact that Basilius knows even less, therefore it is unfair to

attribute the mistake only to his understanding – the prophecy is given in a

misleadingly ambiguous language.

Thus, the ambivalent attitude to oracles appears to be a result of one of the central

assumptions of *Arcadia*: prophecies in fact convey true knowledge, the divine

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[32] Cf. Marcus Seldon Goldman, 'Sidney and Harington as Opponents of Superstition,' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 54 (1955), p. 534: '[...] throughout the Arcadia [Sidney] sought to dissuade his readers from frequentation of practitioners of the occult arts'. Weiner, p. 56: 'In consulting the Oracle [Basilius] is (as Philanax later tells him [*OA*, 7]) substituting vain curiosity for humility and patience; in then rejecting what he thinks is the future which the heavens have ordained for him, he is in the grip of a blind arrogance which thinks it can turn aside the will of God....' Both quoted in McCanles, 'Prediction and the Fore-Conceit of Sidney's *Arcadia*', p. 233, n.1. As I have tried to demonstrate, their interpretation engage with only one half of Sidney's view of the relationship between fate and human action.

[33] Schneider (p. 28) believes that the irony present in this prophecy is to suggest that it should not be believed. I would rather suggest that the irony is directed at Philanax, and therefore its implication is exactly the opposite: that Philanax is wrong, and belief in prophecies (both for characters and the readers) is essential. In this, I agree with Mentz, who points out that '[r]eason is valuable because it can reject false explanations, intuit a notion of Providential control, and then recognize its limits. To be sure, this modest hermeneutic accomplishment does little to alleviate terror on a sinking ship. It does, however, clarify the relation between reason and faith in Sidney's fiction. The two kingdoms are not absolutely separate, and reason can recognize the point at which it must give way and not claim more knowledge than it possesses' (p. 4).

knowledge of the end of human actions, but because of the limitations of the human intellect,[34] it is not always possible to fully understand them. This also raises the question of the ethics of the prophetic voice. The prophecy ultimately conveys divine knowledge; however, it does so in a way that is almost inescapably misleading for the hearer. The prophetic voice seems to be misleading Basilius intentionally, or at least it seems that the voice intentionally fails to reveal the metaphysical truth to him, presumably – as Philanax believes – because he is not supposed to know it. Furthermore, the prophetic voice talking to Philanax is unusually personified or is at least given some psychological depth: this voice is not a transparent, unalterable conveyor of a message. This points to the possibility that oracles might possess their own intention, even a malicious one, as the tragic exploration of the same ideas suggests in *Macbeth*.

Prophecies carry the danger that people will misunderstand them and act mistakenly on that basis, like Basilius.[35] However, whatever he does against it brings him closer to fulfilling it. Philanax is therefore right – if prophecy conveys the truth, it is unalterable and knowing it does not allow for changing it. Prophecy, like

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[34] Sidney thus ultimately emphasises the limitations of the human intellect, but it is noteworthy that he allows it a lot wider scope for understanding than most of his contemporaries would accept. This is also a crucial point in his defence of fiction in the *Apology*. According to Brian Cummings (*The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 264–70), the *Apology* uses a theological argument for the justification of the morality of fiction, but Sidney is radical, and perhaps consciously goes against standard Protestant ideas. '[According to Calvin] [t]he arts and sciences in themselves are perfect, but the understanding which apprehends them is not. In this sense human knowledge, too, is imperfect. Sidney, by contrast, sees reason as uncorrupted. He certainly does not derive this idea from Calvin, although he might have inferred it incorrectly from the *Institutes*', p. 269. Sidney later dismantles his own argument: 'The literal sense of Sidney's argument is that the perversity of the flesh undoes the effect of (since it "keepeth us from reaching unto") the "erected" knowledge retained by the intelligence. Perfection, after all, is impossible, since the "infected will" makes it unrealizable in nature. Sidney in this way provides the counter-argument to his own theory even as he evolves it. At this point Sidney seems to abandon theology for more favourable territory. In one uncomfortable sentence, Sidney takes extraordinary theological risks, before taking similar pains to cover over his traces. It is a sign of pressures puritanism places on literary culture', pp. 269–70.

[35] Cf. Euarchus's speech when he undertakes to be the protector of Arcadia (*The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed. by Jean Robertson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 365): 'But remember I am a man; that is to say, a creature whose reason is often darkened with error. Secondly, that you will lay your hearts void of foretaken opinions, else whatsoever I do or say will be measured by a wrong rule, like them that have the yellow jaundice, everything seeming yellow unto them.'

equivocation, reveals and conceals: it gives the impression that it reveals the course

to follow, while in fact it misleads the hearer about it: prophetic language offers a

familiar, more obvious, seemingly unambiguous reading that hides the actual one.[36]

What is disclosed in a prophecy is false unless what remains hidden beneath the

more obvious meaning is also understood. Thus, it is dangerous (and perhaps even

wrong), to seek knowledge only appropriate for the higher powers.[37]

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[36] Cf. My discussion of Servius' commentary in Chapter 1, dealing with the scene when Anchises realises he was mistaken in the prophecy when he followed the more evident interpretation without the less obvious but actual even occurring to him before it has been fulfilled.

[37] I will argue about this in more detail in my chapter on *Macbeth*, where the intention of the prophetic voice is one of the central issues for understanding the play. The same principle seems to lie behind Basilius's argument as the one employed by e.g. Thomas Morton in his explanation of why Jesus's seemingly false statement that he does not know the time of the Judgement Day is not a lie, but is not mentally equivocal either. Morton claims that Christ's words should be understood with the always implied qualification (which the disciples already know) that it is not fit for them to know everything that Jesus as the son of God knows (*A full satisfaction*, Part III, sig. I4^v–K1^r).

3. 'inward worthiness shining through the foulest mist': Disguise in Arcadia

Disguise, as a means of deception, is a double-edged weapon in the context of the Arcadian allegory of the state. On the one hand, it is a device that the two princes use throughout most of their adventures to defend themselves from a variety of dangers and to achieve their goals. As they are the protagonists, the reader is invited to approve of their disguising, or at least to suspend moral judgement and treat it as a minor error that is acceptable in the higher interest of the princes' success. This is achieved by the intervention of providence in the story, which assures the reader that the princes' actions are aimed at some higher good, even if some of them temporarily seem to be sinful.[38] The princes' goals are not always reconcilable with the interest (or at least what appears to be the interest) of the state of Arcadia. On the other hand, disguise is a means by which characters can dissemble their real identities or intentions, putting the integrity of the state into danger.[39] If disguise is successful, the state (or its sovereign) may become the unsuspecting victim of attacks that they cannot control. Disguise allows the two princes to infiltrate Basilius's court without him noticing it,[40] which is the exact opposite of his intentions in moving to the forest. The state appears (even if falsely)[41] to be in danger of perishing, like the ship – the commonplace symbol for the state – on which Musidorus and Pyrocles travelled:

> they were driven upon a rock, which, hidden with those outrageous waves, did as it were closely dissemble his cruel mind, till with an unbelieved violence (but to them that have tried it) the ship ran upon it, and seeming willinger to perish than to have her course stayed, redoubled her blows till she had broken herself in

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[38] Cf. Thelma N. Greenfield, *The Eye of Judgment: Reading the* 'New Arcadia' (Lewisburg, Pa.; London: Bucknell University Press: Associated University Presses, c1982), p. 190: 'They [the early readers of *Arcadia*] regarded the heroes as positive rather than dubious examples of virtue.'

[39] Cf. Euarchus's and Philanax's condemnatory tone in the final trial scene of the *Old Arcadia*, as well as Musidorus's original indignation when he discovers Pyrocles' disguise (*New Arcadia*, pp. 70–72).

[40] Cf. my earlier discussion of Basilius's second attempt at interpreting the main prophecy: he still believes that his strategy to avoid the marriage of his daughters is working successfully.

[41] Of course, that this apparent threat is false is only known to the reader. Musidorus's and Pyrocles' action is morally suspicious because even if Basilius had discovered their disguise, he would not be able to ascertain that they are not dangerous to his state.

pieces, and as it were tearing out her own bowels to feed the sea's greediness, left nothing within it but despair of safety and expectation of loathsome end.[42]

The waves hide the rock like a disguise hides the disguiser's evil mind. What is noteworthy in this image is the contrast between the fluidity and immateriality of the means of concealment and the solidity and the immobility of the concealed intention. The 'cruel mind' stays where it is set, regardless of what happens around it. This image of unchangeability is more broadly applicable to Sidney's conception of character in general.[43]

Even if there is a strong sense that disguise can be penetrated, that real intentions can be reconstructed however heavily they are masked, in most cases this only remains an ideal. In very few cases do characters actually detect the hidden personality or intention *before* something has happened that reveals it, often with irrevocable consequences. The counterexamples are the princes who almost always recognise each other beneath their various disguises, or Gynecia who sees through the female costume of Pyrocles/Zelmane.[44]

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[42] *New Arcadia*, p. 167.

[43] For a contemporary appreciation of Sidney's characterisation, cf. Hoskins (*Directions for speech and style*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Hoyt H. Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), pp. 41–42), who also regards characters as essential, and gives a list of the 'personages and affections' in *Arcadia* as an example for the right application of the principles that Aristotle sets down for the description of 'qualities': 'But he that will truly set down a man in a figured story must first learn truly to set down an humor, a passion, a virtue, a vice, and therein keeping decent proportion add but names and knit together the accidents and encounters. The perfect expressing of all qualities is learned out of Aristotle's ten books of moral philosophy [...] But to our purpose – what personages and affections are set forth in *Arcadia*. For men: pleasant idle retiredness in King Basilius, and the dangerous end of it; unfortunate valor in Plangus; courteous valor in Amphialus; proud valor in Anaxius; hospitality in Kalander; the mirror of true courage and friendship in Pirocles and Musidorus; miserableness and ingratitude in Chremes; fear and fatal subtlety in Clinias; fear and rudeness, with ill-affected civility, in Dametas. And through the story, mutual virtuous love: in marriage, in Argalus and Parthenia; out of marriage, in Pirocles and Philoclea, Musidorus and Pamela; true constant love unrespected in Plangus and Helena; in the true Zelmane inconstancy and envy; suspicion and tyranny in a king and his counsellors; generally false love in Pamphilus; and light courage and credulity in Chremes' daughter; base dotage on a wife in Plangus's father. But in women: a mischievous seditious stomach in Cecropia; wise courage in Pamela; mild discretion in Philoclea; Pamela's prayer; her discourse; squeamish cunning unworthiness in Artesia; respective and restless dotage in Gynecia's love; proud ill-favoured sluttish simplicity in Mopsa.'

[44] *New Arcadia*, pp. 87–88.

Gynecia is represented throughout the book as one of the most intelligent characters.[45] Her skills of understanding and logical reasoning are emphasised a number of times, and even when she is ultimately driven by an almost mad love for Pyrocles, she retains her capability of political manipulation and letting her immediate actions be controlled by long term goals. Most memorably, she decides not to reveal Pyrocles' identity to Basilius when it seems she would be able to profit more if the revelation were to occur later.[46] Therefore Pyrocles' first suggested reason why Gynecia managed to see through 'Zelmane' is that she employed her reason to assess and judge certain (unspecified) 'hints' that Pyrocles might have (unwittingly) given as to his love for Philoclea.[47]

Pyrocles' pondering on how Gynecia might have recognised the male behind the female disguise demonstrates two assumptions that seem to be fundamental to the epistemology of *Arcadia*. First, that basic character is an unchangeable quality born with the person, which can temporarily be veiled by assuming a disguise, but the core of which will always remain unaltered and to a certain extent recognisable.[48]

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[45] Not only does she recognise Pyrocles as a man, but she also figures out his motive (Philoclea), as well as Basilius's affections towards 'Zelmane'. Cf. *New Arcadia*, p. 120.

[46] Cf. *New Arcadia*, p. 278. A similar manipulation by retaining knowledge occurs during the final trial scene in the *Old Arcadia*, when Philanax conceals Pamela's and Philoclea's letters from Euarchus because he thinks reading them would make Euarchus believe either that the princesses are also involved or that the princes are innocent. Cf. *Old Arcadia*, pp. 395–398.

[47] A second possibility, less a consequence of Gynecia's inductive skills than Pyrocles' carelessness, is that she has noticed an unambiguous sign of Pyrocles being male. Finally, Pyrocles suggests that the revelation of his secret might be the work of evil superhuman forces, but whether even he believes in this possibility, is presented in vague terms.

[48] Sidney's ideal of a constant character is central to his arguments against the English plays of his time in his *Apology*. In accordance with contemporary poetic theories, he attributes a didactic-moral function to poetry (see Maslen's note to p. 98, ll. 4–5. (p. 186)). When watching comedy, the spectators realise their own faults by seeing them in an exaggerated extent in comic characters (p. 98). It is even more relevant that all the examples Sidney gives for acceptable comic characters are figures who commit actions worthy of laughter while they are in a state different from their normal one, and therefore carry the possibility of regaining their properly behaving self. Hercules who, as a consequence of his love-madness, dresses as a woman and serves Omphale (for a discussion of the Omphale episode in the Renaissance, arguing that through Pyrocles/Zelmane's badge Sidney attempted 'to reconcile the conflicting claims of virtue and passion', see Nancy Lindheim, *The Structures of Sidney's 'Arcadia'* (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, c1982) pp. 42–51). The 'self-wise-seeming schoolmaster', or 'the awry-transformed traveller' all possess an underlying, good character, which is temporarily superseded by a morally ridiculous one as a consequence of a well-defined event, and therefore once their madness ends, they regain their desirable qualities (pp. 112–113). Education through poetry (and through drama specifically) is possible only if the

Second, that someone who possesses the appropriate skills of observation and reasoning should be able to recognise the 'real' character or intention of the disguiser.[49]

In *Arcadia*, Sidney takes care to emphasise on every occasion that the 'inward worthiness' shines 'through the foulest mist'.[50] When Musidorus first appears as Dorus, his song suggests that for a successful disguise (one that will prevail), an inner change has to occur: 'Come, shepherd's weeds, become your master's mind: / Yield outward show, what inward change he tries'.[51] But not even such a transformation is necessarily successful if the perceiver is attentive enough towards incongruities. Pyrocles/Zelmane, even before hearing the song, notices incongruities which make him suspect the shepherd's apparel to be a disguise:

> A long cloak he had on, but that cast under his right arm, wherein he held a sheephook so finely wrought that it gave a bravery to poverty; and his raiments, though they were mean, yet received they handsomeness by the grace of the wearer, though he himself went but a kind of languishing pace'.[52]

It is also noteworthy that in most cases (like the one just quoted), the shining through of the real character only helps the observer to spot some incongruity, but not to

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characters are inherently good, not evil or irrecuperable (cf. his examples for characters inappropriate for comedy: beggars, clowns, or foreigners who do not speak English properly, pp. 112–113). The ideal comic character, for Sidney, possesses inward qualities which make him/her worthy of representation and capable of *didaxis*, even if those qualities are temporarily altered or veiled.

[49] As I have discussed in the previous chapters, the responsibility for misunderstood speeches becomes crucial in the controversy about equivocation. Catholics, whose aim was to justify misleading the English authorities with ambiguous replies or other means of evasion, argued that the hearer ought to do everything to uncover all circumstances that could help understanding ambiguous speeches and if they fail, it is their mistake. Protestants, on the contrary, maintained that the speaker lies if s/he intentionally formulates his/her response in an ambiguous way, capable of misleading its hearers.

[50] *New Arcadia*, pp. 30–31. This phrase relates to Parthenia, whom Argalus does not stop to love even after Demagoras's poison distorts her features.

[51] *New Arcadia*, p. 105.

[52] *New Arcadia*, p. 105. The internal nobility which radiates through the meanest appearance also occurs in Dorus/Musidorus's third person narrative of their own deeds: 'There they perceived an aged man, and a young (scarcely come to the age of a man), both poorly arrayed, extremely weather-beaten; the old man blind, the young man leading him. And yet, through all those miseries, in both there seemed to appear a kind of nobleness not suitable to that affliction'. (*New Arcadia*, pp. 179–180). He relates the story of meeting two beggars, before revealing to Pamela that they were the king of Paphlagonia and his son Leonatus, reinforces the idea in the reader that internal qualities are recognisable even if they are concealed, and that they are more 'real' than the external layer of poverty that is merely temporarily cast over them.

identify the actual person. Philoclea, for instance, while gradually falling in love with Zelmane, unknowingly recognises the male in Zelmane; her sexual desires make her recognise the need for a different kind of relationship, of which she conceives as strictly heterosexual: 'Then, grown bolder, she would wish either herself or Zelmane a man, that there might succeed a blessed marriage betwixt them'.[53] Pyrocles' only imperfectly concealed maleness thus makes her realise and not realise his hidden true nature.

Philoclea, eventually, does not actually arrive at the conclusion that her mother – correctly – does about the real gender of Zelmane. When identities are thus mistaken, the narrator (whether it is one of the characters or the extradiegetic narrator) emphasises that the mistake is the consequence of an error in the perceiver. Basilius takes 'Zelmane' 'to be such as [she] profess[es]',[54] because his reason is overruled by the Cupid-induced love, an external, divine-created cause. Basilius is prone to being deceived anyway, since he is 'not the sharpest piercer into masked minds', as his belief in Clinias, the revolutionary turned actor, demonstrates.[55] Similarly to him, the princes also fail to recognise well disguised evil intentions and natures, according to Pyrocles, because of their inexperience:

> And there we found a ship most royally furnished by Plexirtus, who made all things so proper, as well for our defence as ease, that all the other princes greatly commended him for it, who, seeming a quite altered man, had nothing but repentance in his eyes, friendship in his gesture, and virtue in his mouth; so that we, who had promised the sweet Zelmane to pardon him, now not only forgave, but began to favour, persuading ourselves with a youthful credulity that perchance things were not so evil as we took them, and, as it were, desiring our own memory that it might be so.[56]

Here, looking back with hindsight, Pyrocles/Zelmane implies that if they had been more experienced at that point, they should have noticed the incongruities and warning signs, and should not have trusted Plexirtus. However, as the case of the

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[53] *New Arcadia*, p. 145.
[54] *New Arcadia*, p. 87. As part of Pyrocles' narrative, this sentence is originally in the first person.
[55] *New Arcadia*, p. 293.
[56] *New Arcadia*, p. 272.

actual Zelmane disguised as 'Daiphantus' suggests, the real character might remain hidden from the others even when they notice incongruities, if the circumstances (falsely) suggest a more likely interpretation. According to Pyrocles' account, when Zelmane joined them disguised as 'Daiphantus', a boy page, he thought he 'had seen that face, but the great alteration of her fortune made her far distant from [his] memory'.[57] Zelmane/Daiphantus's face also indicated that he is not what he really is: 'How often, alas, did her eyes say unto me that they loved! and yet I, not looking for such a matter, had not my conceit open to understand them'. 'His' behaviour also seemed strange to Pyrocles at the time, but he had no reason to suspect who Daiphantus really is, because more likely explanations suggested themselves:

> How often would she come creeping to me, between gladness to be near me, and fear to offend me! Truly, I remember that then I marvelled to see her receive my commandments with sighs, and yet do them with cheerfulness, sometimes answering me in such riddles as I then thought a childish inexperience.[58]

Ultimately, Pyrocles understands these riddles with hindsight ('returning to my remembrance, they have come more near unto my knowledge'), once on her deathbed Zelmane has revealed her true identity, which makes the two princes comprehend phenomena that they did not understand or misunderstood – but all this too late: 'We were amazed at her speech, and then had, as it were, new eyes given to us to perceive that which before had been a present stranger to our minds; for indeed, we forthwith knew it to be the face of Zelmane, whom before we had known in the court of Iberia'.[59]

According to Stephen Greenblatt, there is a general anxiety about the stability of personality in the Renaissance, and Sidney's *Arcadia* contributes a very intricate example of that in its all-pervading disguise plots.[60] However, *Arcadia* ultimately

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[57] *New Arcadia*, p. 260.
[58] *New Arcadia*, p. 260.
[59] *New Arcadia*, pp. 265–266.
[60] 'These themes are not Sidney's alone, of course; they are, in one form or another, characteristic of the entire period and lie behind the extraordinary concern for stability [...] The plot is set in motion by the disguise Pyrocles assumes to be near his love, and we may note here how very important masks, costumes, assumed names, etc. are in this work. Identities are as fluid and unstable as the

suggests that there is one, innate, unchangeable identity: in the end, all secrets are revealed, nothing remains unanswered, no one (however persistent or multi-layered their disguise is) remains unidentified. If there is a belief that such identification is possible in every case, it also implies that there is one specific, real personality that can be recognised.

The two assumptions of a stable personality and the possibility of recognising that personality seem to lead to a rather optimistic conclusion: deceit is controllable and avoidable with the appropriate reasoning skills. However, while the comments of both the characters and the narrator suggest this conclusion, the turn of events somewhat contradicts it, since deceit almost always works as it was intended. Musidorus and Pyrocles recognise one another no matter what they disguise themselves as, but even they need the help of luck (e.g. Musidorus overhears Pyrocles/Zelmane sing and recognises the voice, but he only sings because he believes nobody hears him), besides, they do not actually intend to disguise themselves from each other.

In my second chapter, discussing the casuistical handbooks, I argued that disguise was regarded as dangerous, because of its close connection to questions of authority. Someone who assumes disguise regards it as justified to dissimulate certain character traits or to put on an external appearance that misleads others, either because s/he believes the deceit serves a higher good or his/her own purposes of saving or advancing him/herself (unjustly hindered by the ones whom s/he deceives), or because s/he has an evil intention of his/her own. As Gynecia's example shows, recognising someone else's appearance as disguise and revealing or keeping it secret are also acts of power: it can spoil or help fulfil the intentions of the disguiser. Whoever has the authority, has the ability to determine which of the competing identities is the 'real' one, and which is the one 'assumed'. Whoever defines the

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constantly shifting genres and tones.' Stephen Greenblatt, 'Sidney's *Arcadia* and the Mixed Mode', *Studies in Philology*, 70.3 (1973), 269–278, in JStor <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4173809>, [accessed 3 August, 2012], p. 274.

'real' identity, determines if the person's actions are morally sound or not. In the final trial scene Philanax remarks sarcastically that he is not sure which identity, which name in fact belongs to Pyrocles.[61] Philanax, surely, is unaware of Pyrocles' true identity, nevertheless, he can be certain that some of the personalities he lists are less true than others. The reader knows throughout that there is an actual identity behind the series of disguises (Pyrocles), nevertheless Philanax's rhetoric almost succeeds in having the prince executed – it is only a final unexpected revelation by Musidorus's servant that saves the princes.

Finally, there is something inherently dangerous, and potentially evil in disguise itself:[62] the two brothers, Tydeus and Telenor, who accept Plexirtus's deceitful plan to go into a duel without revealing their identity to one another, end up killing each other instead of their supposed enemy.[63] The disguise can simply turn against the disguiser and put him/her into situations which would not have occurred if they retained their original personality (e.g. Basilius's advances towards 'Zelmane' or the death of the real Zelmane). The immorality of disguise is evident in cases in which evil intentions against the 'good' characters are perceptible – but even if the reader can assess the 'goodness' of a character based on their knowledge of what the effects of providence seem to suggest, this knowledge is not accessible to the other characters. The discrepancy between the knowledge of the readers and of the characters (except for the two princesses) about the princes' identity calls the attention, just like the misunderstood or disregarded prophecies, to the vulnerability of the limited human judgement.

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[61] *Old Arcadia*, p. 387.

[62] I deal with this problem in more detail in my next chapter in the analysis of Viola/Cesario's soliloquy on disguise ('Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness...'). There I argue that Viola/Cesario ultimately does not see disguise as inherently immoral, although considers the possibility. Instead, she concludes that disguise can easily be abused for immoral ends, but the fault, ultimately, lies with the person, not the means.

[63] *New Arcadia*, pp. 263–265.

4. 'looks one way and goes another': Deceit in Arcadia

When a character assumes a disguise, his/her speeches become ambiguous for the readers (if they are aware of the two co-existing identities), while they remain deceitfully unambiguous for the other (unknowing) characters. One of the means by which the princes (and from an early point on, the princesses too) sustain their disguise is to pronounce cleverly constructed phrases that mean one thing to them, and most likely, something else for their hearers. The narrator constantly calls the reader's attention to the difference between his/her and the characters' knowledge by identifying the disguised characters by their assumed names, and even changing the gender of the personal pronoun (in the case of Pyrocles/Zelmane and Zelmane/Daiphantus) according to the assumed identity, both of which techniques emphasise the point of view of the (deceived) characters.[64]

Early on in the story, Musidorus/Dorus has to find a way of letting Pamela know that he loves her without the others (whose task is to keep suitors away) also understanding it. He chooses to court Mopsa in the presence of Pamela, hoping that the princess will realise that the actual object of his affections is her. To make sure he succeeds in this, he provides a physical key to deciphering his behaviour (and more generally, a model of reading ambiguity). As he later explains to Pyrocles, he asked Pamela to hand over a crab-shaped jewel to Mopsa: 'which because it looks one way and goes another, I thought it did fitly pattern out my looking to Mopsa but bending

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[64] A small joke sufficiently demonstrates Sidney's consciousness of the narrative techniques he employed. In one of the many embedded narratives the intradiegetic narrator, Musidorus, slips out of his assumed character of Dorus, on which the extradiegetic narrator comments in a suitably emphatic manner: ' "In truth, never man between joy (before knowledge what to be glad of) and fear (after considering his case) had such a confusion of thoughts as I had when I saw Pyrocles so near me –" but with that, Dorus blushed; and Pamela smiled. And Dorus the more blushed at her smiling; and she the more smiled at his blushing, because *he had, with the remembrance of that plight he was in, forgotten in speaking of himself to use the third person*. But Musidorus turned again her thoughts from his cheeks to his tongue, in this sort.' (*New Arcadia*, p. 173. Italics added.)

to Pamela'.[65] Musidorus/Dorus assumes that Mopsa will only appreciate the literal meaning (receiving a jewel), while Pamela will be able to look beyond that, for his intention, because she is aware of the meaning traditionally attributed to the crab.[66] Although Pamela does not show any sign of understanding the hint, by this point she had made it relatively evident that she is in on the game.[67]

This is just one example of a series of similar deceptive speeches which all exploit the hearer's expectations about the answer, or the hearer's presumable frame of mind. Pyrocles, disguised as Zelmane, uses a misleading comparison: 'I [...] am well known to be equal in feats of arms to the famous Pyrocles...'[68] It is only possible to see the ambiguity concealed in this sentence if the hearer is aware of Zelmane's identity with Pyrocles.[69] Such ambiguous speeches seemingly offer the opportunity for correct interpretation, but in fact the ambiguity is perceivable only with the readers' surplus knowledge, or with hindsight. The common feature in these cases of deception is that in each of them, there is an incomparably more obvious interpretation, beyond which the hearer has no reason to search, unless s/he knows what the speaker or the reader does. The seemingly simple, straightforward,

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[65] *New Arcadia*, pp. 139–140. According to Skretkowitz, the crab was a commonplace with the meaning that Musidorus attributes to it here, but the related motto was usually just the opposite: 'Sponte Mea, Non Vi'. See notes to 139.36–140.2.

[66] As I argue in the next chapter, in *Twelfth Night* Olivia uses her ring in a similar way to make Viola/Cesario understand her. Olivia sends Malvolio and the ring after Viola/Cesario with a message that is incongruous with Viola/Cesario's knowledge, while making perfect sense to Malvolio (because of his lack of knowledge).

[67] For instance, just before the exchange of the crab-jewel, she told Mopsa: ' "Take heed to yourself," said she, "Mopsa, for your shepherd can speak well. But truly, if he do fully prove himself such as he saith (I mean the honest shepherd Menalcas' brother and heir), I know no reason why you should think scorn of him" ' (*New Arcadia*, p. 139). What Pamela seems to know is that, as opposed to Mopsa's well-justified belief, Dorus is *not* Menalcas's brother, therefore Pamela's commendation is in fact a warning against trusting him, which Mopsa, as Pamela expects, takes in the wrong sense.

[68] *New Arcadia*, p. 453.

[69] Similarly, when Anaxius' brother Zoilus attempts to rape 'her', Pyrocles/Zelmane tries to mitigate his desires by claiming that 'she' was assured at 'her' birth that 'she' should 'never be apt to bear children'. A tragic example for the unavoidable success of such misleading ambiguities which are tailored to the hearers' predictable understanding is Parthenia's death. After Amphialus has killed the Knight of the Tomb, who is revealed to be Parthenia, her maids 'accursing themselves that they had obeyed her, they having been deceived by her words, who assured them that it was revealed unto her that she should have her heart's desire in the battle against Amphialus, which they wrongly understood' (*New Arcadia*, p. 399). What to the maids sounded as a reassurance was in fact the expression of her desire for suicide.

everyday statement turns out to mean something unexpected and unforeseeable. As I have demonstrated in my previous chapters, equivocation exploits the same assumption about communication: a response to a question is expected to be true, false, or patently responding to something else than what has been asked. The latter type of response invites the questioner to seek a meaning beyond the literal words. As opposed to these expectations, Pyrocles' false comparisons or Parthenia's assurance (like equivocation) dress their intended meaning in an external form that seems to convey only one simple literal meaning, which makes them almost inevitably deceptive. Such speeches that are ambiguous to the reader, but are mistaken as unambiguous by the characters within the text, are by no means novelties or specific to Sidney's writing; rather, they are well known and often exploited features of literary language. They are, however, formulated in the same way as those means of deception that are denounced by the Protestants in the controversies as lying techniques directly associated with the conspiring Catholics.

Ambiguity may get out of control, consequently misleading both the hearer and the speaker. Upon arresting Pyrocles, Philanax attempts to corner Pyrocles into confessing complicity in Basilius's murder by swearing an oath which, according to his intentions, should be patently ambiguous and therefore unacceptable to Pyrocles.

> 'Only I demand this innocent lady's security, which until thou hast confirmed unto me by an oath assure thyself the first that lays hands upon her shall leave his life for a testimony of his sacrilege.'
> Philanax with an inward scorn, thinking it most manifest they were both, he at least, of counsel with the duke's death: 'Well', said he, 'you speak much to me of the duke. I do here swear unto you by the love I have ever borne him she shall have no worse (howsoever it fall out) than her own parents.'
> 'And upon that word of yours I yield', said the poor Pyrocles, deceived by him that meant not to deceive him.[70]

Philanax believes that Pyrocles knows about Basilius's death, and moreover, that he had a part in the murder, consequently Philanax (wrongly) thinks that for the prince

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[70] *Old Arcadia*, p. 302.

Philanax's oath will mean that Philoclea shall have no worse than her parents, that is, death, and the other possible meaning, seemingly reassuring Pyrocles of Philoclea's security will seem much less likely to him. Pyrocles, however, is unaware of Basilius's death, therefore he understands Philanax's oath the only possible way he can think of: that Philanax promises Philoclea's inviolability. Thus, as the narrator makes it explicit by revealing Philanax's intention ('deceived by him that meant not to deceive him'), Pyrocles misunderstands him and surrenders. Had such deceit been intended by Philanax, it would have jeopardized the readers' belief in his moral integrity.

It is clearly not obviously justifiable to mislead others with deceptive responses. At different points of the story, both Musidorus and Pyrocles feel it necessary to give a justification of the moral rectitude of their speeches. Musidorus, describing to Pyrocles how Pamela accepted his game of talking in the third person about himself (disguised as Dorus), explains the difference between lying and not revealing the truth: ' "As for Pyrocles," said I, "I will not deny it but that he is perished" – which I said lest sooner suspicion might arise of your being here than yourself would have it, and yet affirmed no lie unto her, since I only said I would not deny it'.[71] The distinction between 'I deny' and 'I will [=want to] deny' is reminiscent of the casuistical distinctions between affirming a fact and affirming a state of mind (knowledge, wish, belief etc.) about the same fact. Both arguments justify causing a false belief in the hearer as not being an explicit lie. Pyrocles uses evasion that could be seen as an instance of mental reservation:

> 'But what', said Philoclea, 'became of your cousin, Musidorus?'
> 'Lost!', said Pyrocles.
> 'Ah, my Pyrocles!' said Philoclea, 'I am glad I have taken you. I perceive you lovers do not always say truly. As though I know not your cousin, Dorus the shepherd!'
> 'Life of my desires,' said Pyrocles, 'what is mine, even to my soul, is yours; but the secret of my friend in not mine. But if you know so much, then I may truly

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[71] *New Arcadia*, p. 137.

say he is lost, since he is no more his own – but I perceive your noble sister and you are great friends, and well doth it become you so to be.'[72]

According to Pyrocles, what he said was not a lie because there is a sense in which it is true, even though he believed that Philoclea lacked the information to perceive it that way. Philoclea does not recognise the ambiguity that is present according to Pyrocles (even though she is aware of the relevant circumstances), which suggests that Pyrocles simply made it up as an excuse when he learnt that his deceit had been discovered. Indeed, Philoclea knows the answer to her own question, thus she also deceives (successfully) Pyrocles, as her question instead of asking for information, in fact serves to test Pyrocles' truthfulness. The common feature in the defence of the two princes is that both of them argue that attempting to deceive the other is not necessarily a lie, and that what they did is justified because they did it to defend the other, and the other's secrets. Pyrocles and Musidorus thus implicitly suggest that they are justified in misleading the princesses because they are, as it were, incompetent judges who seek information that they are not bound to know, which is why the princes are not bound to reveal it either.[73] Revealing the true identity of the other would have jeopardised their lives, therefore it would have been the breach of the divine law to take that risk.[74]

The trial scene presents an uncanny mixture of misunderstandings caused by the princes' disguise, and Philanax's lack of knowledge and circumspection (partly

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[72] *New Arcadia*, p. 276.

[73] Cf. the justification that Navarrus (*Commentary*, 2.5–6) and the other defenders of equivocation after him, give for the deception they employ. If the judge is incompetent, the priests are justified to respond ambiguously, using the words according to their own, rather than the judges' understanding (*Commentary*, 3.12), which is exactly what the princes attempt (and fail) to do here.

[74] Sidney here applies the same moral principle as the authors of the Douai-Rheims Cases, when they argue that being instrumental in the murder of a fellow Catholic is a sin to be avoided (Case J2), and since it would be unjust to help causing harm to a fellow Catholic, even an oath taken as a promise to speak plainly is by definition void (Allen–Persons Cases, I. 7, cf. also III. 3). Cf. also Navarrus (*Commentary*, 3.11–13), who argues in the conclusion-summary of the treatise, that using mixed propositions is sometimes the only way to avoid suffering injustice or acting unjustly. When someone is forced to choose between lying and revealing secrets that according to divine laws do not have to, or should not, be revealed, the only lawful way is to seemingly satisfy the unjust questioner and at the same time remain intact in conscience and in the eyes of God.

independent of the princes' deceit). This is aggravated by Philanax's intentional attempt to manipulate the Arcadians and Euarchus, that is, those who possess even less knowledge than him. The scene starts with different levels of lack of knowledge (for the princes, for Philanax, for Euarchus and the Arcadians, for the reader), leads through the partial concealment of knowledge (by the princes and by Philanax) and the substitution of conjecture for knowledge (by Philanax), through a judgement that is partly mistaken, partly based on seemingly true but, in fact, non existent causes, to the final revelation to all.

At the beginning of the trial nobody but the princes and the reader are aware of Pyrocles' and Musidorus's true identity, and ultimately this is the underlying cause (apart from Basilius's apparent death) of everything that is said and done. Philanax, Euarchus, and the Arcadians cannot know for certain who killed Basilius – all they can rely on is Gynecia's admission and the princes' denial of the deed. However, as Euarchus points it out, there is no good reason to believe anything the princes say: 'As for their being princes, whether they were so or no, the belief stood but in their own words, which they had so diversely falsified as they did not deserve belief'.[75] Euarchus's instincts are correct here: the princes, by giving different names from the ones by which they had been known in Arcadia so far, suggest (assuming their honesty) that Timopyros and Palladius are their real names. As the readers well know, that is not true. This is their only (if fundamental) plain lie in the trial – in other cases they rather choose not to tell what they know than to affirm what they know not to be true.

All the major characters of the scene – the princes, Philanax, Euarchus – behave in a puzzling way, although some of the narrator's comments hint at moral principles according to which their conduct ought to be judged. Euarchus, the 'Good Ruler', may appear to some of the readers as applying an overly literalistic interpretation of

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[75] *Old Arcadia*, p. 385.

the laws. The narrator, by incorporating and rejecting that view, sides rather clearly with the righteousness Euarchus shows when he does not accept the two princes' pleas: 'to such an admiration of all the beholders that most of them, examining the matter by their own passions, thought Euarchus (as often extraordinary excellencies, not being rightly conceived, do rather offend than please) an obstinate-hearted man, and such a one, who being pitiless, his dominion must needs be insupportable.'[76]

Philanax's character in the trial scene of the *Old Arcadia* is radically different from – even arguably inconsistent with – the king's faithful deputy in the *New Arcadia* who is just, even if slightly overconfident in human reason. Although he is not plainly unjust with the princes, both characters and the narrator insinuate that his behaviour is far from unbiased. Because of his absolute faithfulness to the late Basilius, he loses self-control more and more as the trial progresses.[77] First, when Gynecia's case is tried, he 'incontinently stepped forth, and showing in his greedy eyes that he did thirst for her blood, began a well thought-on discourse of her (in his judgement) execrable wickedness'.[78] At the beginning of Pyrocles' trial, Philanax is 'even short-breathed at the first with the extreme vehemency he had to speak against them...'[79] By the time it is Musidorus's turn, 'Philanax... so much more vehement, entered thus into his speech against Musidorus, being so overgone with rage that he forgat in this oration his precise method of oratory...'[80] As he loses self-control, he loses the capability of delivering the carefully crafted speech in a manner that would confirm his dignity and integrity of judgement: he can no longer remember 'his precise method of oratory' that would be a requirement of a 'well thought-on

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[76] *Old Arcadia*, p. 414.

[77] McCanles describes his behaviour at the trial as the consequence of a false, conspiratorial logic: 'And it is indeed as a tragedy of conspiracy and bloodshed of the Senecan variety that Philanax proceeds to textualize the information about their arrival and life in Arcadia provided him by the two princes. Philanax's is a conspiratorial view which assumes that none of the events in the denoument of the intrigue plots could have occurred without human will and intention.' McCanles, *The Text of Sidney's Arcadian World*, p. 165.

[78] *Old Arcadia*, p. 381.

[79] *Old Arcadia*, p. 386.

[80] *Old Arcadia*, pp. 399–400.

discourse'. This, of course, turns out to be self-defeating, since it gives the princes the opportunity to point out the internal contradictions and inconsistencies in his arguments (for instance, that he only believes Gynecia's confession as long as it fits his preconception – that she is part of the plot –, while he discards her testimony that she did it alone).[81] Consequently, they can defend themselves by simply disqualifying Philanax's arguments without having to reveal any of the actual facts that they are aware of while everyone else is not.[82]

The princes can also rightly accuse Philanax of intentionally attempting to manipulate his audience. Although his anger at the supposed murderers of his beloved king is genuine, his showing of it is described as histrionically overdone:

> stroking once or twice his forehead, and wiping his eyes (which either wept, or he would at that time have them seem to weep), looking first upon Pyrocles as if he had proclaimed all hatefulness against him, humbly turning to Euarchus (who with quiet gravity showed great attention), he thus began his oration...[83]

Philanax, nevertheless, is not simply cynical and malicious towards the princes: it is his firm (albeit mistaken) belief that they killed (or conspired to kill) Basilius. Therefore, when he receives the letters of Philoclea and Pamela, testifying in favour of Pyrocles and Musidorus, Philanax is 'so far from publishing them (whereby he feared, in Euarchus's just mind, either the princesses might be endangered or the prisoners preserved, of which choice he knew not which to think the worst) that he would not himself read them over, doubting his own heart might be mollified, so bent upon revenge'.[84] Philanax finds it justifiable to retain evidence that conflicts with his understanding of the case, when it seems that by doing so, he serves a higher

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[81] *Old Arcadia*, p. 394.

[82] This is all the more disturbing in the light of the fact that, as McCanles (*The Text of Sidney's Arcadian World*) argues, the princes actually broke the Arcadian laws, even if they did so, as it turns out, for a greater good: '[...] finally, the two princes revealed as malefactors in a good cause, at once violators of Arcadian law and the saviors of the two princesses from their unjust bondage'(p. 164). 'Furthermore, it is not simply the question of appearance versus reality. We likewise perceive that Philanax does not merely misinterpret actions that are "really" guiltless in themselves. Rather, Pyrocles and Musidorus have in fact committed crimes against Arcadia, and their condemnation will exhibit certain justice.' (p. 167.)

[83] *Old Arcadia*, p. 386.

[84] *Old Arcadia*, p. 398.

good (keeping the princesses safe and condemning the murderers) even at the cost of the minor injustice of not revealing all the available circumstances of the case. He is even said to have 'had framed both his own and Dametas's evidence most' for Philoclea's favour'.[85]

Philanax frames and manipulates evidence according to a specific aim, but he is convinced he is right because his interpretation is prejudiced by his preconceptions (he does not want to falsify evidence intentionally). He begins his speech against Pyrocles by claiming that 'the matter, it is so manifest, so pitiful evidences lie before your eyes of it, that I shall need to be but a brief recounter, and no rhetorical enlarger, of this most harmful mischief', which is more or less the opposite of what actually happens in the trial: his speeches are full of conjectures instead of presentations of hard evidence, and his favourite rhetorical device is *interrogatio*, to ask rhetorical questions,[86] which have the advantage of planting an idea in the audience's mind without actually affirming it (and therefore save their speaker from lying).

While Philanax's aim is to manipulate Euarchus and the Arcadians to believe what he believes, he does not know that he is mistaken in his beliefs. As the readers are aware, Philanax's story is a plausible although false parallel narrative to what actually happened,[87] and the fact that almost no element of it accords with the truth is the consequence of a number of factors. The mere facts (Basilius's death, the

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[85] *Old Arcadia*, pp. 380–81.

[86] Cf. McCanles, *The Text of Sidney's Arcadian World*, p. 165: 'Philanax's way of textualizing these events is typical of all conspiracy-mongers: it takes the form of the negative question, "How else could such things have happened?" '. I suggest a slightly different emphasis. *Interrogatio*, as Quintilian describes, can be a means of evading giving proof but attempting to achieve the same convincing effect in the audience. Cf. Lausberg (*Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*, trans. by Matthew T. Bliss, Annemiek Jansen, David E. Orton, ed. by David E. Orton and R. Dean Anderson (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998)), §§ 767–770.

[87] Cf. McCanles, *The Text of Sidney's Arcadian World*, p. 166: 'What is so seductive (and ironic) about such reasoning [...], is that it makes at least as much sense as the facts themselves. Philanax presents his audience with a well-formed text in which words and statements each univocally and analytically imply the next.'; p. 167: 'Consequently, however factually wrong Philanax may be in his accusations, he is structurally right: he follows a recognizable decorum in textualizing the actions of the princes as intrigues leading to tragic death and usurpation.'

princes' suspicious behaviour and multiple personalities, the coincidences between their attempt to escape and Gynecia's mysterious behaviour) that Philanax has to make sense of could actually suggest the narrative that he put forward. The princes had concealed and are still concealing some of their knowledge, therefore Philanax cannot know what in fact happened or who the princes are. He makes inferences based on the facts and his general knowledge of history. The inferences he makes are influenced by his prejudices and his aim of condemning the princes and acquiting the princesses. Even though he intentionally manipulates the audience with his rhetoric, he is not lying to the audience, because (as the narrator emphasises several times) Philanax is actually convinced that the princes are guilty, although he is unable to prove it.

Philanax goes wrong (almost to the point of becoming immoral) because he is blinded by his preconceptions. In contrast, when Euarchus undertakes the role of protector of Arcadia and agrees to preside as a judge over the trials, he reminds the Arcadians:

> But remember I am a man; that is to say, a creature whose reason is often darkened with error. Secondly, that you will lay your hearts void of foretaken opinions, else whatsoever I do or say will be measured by a wrong rule, like them that have the yellow jaundice, everything seeming yellow unto them.'[88]

Philanax seems incapable of following Euarchus's second piece of advice.

Euarchus's first reminder that as humans, none of them can expect their reason and understanding to be infallible (and that therefore their judgement is always prone to being mistaken), could be read as a comment on the whole trial scene, and indeed, on the optimism of the Philanax of the *New Arcadia*, before he is converted to believe in the existence of a higher knowledge (that is inaccessible by human reasoning alone). The narrator's final words on the series of human judgements that

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[88] *Old Arcadia*, p. 365.

occur during the trial scene point in the same direction.[89] When the reawakened Basilius praises Gynecia as the 'perfect mirror of all wifely love', the narrator remarks that '[w]hich though in that point undeserved, she did in the remnant of her life duly purchase with observing all duty and faith, to the example and glory of Greece – so uncertain are mortal judgements, the same person most infamous and most famous, and neither justly'.[90]

Thus, lack of knowledge and limited understanding equally contribute to all the characters being mistaken in their judgements, as it is suggested by the revelation of the greatest secret – that Basilius is not in fact dead, something that not even the readers knew up to this point. His 'resurrection' is the ultimate act of providence that the readers could see at work through the whole plot, and that the characters could also get a (not entirely unambiguous) glimpse of through the prophecies. Although the readers could not be certain of the ending, signs like Philanax's claim ('Basilius's murder hath been the cause of their coming. Basilius's murder they have most treacherously brought to pass')[91] coupled with the tableau-like scene which fits perfectly the formerly mysterious lines could remind them of the prophecy – even though none of the characters recall it until Basilius gives the ultimate – this time correct – interpretation.[92] Finally, Euarchus's presence ('the foreign state' that sits in Basilius's 'own seat') as the judge and protector serves as a proof of providence, which the narrator also clarifies explicitly when he points out the irony of his presence. The two princes assume their final false identities in the hope that this way they can avoid their disgrace reaching Euarchus's ears, 'whom the strange and secret

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[89] Cf. McCanles, *The Text of Sidney's Arcadian World*, p. 171. 'We cannot disagree with Euarchus's condemnation at the trial, since it is based on actions that both princes have admitted. On the other hand, we are aware in ways that Euarchus is not of the greater complexity of forces that have joined to create this situation. [...] If in fact "never-changing-justice" is really Euarchus's concern – that is, a judgement that takes account of and is wholly adequate to the dialectical rules that Sidney has shown governing the text of the Arcadian world – then it is precisely this kind of justice that he does not, and cannot, mete out.'

[90] *Old Arcadia*, p. 416.

[91] *Old Arcadia*, p. 400.

[92] *Old Arcadia*, p. 416.

working of justice had brought to be the judge over them'.[93] Ironically, the disgrace of their actions and the nature of their disguises is perceived faster by Euarchus than they could have imagined, and he evidently despises them for it: '...for never had I shepherd to my nephew, nor never had woman to my son. Your vices have degraded you from being princes, and have disannulled your birthright. Therefore, if there be anything left in you of princely virtue, show it in constant suffering that your unprincely dealing hath purchased unto you.'[94] The narrator's not too subtle or original moral lesson makes it clear that Euarchus's presence and role as a judge is by no means accidental, but due to the will of a higher power: 'in such a shadow or rather pit of darkness the wormish mankind lives that neither they know how to foresee nor what to fear, and are but like tennis balls tossed by the racket of higher powers'.[95] The narrator's comment, made before the accusation of the princes begins, warns the reader to take sceptically whatever passes during the trial, but read retrospectively, from the end of the book, it relates to all the human actions and mistakes in the text of *Arcadia*.

The kind of deception that the princes employ to save themselves and each other works like equivocation in a broad sense. They devise speeches with the hearer's understanding in view, which enables them to apply ambiguity in a way that will in all likelihood mislead the hearer because of his/her expectations. These speeches are true in Pyrocles' and Musidorus's sense, but false in the hearers'. In the Protestant treatises, this would qualify as a lie, because it is a speech intended to deceive. Misleading speeches that are based on a presumption about what the hearer will understand, and some hidden ambiguity, are common literary devices. In the controversies, however, they would be presented as outrageous lies, and a technique previously unheard of. As the examples from *Arcadia* (fitting well in a long-standing

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[93] *Old Arcadia*, pp. 384–5.
[94] *Old Arcadia*, pp. 411–2.
[95] *Old Arcadia*, pp. 384–5.

tradition) demonstrate, such deceptions certainly existed before the controversies, and the exploration of their presumably destructive potential in *Macbeth* cannot be simply attributed directly to the historical events of the Gunpowder Plot.

5. Conclusion

Two key elements of the plot, prophecy and disguise, play with the ambivalent attitudes towards deception: desire and anxiety. Prophecy seems to promise knowledge which is beyond what is attainable by the human intellect or reason, while it threatens that even when that knowledge is revealed, it is easily mistaken (exactly because of those limitations), and may lead to catastrophe if acted upon; and if that happens, only divine providence can set things right.

Disguise, for its wearer, provides a relatively safe way of hiding in plain sight: s/he can be present in otherwise unsafe or inaccessible places by pretending to be not who s/he is, or to be someone else than s/he is. This assumption of a second identity is at the same time a source of anxiety: once it has been assumed, there is a danger that the second identity will start to live a life of its own and by the time the disguiser wishes to get rid of it, his/her original identity may be fully consumed by the new one. Disguise is potentially even more dangerous for those who face someone in disguise: it deceives its perceivers, and carries with it the peril of mistaking the other for who s/he is not, without even noticing the error, especially if the disguise is chosen well enough by the disguiser to harmonise with what others want or expect to see.

Prophecy, disguise and verbal deception are successful if they are customised to the frame of mind of the perceiver, and exploit the weaknesses, limitations or lack of information of the perceiver. *Arcadia* is ultimately a comic exploration of these issues, because the princes' aims (although not all of their means) are just and morally good. But the opposite is equally plausible: disguise can be used for evil intentions too. The readers of *Arcadia* are in a privileged position compared to the characters, because they know more than any single one of them, but they still do not

comprehend everything fully until the very end. This allows them to experience, at least partially, the sense of the lack of control portrayed in the characters.

McCanles discusses the way in which the prophecy reveals the working of providence to the readers but not to the characters. This points to the fact that the prophecy at the same time establishes the contract between the author/narrator and the reader which ensures that the narrator will not lie to the reader, although – to be kept in suspense until the ending –, the reader allows (or even expects) the narrator to deceive him/her to a certain extent.[96]

The requirement from the author that s/he should not lie explicitly to the reader, and that s/he should ultimately reveal the 'truth', thus appears as an aesthetic necessity for the reader. However, considered in the light of the controversies, it could also be seen as an ethical requirement, or at least parallel with the ethical requirement on the avoidance of lying.[97] The way in which Sidney consciously plays with the contrast between the characters' and the readers' varying degrees of knowledge directs attention to the ethics of writing fiction (or drama). The reader's or audience's involvement is ensured by withholding information from them, or giving information in a way that appears unimportant, or that is ambiguous and therefore the reader/audience is likely to misinterpret it. The reader expects the narrator to give and not to give information, to hide the unexpected meaning behind the veil of the everyday, more or less in the manner of the prophecies or the

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[96] Cf. Mentz, p. 14 'His resigned hope approximates the imperfect knowledge of shipwreck that the reader has at the text's opening: these disasters are mysteries and opportunities, occasions for the divine Author to surprise with the circuitry of His story'.

[97] Writing and reading works like the *Arcadia* constitute an act that fell under moral judgement in the Renaissance, according to both the attackers of poetry and its defenders like Sidney. Therefore the contract between the author/narrator and the reader is not simply an aesthetic, but also an ethical one (cf. Das, pp. 30–31, Lamb, pp. 62–69). It might be true that the poet 'never lieth' because s/he 'nothing affirms' as regards the real world, s/he could still provide the reader with false information as regards the 'second nature' that s/he has created in their writing. The anti-theatrical texts of the period also seem to suggest that the author (especially the author of a play who assumes false identities and therefore pretends to be someone else than s/he actually is) commits a sin if s/he misleads the reader, but in more relentless Protestant views, the act of writing fiction itself is already a sin. Sidney's *Apology* is a response to the latter position. This topic is much larger than the space I have for it here, therefore I merely attempt to propose some basic ideas that might be worth further consideration.

deceitfully ambiguous characters. The higher purpose of teaching and delighting the reader justifies such temporary deceptions.

One cause of the sense of vulnerability that the readers can also experience is the realisation that deceit can come in many forms. Beneath these anxieties lies the fascination with and fear of ambiguity: the fear of being deceived by the ordinary, by what seems to be straightforward, a fear of missing the opportunity to use one's reason to make sensible decisions because ambiguity conceals the fact that there is even a choice; and the fascination that ambiguity provides a means of avoiding dangers without compromising our moral integrity with lying.

The religious controversy obviously could not have influenced Sidney directly (as most of it took place twenty years after his death). In fact, the case appears to be almost the opposite: in the controversy fears and politically motivated rhetorical strategies have been recognised (on one side) or have been employed (on the other) that had long been topics underlying literary texts – and as such presumably appealed to the reader's curiosity and anxiety. The fact that Sidney's protagonists employ tricks similar to those which Catholics are later accused of, underlies the Catholic claims that such evasions were not (and never have been) used exceptionally by them, even if *Arcadia* cannot be regarded as a representative of the mainstream Protestant theology.

Chapter 5.

Equivocation in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

1. Introduction

The breakdown of the distinctions between ambiguity (inherent in words/phrases) and equivocation (words/phrases with a mentally reserved qualification), already suggested by the opposing arguments about the ways in which some of the biblical examples should be interpreted, becomes immediately evident as we move away from the rather sterile and artificial examples used in the controversy to the intricate language of Shakespeare's plays. The insistence on the distinction between 'genuine' ambiguity and 'mixt, Hermaphroditical, epicaene, half-borne, and half-vnborne'[1] equivocation, apart from being politically biased, is predicated on linguistic theories which stipulated a necessary and straightforward connection between thought and word,[2] between the heart and the tongue, also evidenced in the way in which Augustine's ideas on lying were evoked. What becomes apparent in the exploration of equivocation is that even when an ethical consideration ensures a bond between the tongue and the heart, what is in the heart will not necessarily become obvious by listening only to the tongue, all the more so, because the heart itself can contain two – equally true – meanings (one true in a different sense from the other). Furthermore what is grasped as the 'true meaning' cannot be established without first determining from whose point of view its truthfulness is sought: the speaker's, the hearer's, or the omniscient external examiner's (that is, God's). What the ears of men hear is often inadequate without a hint at what the divine judgement knows from within.

The dynamics that an ambiguous speech creates between speaker, hearer and God as it emerges in the controversy about mental reservation show some similarities

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[1] John King, *A sermon preached in Oxon: the 5. of November*, *1607*, STC (2nd ed.) / 14985 (Oxford: Printed by Joseph Barnes, 1607), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. D1r.

[2] Contrast this with Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, 14a4–9, where he argues that there is a significant difference between the thing/thought and written/spoken word relationships. While the former are infinite in number and have a necessary mutual correspondence with one another, written and spoken words are limited, and are connected to the existing things merely by convention.

with that of the rudimentary dramatic situation of dishonest character, immediate stage audience and audience.[3] Augustine's definition of a lie reassured the hearer that if he is misled by the information he receives then the speaker intentionally gave false information, and the speaker will be punished for his sinfulness. However, when the speech that conveys the information is not plainly false but ambiguous then the hearer loses his assurance that if he is deceived the due consequences will befall the deceiver. Plays act out the anxiety about (and fascination with) the fact that ambiguity disrupts the logical chain that was supposed to exist in communication between the speaker's thought, the speech and the ensuing gain of knowledge of the hearer, without necessarily affecting the connection between what is true and what is said.

Throughout this chapter, I will follow Maurice Hunt in referring to the disguised protagonist of *Twelfth Night* with the compound name Viola/Cesario, partly because of the reason he gives, that is, 'to designate the hybrid creation visible throughout'.[4] However, that visibility, as it will constitute the main line of my argument, extends only to the audience, but not to the other characters. Therefore my other, and perhaps more important, reason for calling her Viola/Cesario is that it provides a possibility to contrast that persona with her 'simple' personas that occasionally come to the foreground (suppressing the others): Cesario (to the other characters), and Viola (to herself and to the audience). This contrast will be especially useful in exploring the different knowledges generated by certain equivocal expressions and phrases in the play.

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[3] Even if the audience member's knowledge can never be omniscient comparable to God's, their function of being the external judge who is in a position to see both the speaker's meaning and the hearer's misunderstood meaning makes them similar.

[4] Maurice Hunt, 'Love, Disguise, and Knowledge in *Twelfth Night*', *CLA Journal* 32.4 (June 1989), 484–93, Reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. by Michelle Lee, Vol. 92. (Farmington Hills Gale, 2005), 300–304. p. 301. (References given according to the latter version.)

It is common to consider *Twelfth Night* a play that is concerned with (comic) linguistic manipulation to a greater extent than other plays.[5] While there is no reason to deny the play's preoccupation with the different forms of linguistic manipulation, it is perhaps fair to suggest that such claims are often the product of the bias that very understandably takes power over a critic when s/he focuses on one particular work. I will here argue that, rather than being exceptional in that sense, *Twelfth Night* is in fact one instance of a broad tendency of Renaissance literature to explore certain ways in which understanding and misunderstanding can be achieved.

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[5] All quotations from *Twelfth Night* are according to the following edition: William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, Or What You Will*, ed. by Keir Elam, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Cengage Learning, 2008). See e.g.: 'It is a play "about" interpretation, as well as a play that has received more than its share of interpretations.' (*Introduction*, p. 15.); 'It is evident that a narcissistic passion for rhetoricity constitutes the ur-plot of the play subtitled "What You Will."' (Elizabeth Freund, '*Twelfth Night* and the Tyranny of Interpretation', *ELH*, 53.3 (Autumn, 1986), 471–489, in JStor, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873036>, [accessed 27 June, 2011], p. 482).

2. 'so thou mayst say': Pinning Down the Elusive Meaning

Keir Elam approaches the issue of a breach between what is meant and what is understood from the perspective of Speech Act Theory. He draws a parallel between Searle's principle (which posits that whatever a speaker *means* to express *can* be expressed)[6] and the 'rationalistic optimism' of the Renaissance,

> espoused by sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century rhetoricians and moralists, such as Thomas Wilson: 'The tongue is ordained to expresse the mynde, that one might understand anothers meanynge' (1553: Aii^r) and William Camden: '*Locutio* is defined, *Animi sensus per vocem expressio*. On which ground I build these consequences, that the first and principall point sought in every language, is that we may expresse the meaning of our mindes aptly to each other' (1605: 34).[7]

This faith in the 'representational or indeed reproductive capacities of language' in certain cases is turned into a moral imperative when the mind–speech dichotomy is replaced by the heart–speech one, 'which finds in language a faithful delegate or duplicate: "[Speech] is the Image and Interpreter of the Soul; the Messenger of the Heart, the Door by which all that lies within comes out, & shews itself abroad" (Charron 1601: 117).'[8] As we have already seen in a number of examples given by those who insisted on the speech–mind/tongue–heart correspondence in the previous chapters (from St. Augustine to Gratian, from George Abbot to Thomas Morton), speech is not only capable of, but *ought to*, represent the speaker's real meaning and intention in its entirety. This correspondence, presented as logical necessity, reveals itself as a desire, as the optimal case, the morally right way of speaking, which on the other hand implies the daunting recognition that it is not always so. It entails the possibility of 'a breach in the heart–speech integrity. In this moral application of the

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[6] This also points to the limitation of the direct applicability of Speech Act Theory to drama, where the language usage is not ordinary in the sense that the speaker's purpose with speaking is, unlike in ordinary communication, not to convey a message or to make him/herself understood, but just the opposite.

[7] Keir Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse: Language-Games in the Comedies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 212.

[8] Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse*, p. 214.

metaphor, allegiance to the heart is not a necessary constituent of *all* utterances but rather a necessary condition for ethically sound (and hearty) speech.'[9] One example for such a breach is equivocation where the break in the mind/heart–tongue/mouth link is not an error but one of the multiple intentions of the speaker. Such a speaker may or may not want to express what is inside, but at the same time definitely wants to conceal at least part of his/her meaning, while appearing to be participating meaningfully and appropriately in the communicational situation. The breach, in the case of equivocation, is in fact not between intention and expression, but between intentions (as for instance Morton argued in *The encounter*), still in the 'heart' of the speaker.

Twelfth Night explores a number of ways in which understanding and misunderstanding happens, or is caused intentionally. The play practically begins with a misunderstanding. After Orsino's fifteen line emotional meditation on love comes the ensuing dialogue:

> CURIO   Will you go hunt, my lord?
>
> ORSINO   What, Curio?
>
> CURIO   The hart.[10]
>
> ORSINO   Why so I do, the noblest that I have.
>   O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first
>   Methought she purged the air of pestilence;
>   That instant was I turned into a hart,
>   And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
>   E'er since pursue me.
>
>   (1.1.16–21.)

The pun on hart–heart is an Elizabethan commonplace,[11] so much so that it has been mentioned already in connection with the Morton–Persons controversy.[12] Unlike in

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[9] Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse*, p. 215.

[10] Spelt 'hart' in both cases in F; in 3.1.156 ('Viola: By innocence I swear, and by my youth, I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth'), it is spelt 'heart'

[11] note to 1.1.16–17 in Elam (ed).

[12] Cf. the example of the boy who shot the knight's *hart*, but claimed he did not shoot the knight's *heart*. Morton, *The encounter against M. Parsons*, STC (2nd ed.) / 18183 (London: [W. Stansby at

the case of the hypothetical boy, whose aim was to conceal his meaning, which was only revealed when the dead animal was found, Curio's (perhaps unintended) pun is recognised by the audience, and seized upon by Orsino, as soon as it is fully uttered. Curio's intention, that is, which of the senses of h[e]art he meant, is nonetheless never revealed, since neither of them would be improbable, and even though Orsino picks up on one of the possibilities (hart), he further develops the idea through a mythological allegory in which finally the two meanings are inseparably merged: to hunt the hart is the same as to hunt the heart. Both are metaphors for love, which Orsino by evoking Acteon's story, expresses through the commonplace of the hunter being the hunted as well.

The dynamics of the scene between Viola/Cesario and Feste are somewhat similar. The scene involves characters who insistently select one of the arbitrarily chosen meanings of an ambiguous word as its only possible signification. The scene consists of a series of intentional, and somewhat malicious, misunderstandings on both sides.

VIOLA	Save thee, friend, and thy music. Dost thou live by thy tabor?
CLOWN	No, sir, I live by the church.
VIOLA	Art thou a churchman?
CLOWN	No such matter, sir. I do live by the church, for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the church.
VIOLA	So thou mayst say the king lies by a beggar if a beggar dwell near him, or the church stands by thy tabor if thy tabor stand by the church.

(3.1.1–10.)

Eliot's Court Press] for Iohn Bill, 1610), in *Early English Books Online*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. G4[v].

Feste, in his reply to Viola/Cesario's initial question, employs the same phrase ('live by') in a different, equally plausible meaning. As the dialogue progresses, the same pattern of misunderstanding recurs.[13]

In his next response, however, Feste seems to regain control over the conversation, and it remains with him until the end of the scene.

CLOWN   You have said, sir. To see this age! A sentence is but a cheverel glove to a good wit: how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward.[14]

VIOLA   Nay, that's certain. They that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton.

CLOWN   I would therefore my sister had had no name, sir.

VIOLA   Why, man?

CLOWN   Why, sir, her name's a word, and to dally with that word might make my sister wanton. But indeed words are very rascals since bonds disgraced them.[15]

VIOLA   Thy reason, man?

CLOWN   Troth sir, I can yield you none without words, and words are grown so false I am loath to prove reason with them.

VIOLA   I warrant thou art a merry fellow, and car'st for nothing.

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[13] Elam, in a note in his edition of the play, calls Viola/Cesario's 'Art thou a churchman?' 'ironically superfluous' because of the clear message Feste's clothes would have conveyed to the audience. However, it is in no way superfluous from the point of view of power relations: by reverting to her original meaning she forces Feste into an explanation of his meaning, which in turn provides Viola with another opportunity to comment on Feste's usage of words ('So thou mayst say...'), exposing it for what it is: idle punning.

[14] The idea of turning sentences inside out occurs often in definitions of equivocation (in the sense of ambiguity); cf. the note in the Oxford edition (*Twelfth Night, or, What You Will*, ed. by Roger Warren and Stanley Wells, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)): 'chev'rel literally kid (from Middle English *chevrelle*), a very soft, pliable leather (*OED sb.1*) easily turned inside out, and so an apt expression for the way in which a phrase can be manipulated for witty purposes. Compare Romeo 2.3.77–8: "here's a wit of cheverel, that stretches from an inch narrow to an ell broad." '

[15] The note to this line in the edition by Warren and Wells gives the following interpretation: '*bonds disgraced them* i.e. legal contracts replaced a man's word of honour, thus *disgrac*ing him by implying that his *word* was not to be trusted'. However, if we take Feste's next reply into consideration, the line might well be referring to the tricks that can be played during the interpretation of contracts, or already in wording them, and it could be this that brings disgrace to words in general.

> CLOWN   Not so, sir, I do care for something; but in my conscience, sir, I do
> not care for you. If that be to care for nothing, sir, I would it would
> make you invisible.
>
> (3.1.11–29.)

The final exchange – with the quibbling on the performative capacity of caring for nothing by which it could make Viola/Cesario disappear – contains Feste's most obviously hostile attack on Viola/Cesario. At least part of the tension that critics[16] note between Feste and Viola/Cesario is a consequence of the way Feste employs the Fool's traditional juggling with others' words to an extreme, and of Viola/Cesario's unwillingness to admit defeat (as opposed to e.g. Olivia in her first scene).

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[16] e.g. Warren and Wells (eds), 'Introduction', pp. 56–57, and note to 3.1. in general; Elam (ed), note to 3.1.27–29.

3. 'What means this lady?': Hints and Clues

Viola/Cesario deceives other characters by saying a truth which appears to be false, or at least counterfactual. As examples in my previous chapters have demonstrated, this is another method of escaping detection and lying at the same time: to formulate truth in a way that to the stage audience, because of their expectations resulting from ordinary language usage and/or the circumstances of the speech, the truth will appear as its own opposite.

Viola/Cesario appears to 'hint' at her real identity to Olivia and Orsino, but they never recognise these 'hints'. However, calling them 'hints', as critics often do, seems to disregard an important tension between different knowledges present in a performance by privileging the critics' own point of view (or rather the sense Viola is hiding) as *the truth*, or *the real meaning* of Viola's words. It forms part of a tendency to attribute unequivocal meaning to a phenomenon that attracts attention specifically by being ambiguous. Calling these ambiguous references 'hints' implies that the way Viola or the audience understand them is the only right interpretation, whereas they clearly make perfect sense to the characters of the play too, and they do so exactly because they are formulated in such a way that they can carry two different meanings. The audience knows that Viola's meaning is the one that eventually conforms to reality, but they presumably also recognise that what she is playing with here is that with the knowledge of the other characters, *their* meaning is the more plausible one. If Viola's meaning is singled out as *the* meaning, then the tension that the illusory choice between the different interpretations creates will disappear, even though it is an important element of the theatrical effect of such comic scenes.

The most intriguing features of Viola/Cesario's manipulation of/with language from the perspective of the conditions for understanding can be demonstrated in

contrast with some of Olivia's dealings. After her first meeting with Viola/Cesario,

Olivia orders Malvolio to give one of her rings to Viola/Cesario:

> He left this ring behind him,
> Would I or not. Tell him I'll none of it.
> Desire him not to flatter with his lord,
> Nor hold him up with hopes: I am not for him.
> If that the youth will come this way tomorrow,
> I'll give him reason for't. Hie thee, Malvolio.
>
> (1.5.294–299.)

Olivia misleads Malvolio into believing that the ring is from Orsino, and that he

needs to return it to Viola/Cesario because s/he had refused to accept it back from

her, which as it is uttered, registers for the audience as an obvious lie (that is, the text

does not suggest any alternative sense in which it may be true). Her intention in

saying this becomes clear to the audience who already know about her love, when

she tells Malvolio to propose another meeting at which she is willing to give her

reasons to the youth (and not his master). This presents the audience with a rare

interpretational situation: one character's speech is given an unreflective

interpretation by another character (2.2.5–11), which serves as the basis for a

soliloquised reflection by a third character (2.2.17–41).

The audience witnesses Malvolio's and Viola/Cesario's understanding of her

orders two scenes later. Since Malvolio has no reason not to believe what Olivia said

about the ring, he reproduces faithfully the first part of her message, but changes the

second part from a slightly discouraging invitation ('if... will... tomorrow') to an

almost absolute prohibition to return ('never... unless'), potentially because that is the

intention he suspects beneath Olivia's original words.[17]

> She returns this ring to you, sir: you might have saved me my pains, to have
> taken it away yourself. She adds, moreover, that you should put your lord into a
> desperate assurance she will none of him. And one thing more; that you be never
> so hardy to come again in his affairs, unless it be to report your lord's taking of
> this. Receive it so. (2.2.5–11.)

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[17] In believing that Olivia's 'if' in fact means 'unless', he may be influenced by his own desires. Cf.
Warren and Wells (eds), 'Introduction', p. 46.

In Malvolio's not necessarily unbiased interpretation (one possibility is that he sees a rival in Cesario) sending the ring means Olivia's rejection of Orsino, because he has been told that the ring is being *returned*. Viola/Cesario, however, is presented with a message that contradicts itself: from her perspective, the context which Olivia's message offers as the basis of its own interpretation is one which contradicts facts as she knows them. For Malvolio there is only one proposition in the message, that there is a ring which Olivia is returning; for Viola/Cesario, the message consists of two contradictory propositions, the ring itself, and that it is *returned* to her. The latter she knows not to be true, since according to her knowledge the ring is *given* to her. Thus, the underlying message of the ring is eventually almost the opposite of the public one: she should *not* give it 'back' to Orsino, because it is intended for her, and not for him.

As the first line of Viola/Cesario's soliloquy indicates, the fact that Olivia's message is in contradiction with Viola/Cesario's knowledge, instigates her to reflect on the message and attempt to resolve the apparent incongruity. The resulting soliloquy moves from bewilderment to understanding; from understanding to a wider understanding of the effects of wearing a disguise; and from disguise to the consequences of assuming a second identity.

> VIOLA   I left no ring with her. What means this lady?
> Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her.
> She made good view of me, indeed so much
> That methought her eyes had lost her tongue,
> For she did speak in starts, distractedly.
> She loves me sure. The cunning of her passion
> Invites me in this churlish messenger.
> None of my lord's ring? Why, he sent her none.
> I am the man. If it be so, as 'tis,
> Poor lady, she were better love a dream.
> Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness...
>
> (2.2.17–26.)

The two economical sentences of the first line state the fact that disturbs Viola ('I left no ring with her'), and testify to the realisation that there has to be a concealed meaning in the ring ('What *means* this lady?'[18]). Viola's question sounds almost like the formal introduction of a school exercise of interpretation. This emphasis indicates the process through which she will raise herself to the level of understanding the audience already has. The fact that she did not give the ring to Olivia (a fact that Malvolio is unaware of, and which makes Olivia's deception of him successful), is what prompts her to inquire into a possible second (from Olivia's point of view, first) intention behind sending her a ring.

If Malvolio had been presented with the contradiction in the same way as Viola was, if he had known what Viola knew, he might also have been able to reach the same conclusion as her. It is worth highlighting that that extra piece of knowledge is indispensable for even suspecting (let alone guessing) Olivia's intended meaning. What Olivia achieves is to formulate a message that appears to convey a completely plausible and appropriate meaning to the messenger, without him knowing that it conveys a primary intended meaning (hint at her love for Cesario) which is even further removed from the apparent – secondary – intention of rejecting Orsino than being its simple opposite (acceptance of Orsino's suit), as it would be, for instance, in the case of irony. The double success of Olivia's message (to conceal her intention from Malvolio and to reveal it to Cesario) lies in her ability to put it in a form that seems completely natural to the unknowing listener, while it seems incongruous with itself to the other listener who shares (at least part of) her knowledge.[19] The way Malvolio understands Olivia's message, it presents a fact in a false light and thus misleads him; the way Viola/Cesario understands it, it still appears false as regards the words (Viola/Cesario thinks it so: 'None of my lord's ring! why, he sent her

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[18] Cf. Malvolio's satirised, self-deceivingly overconfident and failed attempt at understanding Maria/Olivia's riddle: 'what should that alphabetical position portend?' (2.5.116–7).

[19] Cf. the ring as a double signifier with the crab-jewel that Musidorus/Dorus gives to Mopsa.

none'), but by virtue of that, calls her attention to its own incongruity, which is the common way of warning the hearer to search for further intentions that could be at work.

Thus, the same message is and is not a lie. As seen in the Morton–Persons controversy, in the case of ambiguous statements, truth cannot be pinned down without choosing a point of reference: the truth of such a statement can only be investigated either from the point of view of the speaker and God, or from the point of view of the hearer, but never from both. The choice, however, is arbitrary. This is what critics disregard when they contrast Viola's or Olivia's 'real meaning' with the way their speeches are understood by other characters. Critics in such cases privilege the speaker's point of view as reconstructed by themselves (itself an act of interpretation, consequently prone to loss or change of meaning). In the case of plays like *Twelfth Night* where the audience has knowledge that characters do not, the audience is nevertheless confronted with the characters' interpretations too, therefore even when they know the characters are wrong, the contrast contributes to the audience's understanding, and it is this tension that accounts for the pleasure of the audience. The meaning of an intentionally ambiguous message therefore cannot simply be reduced to the speaker's intended meaning which s/he knows to be true, since there is at least one other intention at work, the meaning intended (and conceived) to mislead the other character or characters by coinciding in its form (i.e. words) with the other.

As opposed to Olivia's message just discussed, Viola/Cesario seems to take more care to formulate her deceptive messages without uttering an actual lie. In Shakespearean comedy, lying is not necessarily forbidden or punished by the providential authority. It is significant, therefore, that she shows a tendency to avoid plain lies, preferring to use multi-layered language to conceal from other characters at least temporarily the meanings closest to her heart, while making them known to

the audience. What makes her character remarkable is that in many cases she does not need to employ asides or soliloquies to convey the two meanings, but manipulates language to achieve a double understanding of one and the same utterance.

While wearing disguise, Viola 'hints' several times at her counterfeit identity, but nobody in the play ever seems to take up any of her 'hints'. Even though it is clearly part of the tradition that the comic protagonist's disguise cannot be seen through by the other characters, it is also significant how far Viola/Cesario can go in complementing the visual disguise with verbal tricks that reveal and conceal her original identity simultaneously. This verbal dexterity will also be constituent of her more complex identity as it appears for the audience (Viola/Cesario), who are, this way, given the pleasure of understanding what none of the characters do. 'Hints', although seemingly they are aimed at the other characters, in fact serve as cues for the audience to seek secondary meanings in Viola/Cesario's words. Like the disguised character's counterfeit identity which, once assumed, cannot be separated from her original identity any more, intentionally ambiguous speeches retain both their meanings for the audience. Viola/Cesario's equivocations may be unrecognised hints from her own perspective, but for the audience they are just as much the seemingly innocent statements that other characters (mis)take them for; it is this tension, the tension of equivocation that makes her speeches so appealing.

The speeches in which Viola most obviously mixes non-factual (or counter-factual) elements with ones which, read differently from the way their on-stage audience understands them, are true, occur in her two central dialogues: the one with Olivia when she confesses her love to Cesario, and the one with Orsino, when Viola confesses hers in a concealed way. At the end of the long scene in which Olivia finally speaks openly about her love to Cesario, Viola gives her probably most densely ambiguous reply:

> VIOLA   By innocence I swear, and by my youth,
>   I have one heart, one bosom and one truth,
>   And that no woman has, nor never none
>   Shall mistress be of it save I alone.
>
> (3.1.155–158.)

Viola is and is not giving a clue to Olivia, because this could only have been a clue to her if she had known that she should have been looking for one. There is nothing in Viola/Cesario's words that could arouse suspicion in Olivia, therefore it is only natural (and in accordance with Viola's intention) that Olivia is deceived. Keir Elam suggests otherwise. According to his note, *mistress* is a word that could have raised Olivia's suspicion: '**alone**[:] except for me, with the implication that Cesario is *mistress* rather than master: another half-confession'. But another reading also suggests itself if viewed from Olivia's perspective: that nobody will be the mistress of Cesario's heart, *unless* that mistress is himself, but since he is not a woman, absolutely nobody will ever win his heart. Taken in this sense, what in Viola's understanding is a self-explanatory statement (as a heterosexual woman she will not have a mistress), sounds to Olivia as a hyperbolically committed promise (a young male promising not to ever have a mistress). Cesario deceives Olivia with a statement that has a meaning suggested by the circumstances (her being dressed as a boy), which is much more obvious to her than the unexpected one in which it will eventually come true, and which is nevertheless undoubtedly potentially included in the way it is phrased.

'This scene', Keir Elam notes at the beginning of 2.4, 'is dedicated principally to the long exchange between Orsino and Cesario on the theme of love, and contains the comedy's most extended play on Viola-as-Cesario's androgyny, together with her veiled confession of love to the duke, *which he fails to understand*.' (Italics added.) A number of Viola/Cesario's responses in the course of this scene are ambiguous in their reference. Orsino has every reason to believe that Cesario is referring to a female beloved whom Orsino suspects Cesario has, and later to the apparition-like

daughter of Cesario's father, sitting in an unidentified place 'like Patience on a monument'. It is only the audience that knows that the daughter is Viola, and the beloved is Orsino, because the responses are formulated in a way to suggest that Cesario is talking about someone not present.

DUKE Thou dost speak masterly.
My life upon't, young though thou art, thine eye
Hath stayed upon some favour that it loves.
Hath it not, boy?

VIOLA A little, by your favour.

DUKE What kind of woman is't?

VIOLA Of your complexion.

DUKE She is not worth thee, then. What years, i'faith?

VIOLA About your years, my lord.

(2.4.22–28.)

(...)

DUKE [...] Make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

VIOLA Ay, but I know—

DUKE What dost thou know?

VIOLA Too well what love women to men may owe:
In faith, they are as true of heart as we.
My father had a daughter loved a man,
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.

DUKE And what's her history?

VIOLA A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
But let concealment like a worm i'th'bud
Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
We men may say more, swear more, but indeed
Our shows are more than will, for still we prove
Much in our vows, but little in our love.

DUKE   But died thy sister of her love, my boy?

VIOLA   I am all the daughters of my father's house,
            And all the brothers too; and yet I know not.
            Sir, shall I to this lady?

                                                                                    (2.4.101–122.)

At the beginning of the discussion of the love life of the page, Viola/Cesario gives three responses that conceal from Orsino that he himself is their object as well as their audience. She achieves this not only through a pun ('favour') and two ambiguous references ('of your complexion', 'about your age'), as noted by the editions of the play, but also by omitting the personal pronouns in three natural sounding elliptical sentences. By means of that, she avoids having to specify the gender of the object of her love, and consequently avoids explicitly denying her gender (which would have jeopardised her disguise as a man). The value of such verbal adroitness in a character can be seen when these responses are contrasted with the ones where Viola/Cesario has to lie about her gender in the same scene: in 116–118, when she fully identifies with her male persona and speaks in first person plural ('we men… our… we… our… our').[20] Another example from the second half of the scene is a borderline case. Viola/Cesario ironically begins (and justifies) her defence of the strength of female love by once more claiming herself to belong to the male gender. If 'they are as true of heart as we' is understood literally, as Orsino understands it since he has no reason to suspect any hidden meaning, then it helps sustain the Cesario persona, but it does not accord with the facts, or put more radically, it is a lie. From the point of view of Viola, however, there is a way in which even this can be understood as a true statement (if we accept that a general subject like this can retain the potential of referring to the speaker): according to such an interpretation, Viola formulates her statement as a tautology to emphasise its self-

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[20] Freund, p. 484 gives a similar example from line 108: 'Cesario's subjunctive mode describes a hypothetical or counterfactual condition ("were I a woman"), but if Cesario is Viola, the condition becomes counter-counterfactual, that is to say tautological: Viola is a woman'.

explanatory nature; it reinforces her statement: women are as true lovers as women. Ironically, of course, such an understanding can just as well undermine its own seriousness, especially in a context like this where the misogynistic standpoint seems to be the norm to be overturned.

According to Keir Elam's note, when Viola/Cesario begins her tale with 'My father had a daughter loved a man', she is, again, giving 'a "hidden" clue to Viola's gender and her love for Orsino, who, as elsewhere, fails to decipher the conundrum'. Not contesting that it is a clue to the audience, the sentence has a perfectly unremarkable interpretation too which without the audience's knowledge is in fact the only one available to Orsino: that Viola/Cesario *is* talking about another daughter of his father's, someone that is not present on the stage. It would actually be quite surprising, and a display of irrational suspicion – comparable to Leontes' – if at this point Orsino began to suspect that the way he understands Cesario is wrong, and that *he*, in fact, is referring to *her*self.

Towards the end of their conversation, when Viola/Cesario names herself both as the only brother and as the only daughter of her father's house, it is, according to Elam, 'another of Viola's riddling clues identifying her as the subject of her own history; *again Orsino fails to take the point* (cf. 107).' (Italics added.) There is in this a tone of indignation at Orsino's imperceptiveness. However, if Orsino, like anybody in an everyday conversation, assumes that the other with whom he is talking, intends to convey, rather than conceal some information from him, then what linguistic signal could he have picked up? Viola/Cesario's sentences make perfect sense, when they are read without the knowledge that Viola is a woman. It is only with the audience's surplus of knowledge that the ambiguity of the speeches, and hence the possibility of a deceptive meaning, becomes apparent.

Viola's and Orsino's understanding of these statements form a chiastic structure from the audience's point of view. Viola's meaning to herself in the first statement,

'I am all the daughters of my father's house' (120) is literal and conforms to the facts: she (as opposed to what her disguise suggests) *is* female with no sisters. She, on the contrary cannot intend her second claim, 'And all the brothers too' (121) literally if she wants to avoid lying. Therefore, it does not affirm her manhood (the meaning her disguise as a context would suggest), but denies the existence of a brother: her father has no son (any more).[21] Orsino's understanding of the speech is (mis)guided by the disguise. When Cesario says she is the only daughter, the contradiction between the visible and spoken persona's gender (boy page vs. sister) invites Orsino to search for a non-literal meaning: instead of being perceived as it conforms to facts, that is, as an affirmation of Viola's womanhood, it sounds like an emphatic denial of the existence of such a daughter. From Orsino's point of view, this is arguably a lie. The second statement, conversely, is most likely to be taken literally by Orsino: Cesario has no brothers, which is false as regards the facts, but still not a lie, as argued above. Viola's equivocation is thus more masterful than most of the examples devised by Garnet or Persons. What on the most basic level seems to mean that Viola/Cesario is an only child, is understood by the audience as a concealed and truthful identification of herself with the girl sitting like Patience on a monument on the one hand, and on the other hand, as the false identification of herself with her non-existent brother: a statement that is true if understood according to the mind of the speaker, but a lie, if interpreted with the knowledge available for the hearer (Orsino).

With these equivocations Viola/Cesario manages to confess and not to confess her love to Orsino. It is successful, because with her linguistic ingenuity she can rather freely relieve her heart to the person whom it most concerns, and to whom it would be completely inappropriate to do so without the veil of the male disguise (a

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[21] The statement does not conform to the facts (since Sebastian is alive, something the audience knows since 2.1), it is nevertheless not a lie, because – as theologians agree – a false claim is not a lie if to the speaker's knowledge it is true: Viola could not have known at this point that Sebastian is alive.

satirical version of that situation is acted out by Malvolio); but also because she attracts Orsino's attention even more than before, fortifying the (unconscious) bond that ultimately (if unexpectedly) results in marriage. Moreover, she does so while at the same time involving the audience as an accomplice to her deception of Orsino.

Viola/Cesario's 'hints', in accordance with her intention, are never picked up by the other characters. This is a comic version of the problem of equivocation: for the immediate hearers, speech appears to be produced by a non-deceiving intention (as it is commonly assumed), while the primary intention is unavailable without penetrating the heart of the speaker. The speaker's interest, on the other hand, is not to let her heart be penetrated. For the spectators both intentions and both interests are accessible.

When the speaker deliberately employs some form of ambiguity (whether it is mental or verbal equivocation), his/her intention (in the heart) is to convey a message that will be misunderstood. The breach is not between what the speaker thinks and says, but between what the speaker knows to be true and what the hearer will believe to be true on hearing what the speaker says. These equivocal replies come in situations in which both telling the truth and lying would be disadvantageous (or even dangerous) for the speaker: situations in which the choice seems to be between two bad solutions. Equivocation is the third way out (or in between the two bad ways), which, however, according to the morality that contemporary protestant treatises would subscribe to, is non-existent. Such linguistic manipulations of characters mirror the desire attested in the religious polemics to be able to escape prosecution without risking one's moral integrity.

In a successful performance the audience presumably takes Viola/Cesario's 'hints' as hints, understanding them primarily as she does, nevertheless, because the mistaken (or unrecognised) meaning is also represented on the stage in Orsino, the scene suggests that when faced with similarly formulated deceptive speeches,

misunderstanding is guaranteed and unavoidable. The audience's pleasure in this dialogue comes from their surplus of knowledge compared to Orsino: the audience knows that Viola/Cesario is misleading Orsino. At the same time, the play also enacts the recognition in the background that Orsino could not differentiate between Viola's plain lies and equivocal (and thus misleading) statements, based merely on her words, without access to her intentions (which the audience has). This is pleasurable, because the audience's interest lies with Viola's to avoid premature detection. Once that is recognised, however, the potential danger also becomes discernible: the same could happen when the interest would be the opposite, to be able to detect ambiguity and lying, and it will turn out to be just as impossible as it is here.

4. 'One face, one voice, one habit, two persons': Disguise and Wickedness

The most prominent means of deception in the play is Viola's disguise and assumption of the personality of Cesario that accompanies it. Instead of entering the discourses about the instability of gender, androgyny, cross-dressing and especially female transvestism,[22] I will approach disguise as a parallel to, and a complementary of, linguistic deception. The relevance of disguise in the light of the religio-political debates of the late Elizabethan and the Jacobean period hardly needs explanation: the anxiety about closet Catholics who pretended to go to Protestant services, about secret Catholic agents, about expelled priests living under pseudonyms and disguised as servants is well-documented.[23] The disguise element in the plot of *Twelfth Night* (and other plays like *The Merchant of Venice* or *Measure for Measure*), can be seen as a comic exploration of the anxiety about being deceived without having the slightest chance of evading it, as well as its opposite: the representation of the fascination with and desire of being able to evade both human persecution (by the misleading appearance) and divine judgement (by in some way retaining the original personality).

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[22] These issues are widely discussed. See e.g.: Jean E. Howard, 'Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39.4 (Winter, 1988), pp. 418–440; Dympna Callaghan, ' "And all is semblative a woman's part": Body politics and *Twelfth Night'*, *Textual Practice*, 7.3, 428–452; for an overview, see also Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 236–8. Cf. Peter Hyland, *Disguise on the Early Modern English Stage* (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, c2011), p. 142: 'Cressy's point is, I think a welcome realignment of the discussion. The feminist and queer theorist arguments have been partial in both senses of the word; because they have focused on the boy actor and on disguises related to the "girl page" they have inflated the importance of a single one of the broader range of disguise devices. I would say that the sheer number of disguises of all kinds reflects a much more widespread anxiety about the "identity system" that was by no means confined to issues of gender.'

[23] Cf. also Feste's remark when he puts on a curate's gown (4.2.5–6).

Disguise in Renaissance drama is often seen as a dramatic device by which its wearers gain knowledge about other characters or themselves.[24] However, as Lloyd Davis pointed out in his study of Renaissance character formation, this view presupposes that there was a concept of a stable identity, over which disguise could temporarily be superimposed, and then removed without trace. According to such an approach, which Davis calls essentialist, the *real* identity of the character is replaced by the disguise, and restored at the end of the play, while the character potentially gains some further knowledge about him/herself. This, however, does not change the personality of the character, but only helps them recognise a trait that they had always possessed unknowingly.[25]

> Next, disguise is seen as teleologically oriented to the affirmation and resolution of true identity. Selfhood is the goal of disguise: "the comic heroines undergo a temporary and self-willed loss of identity; they stage finite and controlled performances at the end of which everything is as it was to begin with." Thirdly, disguise is considered a means, perhaps a therapy, through which mature individuality and full humanity can evolve and develop. Disguise realizes self-knowledge.[26]

Such a view, however, does not take into consideration that what to the disguiser is their 'real' personality, is invisible and hence practically non-existent to the other characters, while for the audience, it is merely one element of a complex personality. As in the case of ambiguity, the knowledge and understanding of the disguiser, the

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[24] Rosalind Miles, *The problem of 'Measure for Measure': A Historical Investigation* (London: Vision Press, 1976), pp. 125–197; Susan Barker, 'Personating Persons: Rethinking Shakespearean Disguises', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43.3 (Autumn, 1992), 303–316, pp. 303–316; Peter Brand, 'Disguise and Recognition in Renaissance Comedy', *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies*, 1 (1991), 16–32, p. 28; Karen Greif, 'Plays and Playing in *Twelfth Night*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 34: *Characterization in Shakespeare* (1981), 121–130, pp. 125–126.

[25] Cf. for instance the way Karen Greif, p. 123, characterises the relationship between Viola and Cesario: 'In her exchanges with Olivia, Viola is able to treat the part she plays with comic detachment; but the somewhat rueful tone underlying her awareness of the ironies of her relation to Olivia turns to genuine heartache when this separation between her true identity and her assumed one comes into conflict with her growing love for Orsino. Unable to reveal her love openly, Viola conjures for Orsino the imaginary history of a sister'. As I will argue later, her recognition pertains not so much to the split between two solid identities, but to the doubly deceitful nature of disguise, which tricks both its viewer and its wearer.

[26] Lloyd Davis, *Guise and Disguise: Rhetoric and Characterization in the English Renaissance* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 15. Davis's quote is from Linda Bamber *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1982), p. 41.

deceived character and the audience differ radically. Consequently, such a view fails to deal with the tension between the several perceptions of situations with disguised characters which play an important role in creating the dramatic effect.

Furthermore, according to Davis, the essentialist view is anachronistic, and it fails to recognise that '[t]he motif of disguise suggests that personal identity is not conceived as essentially or originally present through a broad stream of the period's social discourse. There may never be a "disguise-less" character; instead, it is the degree or intent of deception and the control over the effects of disguise that vary.'[27] He argues that a historically accurate view sees disguise as another of the many potential guises that together constitute the personality. Consequently, not only does the concept of a *real* identity not make sense, but neither will the several identities be perfectly separable from each other. Disguise can never be completely abandoned to reveal the true self of a character,[28] because for the audience of a play like *Twelfth Night*, it is part of the character: 'once a disguise has been donned, its wearer can never simply take it off, either to return to an original self or to attain an ultimate one. Its unpredictable effects remain in force for the wearer and observers'.[29] As I attempted to demonstrate in my previous chapter, the essentialist concept is not obviously anachronistic either, since Sidney's *Arcadia* seems to support such an interpretation; on the other hand, the approach which denies the existence of one 'real' identity seems more appropriate to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

As Davis, elaborating on and criticising Greenblatt's idea of self-fashioning, argues, having several guises (partly framed by social expectations, partly self-

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[27] Davis, p. 4.

[28] Contrast this with e.g. Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 214.: 'Alexander Leggatt makes the excellent point that "in other comedies a single personality is extended by disguise, but the extension is temporary and finally withdrawn; this is the only case in which the new figure created by disguise has also an objective reality, a life of its own" [Legatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 47–8, 251–2.]'.

[29] Although Davis (pp. 5–6) makes this observation about the double-edged nature of disguise in connection with Iago's apprehension of his own situation ("This is the night / That either makes me, or foredoes me quite" (v.i.128–9)), it is equally applicable to Viola's case.

imposed in defiance to them), was essential for a successful public life in the Renaissance.[30] But Viola's example demonstrates perfectly how difficult it would be to identify her 'real' character. As the religious controversies about the lawfulness of disguise demonstrate, an insistence on the existence of one 'real' personality and a denial of the moral acceptability of several *personae* can be an act of exercising oppressive power. Having a number of guises, and at the same time marking out one of the opponent's guises as his *real* character, and perhaps further identifying another as a disguise, a guise that is not genuine, is an obvious technique to attack the other's moral integrity. Analyses of Renaissance drama do not always examine disguise in ethical terms, but it is all the more telling that Macbeth's dissembling of purpose and identity is treated as necessarily immoral, while Viola's or Portia's disguise is not interpreted in an ethical dimension. This suggests a moral bias in modern criticism similar to that perceptible in the arbitrary way in which English Renaissance authorities defined morality.

There are two explicit references in *Twelfth Night* to the immorality of disguise: Viola's soliloquy in 2.2, and Feste's short soliloquy in 4.2. As much as it would fit the present discussion, Viola's soliloquy about her disguise ultimately does not argue for the intrinsic wickedness of disguise.

> Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness,
> Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
> How easy is it for the proper false
> In women's waxen hearts to set their forms.
> Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
> For such as we are made of, such we be.
> How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
> And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
> And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
> What will become of this? As I am man,
> My state is desperate for my master's love;

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[30] Davis, pp. 17–18. It is perhaps easier to assent to Davis's criticism of the 'essentialist view' as relating to historical figures than to the characters of a play, since the existence of the latter is already the product of the (at least to a certain extent) conscious creative process of the author, therefore they would not necessarily have to respect the same socially imposed rules as a living person.

> As I am woman, now alas the day,
> What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe?
> O time, thou must untangle this, not I.
> It is too hard a knot for me t'untie.
>
> <div align="right">(2.2.27–41.)</div>

After the first two lines, apostrophising the disguise, Viola shifts the blame for deception to the 'proper false' men. Disguise is not essentially evil, but it is an instrument that men can use to mislead and seduce women. However, the responsibility is distributed even further, and becomes shared between the deceiver and the deceived. The 'proper false' can use disguise as a device to deceive women because of a weakness that is essentially constitutive of women's character: the too easily impressionable female heart ('In women's waxen hearts to set their forms'). This idea is reaffirmed in the next two lines: deception through disguise, as characterised by Viola, is a consequence of the interplay between 'frailty' constitutive of the female character and the deceitful intention of the male seducer.[31]

The implicit contrast that Viola sets up between the proper false and herself is also noteworthy. Viola, she admits, is false because she wears the disguise (she is even 'false' as a man, as Keir Elam points out in his note). She deceived Olivia, just like the 'proper false' male seducers deceive women, but the extent of the deception Olivia suffers was not intended by her. In the first half of the soliloquy (2.2.18–26), she talks about seducing Olivia as a surprise, as something which even she understood only when she received Olivia's message with the ring. It was just as unpremeditated as falling in love with Orsino, which the disguise makes an even more complicated issue. This is another sense in which Viola understands the wickedness of the disguise: while she originally intended it as a protection, it develops into a hindrance which prevents her from fulfilling her desire, and thus, as

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[31] Cf. Elam's note in his edition: 'Viola's *we* marks a shift from the position of deceptive false man to that of member of the deceived suffering female sex: she is at once cause and effect.'

she realises, her disguise has got out of control and she tricked herself into a situation which she is no longer able to disentangle.

Nevertheless, disguise after all *is* described as evil in line 27, even if not as its essential quality, but as an end for which it can be exploited. The 'pregnant enemy' that 'does much' with the help of disguise is a likely reference to the devil, as editors point out.[32] A few lines later Viola calls herself 'poor monster': she is poor, because she lost control over the disguise which originally she devised, as well as a monster, an androgynous creature.[33] However, as Brian Vickers pointed out, transvestism and androgyny were treated and punished severely in the Renaissance,[34] and in his edition Elam explicitly sees it as a reference to the devilish nature of the disguise. According to him, 'her transvestism [is compared] to Satan's disguising himself as a serpent in *Genesis*'.[35] Finally, Feste's disillusioned remark when he disguises himself as a curate, suggesting that he is not the only person to 'dissemble in such a gown',

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[32] Cf. notes by Elizabeth Story Donno (*Twelfth Night, or, What You Will*, ed. by Elizabeth Story Donno, introduction by Penny Gay, New Cambridge Shakespeare, Updated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)); Elam (ed). In their edition Lothian and Craik associate this line with *Hamlet*, 2.2.594–595 ('and the devil hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape'). See William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. by J. M. Lothian and T.W. Craik, The Arden Shakespeare, Second Series (London: Methuen and Co., 1975), note to 26–27 (ll. 27–28. in Elam (ed)). Banquo's warning to Macbeth about the Weird Sisters' prophecy ('And oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence') could also be quoted as a parallel. It is noteworthy that, according to Kenneth Muir, this idea was commonplace (see the notes to lines I.iii.123–126 in his edition, *Macbeth*, ed. by Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare, Second Series (New York and London: Routledge, 1991)).

[33] Cf. the notes in Donno (ed.) and Warren and Wells (eds).

[34] Vickers, p. 237: 'This is a well-known point to anyone familiar with [...] Sidney's difficulties with the 'womanish man' produced by the disguised prince in *Arcadia*. This topic has been recently treated with great historical range and critical intelligence by Linda Woodbridge, [according to whom] the Renaissance knew "a tradition of fear and contempt for physical androgyny and transvestism which went back to the Greeks" (and presumably explains why the legal sentences punishing it were so savage). Ovid's myth of Hermaphroditus became "an emblem of bestial transformation" in Renaissance culture' (Woodbridge 1984, p. 141).'

[35] See note in Elam (ed), cf. also 'Introduction', pp. 62–3, where Elam discusses the differences between the two cross-dressing plots. We might also be reminded of the abusive language of the public discourse about equivocation, in which the imagery of sexual transgression and abnormal sexuality features prominently, see for instance John King's 1607 sermon: '[...] whose mixt, Hermaphroditical, epicaene, half-borne, and half-vnborne propositions are like I say not there seruations of the Gentiles---*Iuraui lingua,* but the oracles of the deuiles themselues. In a worde, they áre the marow, and spirit of the *mystery of iniquitie,* the trumpets of sedition and rebellion' (sig. D1ʳ). Even if such responses are historically determined (present day audiences do not necessarily share the same prejudices, or believe that disguise is the work of the devil), they can be made clear in performance.

may be a reference not only to hypocrisy in general,[36] or the dissembling Puritans more specifically,[37] but more straightforwardly (and less comically) to the threat that even clergymen may be capable of dissembling. This interpretation underlines the role of the gown as a signifier itself: the gown suggests that the wearer is a priest, and therefore vouches for his truthfulness. Thus, the curate's gown is seen as an unreliable signifier: even if the person wearing it is an actual clergyman (as opposed to Feste), he may nevertheless be dissembling in some other respect, and in that case his gown becomes part of a disguise, because it authenticates whatever the wearer says, even if it is false. Just as Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*, disguised as a priest, verifies his intentions by pointing to his garment,[38] an actual but in some way dissembling priest could also use it to mislead his audience.

Disguise affects every utterance of the disguised character.[39] A disguise, recognised as a disguise gives the audience the same double insight into concurrent meanings as equivocation. There is a persona that the disguised character sees as his/her own, another one that is visible for others, and a complex one for the audience, in which the previous two are in constant rivalry. As soon as a character assumes a different personality, his/her communication becomes ambiguous, with one meaning to the immediate stage audience, another to themselves and a complex one, the result of the interaction of the previous two, to the audience of the play.

Viola's disguise remains impenetrable (and consequently misleading) to the other characters throughout the play, despite the warning signs that a number of characters

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[36] See notes in Lothian and Craik (ed).
[37] See notes in Donno (ed); Warren and Wells (eds).
[38] Cf. two of the Duke's vows in *Measure for Measure:* 'My mind promises with my habit no loss shall touch her by my company' (3.1.180ff); 'By the vow of mine order I warrant you' (4.2.168). (*Measure for Measure*, ed. by N. W. Bawcutt, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991))
[39] Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'Shakespeare's liars', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 69 (1984), 137–168, pp. 141–143.

notice, but pass over without further inquiry.[40] For the audience (although fully aware of her original identity) her assumed identity becomes part of her personality, because even to them, Viola is only ever represented through the veil of Cesario: after her first scene, not even the audience sees her in her original identity (except for her scarce *asides* and the soliloquy addressed to her disguise), let alone any of the other characters.[41] Disguise results in an ambiguity similar to the one produced by Viola's equivocal language. On the one hand, it conceals the original identity of the disguiser by constructing a new one, but on the other hand, once this has happened, the two will never be perfectly separable from each other. This is also the reason why it seems better to me to talk about 'original' rather than 'real' identity: for the audience (or a character with knowledge comparable to the audience's)[42] the disguise may be partially transparent, but never completely so, since the disguise will only be successful if it is to some extent credible both for the characters and the audience, and consequently creates a complex identity for the audience which is a product of the constant comparison of the original to the assumed one.

In this aspect, Viola's disguise differs significantly from other comic heroines'. As a consequence of the never fully removed disguise, Viola *as Viola* is inseparable from Viola *as Cesario*: whatever there is for the audience to judge, is acted out by Viola/Cesario; the audience gets to know the qualities that make her the heroine of the play while she is wearing her disguise, therefore Viola's original identity is

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[40] Cf. Orsino's (1.4.29–34), Malvolio's (1.5.152–7) and Olivia's (1.5.284–5) remarks on Cesario's unusual qualities. See e.g. Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse*, pp. 47–48.

[41] According to Peter Brand (p. 26), there are seven 'female pages' in Shakespeare: Julia (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), Portia, Nerissa, Jessica (*The Merchant of Venice*), Rosalind (*As You Like It*), Viola (*Twelfth Night*), Imogen (*Cymbeline*). (Brand mixes up the plays for Rosalind and Viola, which I corrected in this list).

[42] Cf. Hamlet's precaution about his allies' behaviour: 'But come; / Here as before: never – so help you mercy, / How strange or odd some'er I bear myself / (As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on) – / That you at such times seeing me never shall / With arms encumbered thus, or this headshake, / Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase / As, "Well, well, we know", or "We could, an if we would", / Or "If we list to speak", or "There be an if they might", / Or such ambiguous giving out to note / That you know aught of me. This do swear, / So grace and mercy at your most need help you.' *Hamlet: The text of Q2* (eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Cengage Learning, 2006)), 1.5.166–178.

practically non-existent. The audience witnesses her wit as Viola/Cesario's wit; she wins Orsino's confidence as Viola/Cesario. At the end of the play, the audience's knowledge (or rather lack of knowledge) about Viola coincides with Orsino's closing words:

> Meantime, sweet sister,
> We will not part from hence. Cesario, come –
> For so you shall be while you are a man;
> But when in other habits you are seen,
> Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.

(5.1.377–81.)

For all the major characters, as well as for the audience, Viola is present only as mediated through Cesario. In this respect, Viola's case is very different from e.g. Portia's in *The Merchant of Venice*. Although Portia's original persona does not remain unchanged either, her performance as Balthazar is somewhat foreshadowed by her earlier appearances. She has her own dramatic identity and characteristics both for the characters and the audience before she assumes the male disguise. During the trial scene, the audience is aware of the conflict between her interests as Portia and as Balthazar (cf. her reaction to Bassanio's vow that he would sacrifice even his wife to save Antonio, 4.1.284–90).

In Viola's case, the process of self-fashioning as a calculated shaping of a character for a certain purpose can also be called into question, since Cesario as an assumed personality seems a much less conscious creation than Portia/Balthazar, Duke Vincentio/Friar Lodowick or the innocent flower-looking serpent-Macbeth. This perception of a relative shapelessness is partly the consequence of the undefined reason for (or threat because of) which Viola needs the disguise. An indication of that in the play is her immediate and unregistered abandoning of her original plan of disguising as a eunuch.[43] Her motivation for disguising herself is not nearly as strong

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[43] Cynthia Lewis ('Whodunit? Plot, Plotting, and Detection in *Twelfth Night*', in *Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays*, ed. by James Schiffer (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), 258–272, p. 259) calls Viola's changing of her mind one of the play's questions that remains unresolved to the end. In

as Portia's, or as wilfully carried out as Duke Vincentio's. Viola uses her disguise rather passively throughout the play: she lets everybody be deceived, and waits until the confusion her disguise created resolves itself: 'O time, thou must untangle this, not I. / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie.' (2.2.40–41.)

By the last scene, the Cesario disguise has put Viola into too many conflicts: even though she is never seriously threatened to be revealed, her disguise not only hinders her in her love with Orsino,[44] but also puts her into increasingly more uncomfortable situations. At this point she is already so entangled into the net of deception that even revealing her identity could not resolve the conflicts, because in a sense she had betrayed every character. Olivia had fallen in love with her and believes herself to have married her, which she seems to deny; Sir Toby sees a rival in her and challenges her to a duel; Antonio has every reason to accuse her of the betrayal of someone who helped her; Orsino, instead of loving her, believes her to be his treacherous page. All the tensions in the last scene converge around (and are caused by) Viola/Cesario, and the solution, as she anticipated, is brought about by a force not in her control. Her brother's revelatory appearance resolves the conflicts, even before she would be forced to reveal her own identity by abandoning the disguise.

Orsino's words (5.1.209–210), when the Illyrians recognise the double deception they have been subject to (the dual identity of Viola and the existence of another Cesario, Sebastian), deserve attention. The phenomenon that they are presented with ('One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons') seems paradoxical ('is and is not'), and yet visibly exists ('a natural perspective'). The tension between undisputable visual experience and common sense ontology leads to a recognition

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her essay, she argues that there are a number of such questions that are intentionally left open for the audience, undermining there sense of complete (and privileged) knowledge.

[44] Greif, p. 123: 'but she also learns that the freedom playing permits her is only a circumscribed liberty. For as long as the role of Cesario conceals her real identity, Viola is free to move at will through Illyria, but not to reveal her true nature or her love for Orsino'.

that earlier their interpretations were wrong. The phrase 'One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons' echoes Viola's earlier vow to Olivia, 'I have one heart, one bosom and one truth', which she used to back up – as it finally transpires to the characters – a misleading promise (a promise that is true in a different sense): 'no woman has, nor never none / Shall mistress be of it save I alone'. Orsino's recognition is a reaction to the revelation of the fact that Viola has a twin, but it could just as well refer to the two person(a)s of Viola/Cesario. Against all the characters' assumptions, it turns out that one outward appearance is capable of representing two inward identities; the same appearance can belong to two personages (one natural, and one feigned), and without the visual warning of the two 'Cesarios' all of a sudden simultaneously present on stage, this would have gone unnoticed. Viola indeed has 'one heart, one bosom, and one truth', but that truth is not Cesario (which to Olivia it seemed to be), but the unnoticed (and except for the audience, unrecognisable) Viola.

In her soliloquy about the wickedness of disguise, Viola sees her two personas inseparably tangled together in their single appearance, the male Cesario. It is not a matter of choice whether she is female or male ('As I am man… As I am woman'), because she is both at the same time. As a consequence of the one physical appearance that conveys the two personas, she cannot escape the trap that she set for herself. The male appearance distances Orsino, whom she would like to seduce, and seduces Olivia, whom she would like to distance. Her disguise is not perfect, as both Olivia and Orsino (and Malvolio) note something extraordinary in her beauty as a boy, but it is perfect enough to stop them from taking this as something meaningful, something that needs further scrutiny.

5. Conclusion

It is possible to suggest a number of similarities between the ways in which equivocation and disguise bring about understanding and misunderstanding in *Twelfth Night*. For disguise, and for equivocation, to work, first, there needs to be a separation of an inward (primarily intended) and an outward (secondarily intended) meaning. A successful disguise needs to be capable of appearing meaningful and credible for the immediate and the external audience alike. Disguise, therefore, has to be a physical appearance that is capable of conveying both identities, similarly to the way in which the equivocal utterance is able to convey both the inward and the outward meaning in one linguistic form. Disguise, like equivocation, thus forms a third, complex meaning for the audience in which the inward and the outward meaning are in constant rivalry: the audience is aware that what seems to be a plausible truth for the other characters, is in fact true only seemingly, and the truth as it conforms to the state of affairs is in some way embedded in the apparent truth, and it can only be seen if the viewer knows the specific angle from which it needs to be looked at. In the case of Viola, however, the two personalities cannot be easily separated, even by the audience. Only time can *untangle* Viola's disguise, because Viola/Cesario is not either man or woman, but both, depending on the point of view. Disguise recognised by the audience as disguise shows in a visible form how meaning is manipulated in equivocation: the disguiser has his/her own concept of self, the immediate audience sees a different person and the audience sees both. Disguise therefore works in a parallel fashion to intentions in equivocation: two personalities can belong to one person, just like two intentions can belong to one speech. Disguise in drama plays with the anxiety of being deceived without even realising it, and from the disguiser's point of view, a fascination with escaping human judgement without jeopardising divine judgement. An especially dangerous

disguise is one that assumes an authoritative persona (like a priest's in *Measure for Measure*, or the host's in *Macbeth*), which gives the false character a stronger integrity than any other character would have. Finally, both disguise and equivocation are capable of posing a threat to social cohesion and to interpersonal relationships. The last scene of *Twelfth Night* demonstrates how the disguise, the not even existent Cesario, is the cause of all the tension between the characters. The realisation that Cesario is merely an assumed persona, and the consequent revelation of Viola as Viola settles disputes and restores order in the court of Illyria.

The play further undermines the understanding of what constitutes a lie. Viola escapes from potentially dangerous situations by altering her identity and by proficiently using responses that deceive the hearers who asked the questions, because they have a sense which is infinitely more plausible and obvious to them in the given context than the factually true one. The speech, as perceived by the other characters, is factually false, but it would be an oversimplification to call it a lie, because, as the theatre audience knows, there is a sense in which it is nevertheless true. Olivia's message delivered by Malvolio to Cesario is an instructive example for such double signifiers, because through the different interpretations by the two recipients of the message, the double effect of such messages is dramatised. When the speaker employs an ambiguous message, the only way the double meaning can be recognised by the hearer is if there is some incongruity which signals the need for seeking an interpretation other from the most obvious, common sense one. While Malvolio is presented as being deceived by the secondary intention, in this case, it is not only the all but omniscient audience that perceives both intentions simultaneously, but one of the characters, Viola/Cesario too, who due to her superior knowledge of the circumstances, is able to recognise the 'hint' in Olivia's message that makes it possible to look for, and ultimately reconstruct the primary intention.

In most cases of deception in *Twelfth Night*, though, these 'hints' are only perceptible for the audience, and not to the other characters. It is Viola/Cesario's intention that other characters could not pick up her 'hints', as it is for any person, real or theatrical, who seeks refuge through ambiguous language. *Twelfth Night* abounds in these comic cases of the problem of equivocation.

What is then conceived by the audience as an unrecognised hint to Viola's original identity is in fact an illusion: by putting the audience in the position of God, these hints create the false impression that the characters could (or even should) also have somehow recognised the meaning beyond the words or the disguise. But it is only from the audience's privileged position that these statements appear as hints, and if the audience reflects on that discrepancy then they can also recognise that if they were in the other characters' position, they would just as easily be mislead: what appears as ambiguous for the external hearer does often seem unequivocal for the immediate hearer who does not possess the full knowledge of the circumstances of the speaker (e.g. the speaker's identity, gender, etc). Therefore, even if there is one factually true meaning of a speech or an action, it is not the only meaning because depending on the level of knowledge, the same speech or action may have a number of equally plausible interpretations.

The dialogues such as the one between Viola/Cesario and Feste (or to choose a more alarming example, Portia/Balthazar and Shylock) demonstrate how the interpretation of ambiguity can be regarded in terms of power relations. The two characters – exactly as Cicero advised – compete over determining the one acceptable meaning of a phrase that significantly has more than one possible meaning. Both Viola/Cesario and Feste intentionally disregard the otherwise obvious intention of the other to pin down the meaning that therefore privileges the words over the spirit. To follow Gregory's imagery, what is in the heart is not sought

through what is heard from the mouth (as it would be the task of the righteous judge), but replaced by it.

Twelfth Night is just one example of the Renaissance's interest in intentional manipulation of understanding and misunderstanding. It was written before the Gunpowder Plot, hence before the discourse about equivocation proper started, and as such testifies to the fact that the uneasiness felt about the effects of ambiguity is a result of recognitions and anxieties already present in Renaissance England before the historical events that are often singled out as their point of origin. Viola/Cesario's 'that no woman has, nor never none / Shall mistress be of it save I alone' is a false hyperbole similar to the Weird Sisters' 'none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth', thus it is an example for the more general fear and excitement in Renaissance thinking about being deceived by a speech that appears to be unambiguous.

Chapter 6.

Equivocation and 'Equivocation' in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

1. Introduction

It is ironic that a passage that Pope and Coleridge marked as an interpolation by someone other than Shakespeare is today held to be the most important evidence for the composition date of *Macbeth*.[1] In his forty odd lines the Porter uses the word 'equivocation' five times, but because otherwise it is rare in contemporary English usage, and because it has only four more occurrences in the whole of Shakespeare's oeuvre (once in *Hamlet*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Othello*, and another time in *Macbeth*), this and his mentioning of the Farmer (one of Garnet's assumed names) are read as topical references to Henry Garnet's trial and public execution on 3rd May 1606. Editors' opinions differ on how much credit to give to the suggestion,[2] but, 1606 is generally accepted as the composition date, and no other convincing alternative has been suggested. In arguments which rely on the dating, critics imply some kind of connection between Garnet's trial, his doctrine of equivocation and the play.

This thesis was originally intended as an exploration of this relationship. I noticed that critics often substantiate their analysis with the link between

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[1] Coleridge, in a marginal note in one of his volumes of *Shakespeare's Works*, famously remarked that in '[t]his low Porter Soliloquy', apart from one sentence, 'not one syllable has the ever-present Being of Shakespear [sic].' 'William Shakespeare: Works: Copy A, note 109'. in S. T. Coleridge, *Collected Works 12: Marginalia*, edited by H. J. Jackson and George Whalley. 4, Pamphlets to Shakespeare (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 729.

[2] Kenneth Muir finds the assumption 'reasonable' ('Introduction' in *Macbeth*, ed. by Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare, Second Series, (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p. xxiv); Nicholas Brooke (*Macbeth*, ed. by Nicholas Brooke, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)) argues that 1606 fits in with the supposed chronology of the other plays (soon after *Lear*, and close to *Antony and Cleopatra*), and although he claims that '[t]here is no evidence to contradict 1606, but there is also very little to support it', he conditionally accepts it ('Introduction', pp. 59–60). Braunmuller (*Macbeth*, ed. by A. R. Braunmuller, New Cambridge Shakespeare, Updated Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)) is more sceptical: '[m]ost proposed links between *Macbeth*, the Gunpowder Plot, and Gwinne's pageant prove to be vague, circumstantial, or undatable' ('Introduction', pp. 5–6), and similarities with *Antony and Cleopatra* do not necessarily suggest closeness of composition, therefore '[c]laims for a topical *Macbeth* cannot be substantiated and may be circular' ('Introduction', p. 5). Leeds Barrol (*Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater: The Stuart Years* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1991)) convincingly demonstrates that critics handle historical data too lightly and disproves the connection between Garnet, the play and the visit of King Christian (p. 150). Braunmuller contests Henry N. Paul's (*The Royal Play of 'Macbeth': When, Why and How It Was Written by Shakespeare* (New York: Octagon, 1971)) assumption of the court performance ('Introduction', p. 8), cf. also Michael Hawkins ('History, Politics and Macbeth' in *Focus on 'Macbeth'*, ed. by J. R. Brown (London: Routledge, 1982), 155–88), p. 186.

equivocation and *Macbeth*, but hardly scrutinise its nature, and therefore fail to clarify in what ways the contemporary discourse had an impact on the intellectual content of the play. The more I read the historical texts and the more I tried to think about *Macbeth* in their light, the more apparent it became to me that if there is any influence at all, it is limited to the verbal layer, and it does not pertain to the dramaturgy of the play, or the ideas it is concerned with. Therefore, this chapter attempts to demonstrate that some of the assumptions based on a link taken too much for granted are ungrounded, and to argue, instead, that *Macbeth* is better seen as embedded in the tradition of ambiguously misleading prophecies and in a more general distrust of language in the Renaissance.

First, I examine the underlying assumption that the preponderance of the word is an indicator automatically accompanied by the change in its meaning. Once this connection has been established,[3] critics seem no less overzealous than the Porter to apply 'equivocation' to almost any feature of the play.[4] Such unreflective usage endangers the explanatory value of the concept, and it often entails applying it instead of other, perhaps more accurate, concepts such as ambivalence, deceit, or obscurity. Brooke's rather eclectic list ('Macbeth equivocates with his conscience from his first appearance in 1.3; Lady Macbeth with her humanity in 1.5 and after;[5] the Weird Sisters in all their predictions; Malcolm with Macduff in 4.3; and so on')[6]

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[3] Reluctant as Nicholas Brooke may have been to accept the dating of the play based on the supposed references to Garnet, he fully endorses the idea that the public discussion of the doctrine fundamentally influenced the play. He claims that there is 'nothing remarkable' in the fact that the word 'equivocation' occurs so many times in the play, 'it is, if anything, more surprising that it isn't used more often, for equivocation can properly be seen as a fundamental preoccupation in the play [...] It is certainly conceivable that the theological and political scandal of Garnet's trial contributed to this leitmotif in the play' (p. 60).

[4] Mariangela Tempera's statement that once the term is evoked by the Porter, it '*had to* permeate the whole play, which would then be expected to include an exposition of the workings of evil in human affairs' ('The Art of Lying in *Macbeth*', *Textus VI* (1993), 57–76, p. 57, my italics) implies a hardly justifiable necessity, as well as a creative process in which the play's tragedy of deception, as it were, emanates from the Porter's words as the core and point of origin of the play.

[5] Tempera (pp. 74–75) and William O. Scott ('Macbeth's – And Our – Self-Equivocations', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37.2 (Summer, 1986), 160–174, in JStor <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2869955>, [accessed 21 February, 2012]), in a similar vein, talk about Macbeth's self-equivocation (p. 164).

[6] Brooke (ed), p. 60.

should serve to represent this approach.[7] Others eliminate the crucial difference between speeches that are ambiguous for the characters and that are obscure or ambivalent primarily to the audience of the play, and not the characters.[8]

While 'equivocation' undoubtedly could have most of those meanings at the time of the composition of *Macbeth*, there is a danger that the conflation of the various meanings results in associations that are ahistorical despite the fact that these readings aim at historicity. Frank L. Huntley cites Persons's version of the 'Bloody Question' from *A Treatise Tending to Mitigation* (a work published in 1607!), and argues that it is relevant to the discussion of *Macbeth* because it demonstrates the difference between verbal ambiguity and Jesuitical equivocation.[9] This results in the assumption that if Shakespeare knew about the political scandal, he also fully understood all the implications of the technical distinctions between ambiguity and equivocation, and expected the same from his audience.[10] In the first part of this chapter, I compare the senses in which 'equivocation' is used in *Macbeth* to its three remaining usages by Shakespeare in the pre-Gunpowder Plot plays to assay whether the assumption that 'equivocation' is used in its technical ('Jesuitical') sense in *Macbeth* is substantiated.

Second, I look at instances that critics identify as cases of equivocation in the play.[11] Singling out one historical event (the Gunpowder Plot) and a concept closely

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[7] What is perhaps common in these 'equivocations' is the *deceit*, but the ways in which it is achieved, as well as the dynamics between the participants are fundamentally different.

[8] See for instance Frank L. Huntley's influential article ('*Macbeth* and the Background of Jesuitical Equivocation', *PMLA* 79.4 (1964), 390–400), which being the first thorough treatment of the connection, serves as the basis (and sometimes the only source) of most discussions that explore the relationship between *Macbeth* and the doctrine of equivocation: 'The play is filled with equivocal appearances – women with beards, Macbeth in "borrowed robes," day turned into night, a peaceful castle without and a burning cauldron of evil within', and '[t]here is equivocation between Macbeth as a man and Macbeth as a woman' (p. 390); the 'visual equivocation' of the Weird Sisters (Lucy Gent, 'The Self-cozening Eye', *RES*, n.s., 34.136 (1983), 419–428, p. 423); the play 'equivocates with us, by holding back part of its truth' with its almost proverbial shortness and famous supposedly lost scenes (Tempera, p. 61).

[9] pp. 392–393. He then uses the distinction to argue that the Weird Sisters' prophecies are especially deceptive, because they are not ambiguous but equivocal (p. 398).

[10] Scott claims without too much demonstration, that Shakespeare '*certainly* knew a great deal of the controversy about equivocation' (p. 163). Huntley similarly says that because Shakespeare was close to 'the men, the places, and the stirred up feelings of the Gunpowder Plot', he '*must have been* aware of Jesuitical equivocation' (p. 391, italics added).

[11] In my examination of the cases of equivocation in *Macbeth*, I will only consider expressions or speeches equivocal when they are intended to deceive other characters of the play, but are in some

associated with it (mental reservation) as the explanation for the composition of the play, and for its 'main themes', may unreasonably distance it from a context that is more deeply rooted in literary tradition and Renaissance thinking.[12] The anxiety about the deceptive qualities of language, the recognition that meanings are arbitrary, and that the transmission of knowledge/meaning cannot be taken for granted, especially if the message originates from the sphere beyond the human, were current in the late sixteenth century.[13] I suggest that characters who use verbal deception may not differ substantially from characters with similar aims in other plays.

Finally, I look at the issue of the ambiguity of the prophecies: I argue that equivocation (either in the sense of linguistic ambiguity or mental reservation) is a common, or in fact essential, part of the literary tradition of prophecies, and fits well into a more general concern about the limits of human understanding – a feature that I already examined in connection with *Arcadia*. I aim to reinstate *Macbeth* in the tradition of Renaissance scepticism about language and meaning, hoping to demonstrate that the interpretation of the play gains more from viewing it as an example of a more general phenomenon than a too close association with the Gunpowder Plot allows us to see.

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sense still true. I deal with duplicity of meaning that has some effect on the plot, regardless of whether it is achieved with verbal/syntactic ambiguity or mental reservation (since from the hearer's point of view they can be equally deceptive). I distinguish, however, equivocation from ambiguities that are perceived only by the audience (e.g. puns that other characters do not reflect on, or the play's supposedly 'equivocal' approach to the Stuart monarchy), and that New Critics were interested in. Ambiguity for them was a desirable quality of poetic language that makes the timeless reader reflect and therefore ensures that the poem will always provoke interest. I am not concerned with the latter type of ambiguity.

[12] Huntley believes that 'equivocation is a major theme in the play, both in the narrow sense of common duplicity and in the larger sense of a blur between appearance and reality' (p. 390). The idea that 'ambiguity' is intrinsically deceptive and a threat to gaining understanding is hardly a new development in Garnet's trial, as I showed in the first three chapters. Common duplicity, on the other hand, is a meaning that Renaissance audiences would only begin to link with 'equivocation', although the link is not nearly as obvious as fit is in present day English: if *Macbeth* was indeed written shortly after Garnet's trial and execution, then the play may be just as much responsible for solidifying that association as being itself influenced by it; 'blur between appearance and reality' seems anachronistic.

[13] Navarrus's interpretation of Gregory might be theologically contestable, but his argument is relevant: the absolute understanding of others' speeches belongs only to God (and to the audience of a play), while the human ears can only ever judge by what is uttered 'outwardly'. This is a tragic recognition that arguably lies behind plays like *Macbeth*.

2. The Word 'Equivocation' in Shakespeare

2.1. 'Equivocation' in Other Plays

The fact that Shakespeare uses the word six times in one play, whereas it occurs only three times, in three other plays – *Hamlet* (before 1603),[14] *All's Well that Ends Well* (1603–4)[15] and *Othello* (c. 1604)[16] –, has been used to relate *Macbeth* to the historical event of the trial of Henry Garnet. If (contrary to what would be expected) the occurrences in *Macbeth* do not reflect the historical change in the meaning of the word, then the assumption that Shakespeare knew (or cared) enough about the technicalities of the doctrine to distinguish 'lawful' (verbal) ambiguity from 'unlawful' equivocation (i.e. mental reservation) would be undermined.

2.1.1: 'Equivocation' in Other Plays: *Hamlet*

The first character to use the word in Shakespeare's *oeuvre* is the Q2 Hamlet (1604/5)[17] in the Gravedigger scene.[18] Hamlet seeks to find out for whom the Clown is digging the grave (something the audience already knows), but he cannot get

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[14] The First Quarto was printed in 1603, the Second in 1604/5 (*Hamlet: The Text of Q2*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Cengage Learning, 2006), p. 49; all quotations from the play are according to this edition). The exact date of composition and of the first performance is still much contested, but for my argument the *terminus ante quem* is sufficient.

[15] See 'Introduction' in *All's Well That Ends Well*, ed. by G. K. Hunter, The Arden Shakespeare, Second Series (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. xviii–xxv. Quotations from *All's Well That Ends Well* are according to this edition. See also 'Introduction' in *All's Well That Ends Well*, ed. by Russell Fraser, introduction by Alexander Leggatt, New Cambridge Shakespeare, Updated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 10–11.

[16] According to Honigmann (*Othello*, ed. by E. A. J. Honigmann, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1997), p. 344), it must have been written before 1 November 1604, when it was first performed. Quotations from the play are according to this edition.

[17] According Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, the imprint in three of the extant copies reads 1604, four are dated 1605.

[18] The Folio also contains this scene, but Q1 does not.

closer to the response because the Gravedigger constantly plays out any ambiguity

that can be found in their mutual words:

> HAMLET   Whose grave's this, sirrah?
>
> GRAVEDIGGER   Mine, sir,
>   [sings]
>   O, a pit of clay for to be made –
>
> HAMLET   I think it be thine, indeed; for thou liest in't.
>
> GRAVEDIGGER   You lie out on't, sir, and therefore 'tis not yours. For my part, I
>   do not lie in't, yet it is mine.
>
> HAMLET   Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say it is thine. 'Tis for the dead,
>   not for the quick. Therefore thou liest.
>
> GRAVEDIGGER   'Tis a quick lie, sir, 'twill away again, from me to you.[19]
>
> HAMLET   What man dost thou dig it for?
>
> GRAVEDIGGER   For no man, sir.
>
> HAMLET   What woman, then?
>
> GRAVEDIGGER   For none, neither.
>
> HAMLET   Who is to be buried in't?
>
> GRAVEDIGGER   One that was a woman, sir, but rest her soul she's dead.
>
> HAMLET   How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card or
>   equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three
>   years I have took note of it, the age is grown so picked that the
>   toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls
>   his kibe. – How long hast thou been a grave-maker?
>   (5.1.110–134.)

The note to line 130 glosses the word 'equivocation' as 'quibbling', going on to

contextualise it as 'an element common to both legal arguments and comic dialogue

(the latter exemplified by the puns on *lie* at 114–21).'[20] Although such punning is

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[19] Cf. *Othello*, 3.4 for similar punning on lying, where it is not commented upon by characters (see the
notes to Q1 (*Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The
Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006)), 16.64–65.)

[20] Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, ad loc.; The Oxford (*Hamlet* ed. by G.R. Hibbard, The Oxford
Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987)) and the New Cambridge (*Hamlet* ed. by Philip

undeniably an important practice in legal arguments (for instance, in Sir Edward Coke's speeches on Garnet's indictment), its function is quite different there.[21] What is common, however, in a lawyer's speech and the punning of comic figures like the Gravedigger is the aim of entertaining the audience with the wittiness of expression.

The Gravedigger, as opposed to a lawyer, does not use the ambiguity of words to conflate meanings, but the opposite: to call attention to the fact that a word which, despite its ambiguity, is normally understood by everybody, could lead to misunderstanding if it is not used with caution or if the hearer is not considerate enough (cf. Navarrus) or is malicious (cf. Sepúlveda). However, the dramaturgical function of the Gravedigger's quibbling is equally important in this case, because Hamlet's reaction seems to refer to this. By not responding to Hamlet's original (and perfectly comprehensible) question, 'Whose grave's this, sirrah?', the Gravedigger impedes Hamlet from learning what the audience already knows: that Ophelia is dead. Hamlet's response relates to the Gravedigger's obsession with linguistic accuracy: one must use words with extreme precision ('speak by the card' – something like what a dictionary entry could provide today) to obtain an answer from the Gravedigger. However, the suggestion that failing to provide a pure, unambiguous speech can 'undo us' seems surprisingly grim for the scene.[22]

What Hamlet calls *equivocation* here, a rather idle play with words which lacks any immediate consequence in terms of the plot (i.e. whether the information will be

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Edwards, New Cambridge Shakespeare, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)) editions do not explain 'equivocation'. For the notes in the Arden Second Series, see below.

[21] In legal arguments quibbling is often employed as a device of ornament, or to insinuate a connection between concepts without explicitly stating its existence (and as such, can be useful in *ad hominem* arguments, for instance, Sir Edward Coke says Garnet is 'by profession a Jesuite, and a Superior, as in deed hee is superior to all his predecessors in deuilish treason' ([Anon.], *A true and perfect relation*, sig. T1ᵛ), and in its extreme form, it can obviously constitute the logical fallacy of equivocation.

[22] *Hamlet*, ed. by Harold Jenkyns, The Arden Shakespeare, Second Series (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1982, 2001): '134. *equivocation*] ambiguous use of words (1) in the plain sense, but (2) also in the sinister sense, with the intent to deceive, which, though the practice had not yet acquired the notoriety that came with the trial of Garnet in 1606 (see Arden *Mac.* xviii ff.), was already familiar enough (cf. R. Scot, *Discovery of Witchcraft*, 1584, xiii, ch. 15, 'how men have been abused with words of equivocation'; Harrison, *Last Elizabethan Journal*, pp. 111, 218–9). Hence *will undo us*.'

revealed or not does not change anything), could just as well be applied to some of his own tactics of pretending to be mad. Other characters, in response to such 'quibbling' either join the game or become frustrated or even angry, neither of which is unparalleled in Shakespeare.[23] In her scene with Feste, Viola/Cesario is just as patient and good humoured as Hamlet with the Gravedigger. As I have argued in my previous chapter, in that scene Feste misunderstands all Viola/Cesario's questions intentionally, provoking her into a counter-attack to demonstrate that practically any word could be ambiguous if the speaker's obvious intention is consistently disregarded. Malvolio in an earlier scene with Feste (1.5.30–105) exhibited the opposite reaction to Viola/Cesario's: he tried to get Feste sacked for the word-juggling with Olivia, which Malvolio deemed inappropriate and something to be excised from Olivia's house. Viola/Cesario, just like Hamlet, appreciates the value of verbal juggling that can conceal certain knowledge from one's interlocutor. Both she and Hamlet employ a similar technique in order to maintain their disguise – an actual one in the case of Viola/Cesario, and a metaphorical, acted one in the case of Hamlet.

   Part of the dramatic effect comes from the audience's God-like meta-knowledge through which they see these ambiguous linguistic manipulations not so much as lies but as masterfully crafted evasions that help certain characters deceive others in order to protect themselves. The ingenuity of such evasive replies is that they are true in one sense (the sense in which their speaker understands them), and false in another (the sense in which their immediate audience takes them, and which is more obvious), while the audience perceives them as ambiguous. Such replies will mislead the hearers – from whose perspective they are lies –, but, at least for the audience, there is a certain sense in which they are true.

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[23] The more hostile and indignant reaction to someone impeding the revelation of information by juggling with multiple meanings is exemplified in the intricate trial scene in Act 5 of *Measure for Measure*.

2.1.2: 'Equivocation' in Other Plays: *All's Well that Ends Well*

The trial scene in *All's Well that Ends Well* is the most obvious parallel example for seeing equivocation as something that needs to be controlled by authority, as well as the second occasion that Shakespeare calls a verbal manipulation to evade both giving a plain answer and telling a lie 'equivocation'. Two exchanges deserve special attention in the trial scene: the one between the King and Parolles, and the one between the King and Diana.

Parolles, when he is interrogated by the King to find out whether Diana's claim that Bertram seduced and married her is true, angers the King by putting forth a number of statements and their negations as being simultaneously true.

BERTRAM	My lord, I do confess the ring was hers.
KING	You boggle shrewdly; every feather starts you. Is this the man you speak of?
DIANA	Ay, my lord.
KING	Tell me, sirrah – but tell me true, I charge you, Not fearing the displeasure of your master, Which on your just proceeding I'll keep off,— By him and by this woman here what know you?
PAROLLES	So please your majesty, my master hath been an honourable gentleman. Tricks he hath had in him, which gentlemen have.
KING	Come, come, to th'purpose. Did he love this woman?
PAROLLES	Faith, sir, he did love her; but how?
KING	How, I pray you?
PAROLLES	He did love her, sir, as a gentleman loves a woman.
KING	How is that?
PAROLLES	He lov'd her, sir, and lov'd her not.
KING	As thou art a knave, and no knave. What an equivocal companion is this!

(V.iii.230–247.)

Strictly speaking, there is nothing ambiguous in what Parolles says. What he suggests by these antitheses, however, is that certain actions are not too easy to categorise within a pre-set framework of notions (that is, the strategy he follows is quite the opposite of *Hamlet*'s Gravedigger). His tactic is to avoid telling what had actually happened by elaborating on the possible ways of judging what happened. With that, Parolles is hoping to escape the punishment with which both authority figures threaten him. This nevertheless seems impossible since their interests are opposite at this point: the King wants to know what happened, while Bertram would like to keep it secret. As G. K. Hunter writes, '[t]he continual equivocation in Parolles's answers is caused, presumably, by his desire to offend neither Bertram nor the King'.[24] Even though Hunter subscribes to the King's usage of the word, it is not entirely obvious in what sense Parolles's speech is 'equivocal'.[25]

In the first three responses that Parolles gives ('Tricks he hath had in him, which gentlemen have', 'he did love her; but how', 'He did love her, sir, as a gentleman loves a woman') he suggests that the King's questions can only be answered if they are qualified. His last response before the King's indignation about his slippery language usage is perhaps best understood as using the same word (*love*) in two senses to suggest another qualification to his response,[26] and as such, it is an equivocation in the rhetorical sense.[27] Of course, the two meanings involved are obvious only to Parolles and the audience, who already possess the knowledge that the King is aiming to obtain here: for the King it can at best mean something like 'he loved her in a certain sense but not in another', but exactly which is which cannot be

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[24] A situation that closely parallels the interrogated Catholic's.

[25] Interestingly enough, the *OED*, too, seems to be somewhat at a loss with this occurrence. The entry for 'equivocal' marks this usage as exceptional, and the definition is tautological, and thus rather unhelpful: 'A2c. *nonce-use*. Of a person: Expressing himself in equivocal terms. *a1616* Shakespeare *All's Well that ends Well* (1623) v. iii. 253. "As thou art a knaue and no knaue, what an equiuocall Companion is this?".'

[26] Cf. Hunter's note in his edition: 'loved her carnally, but not with intent to marry her'.

[27] Employing one word in two meanings in the same argument results in a false conclusion. See my discussion of Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* in Chapter 1.

clear to him, while Parolles, by this verbal trick, is placing the responsibility of interpretation and judgement on the King, at the same time failing to supply the information he would require in order to make a reliable judgement.

The King's reaction is anger, and the vindication of his right to know what Parolles is desperately trying to avoid revealing. Parolles finally has to expose his (mistaken) knowledge of the intercourse as well as the marriage promise, but since the King wants more straightforward information, he turns back to the accuser Diana.[28] She is one of the main manipulators of the whole scene. She is the one who accused Bertram of committing fornication and promising to marry her: at this point, she is the only character on the stage who knows this to be true only in a certain (restricted) sense. She carefully avoids accusing him of charges she knows not to be true (i.e. lying) by a seemingly unimportant qualification: 'Good my lord, / Ask him upon his oath if he does *think* / He had not my virginity'. (V.iii.183–185, italics added)'. What Bertram *thinks* happened and what *actually* happened are of course not the same, and thus she does not charge him with doing something which she knows he did not do. She was also the one who produced Parolles as a witness in the first place, which was another manipulative step. Since she can safely assume that Parolles will confirm her statements and will act as a false witness without knowing it. Just like Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, Bertram is guilty in the sense that he intended to (and to his knowledge did) commit what he is charged with, but in fact is innocent of the actual deed (which would have made the final reconciliation even more volatile than it already is).

After the King has finished with Parolles, Diana continues to rely on this convenient misconception of Bertram and Parolles, and carries on quibbling in a similar way to the one which occasioned the King's outrage at Parolles (264–74).

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[28] Once more, the problem of the separation of intention and words (and equivocation) occurs in connection with marriage proposals, just like in Navarrus or *Measure for Measure*.

When she is almost sent to prison as a consequence of her tactic (together with Parolles), she explains her earlier quibbling (or equivocation?) in similarly vague terms:

> KING   Wherefore hast thou accus'd him all this while?
>
> DIANA   Because he's guilty and he is not guilty.
>   He knows I am no maid, and he'll swear to't;
>   I'll swear I am a maid and he knows not.
>   Great king, I am no strumpet; by my life
>   I am either maid or else this old man's wife.
>
> KING   She does abuse our ears. To prison with her.
>
> (V.iii.282–288.)

G. K. Hunter marks an important parallel between the interrogation of Diana and Mariana, who plays a similar role in the final trial scene of *Measure for Measure*.[29] They both claim that they are married *and* still a maid, however, there is a perhaps even more striking (and to my point more relevant) parallel between the way they both play with the ambiguity of the word 'know', which continues in Diana's next response too:

> …But for this lord
> Who hath abus'd me as he knows himself –
> Though yet he never harm'd me – here I quit him.
> He knows himself my bed he hath defil'd;
> And that time he got his wife with child.
> Dead though she be she feels her young one kick,
> And now behold the meaning.
>
> [Re-]enter Widow [with] Helena.
>
> KING   Is there no exorcist
>   Beguiles the truer office of mine eyes?
>   Is't real that I see?
>
> (V.iii.291–300.)

We can observe the underlying idea that a factually false statement is not a lie as long as the speaker is unaware of its falsehood. Apart from the obvious sexual innuendo in 'knowing someone', Diana more relevantly plays with the notion that

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[29] He calls it a 'similarly placed conundrum'. Note to ll. 284–7. Cf. *Measure for Measure* (ed. by N. W. Bawcutt, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)), 5.1.169–205.

knowledge can be mistaken. Bertram believes that the charges laid against him are true (and as far as he knows, he is guilty), but as it will turn out just a few lines later, what seemed to him as knowledge is in fact a mistaken belief, the result of Diana's and Helena's manipulation. The ambiguity of what Diana says lies in 'as he knows himself': it either means that it is *as true* that he abused her *as* that he knows himself (it is not); or that *as far as his knowledge of himself extends*, he abused her (but in fact he did not).

2.1.3: 'Equivocation' in Other Plays: *Othello*

The third occurrence of 'equivocation' in Shakespeare's *oeuvre*, surrounded by equivocal words, is in the tense council scene at the beginning of *Othello*. Contradictory reports about the movement of the Turkish fleet make it difficult to forecast their intentions,[30] but they seem to agree on the basic facts.[31] Even this relative certainty is undermined, however, when news arrives that the fleet has turned towards Rhodes, a piece of information that the council, based on their general knowledge of war tactics, deems improbable; more likely a deceit, which the latest (and last) report soon confirms. Beside the political conflict, the other in the scene is the domestic one between Brabantio and the newly wed Othello and Desdemona. The two threads are woven together and made to mirror each other in Brabantio's speech in the middle of the scene, when the Duke tries to console Brabantio:

> DUKE   …
> Let me speak like yourself, and lay a sentence
> Which as a grise or step may help these lovers
> Into your favour.
> When remedies are past the griefs are ended
> By seeing the worst which late on hopes depended.

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[30] 'There is no composition in these news / That gives them credit' (1.3.1–2). Quotations from *Othello* are according to Honigmann's edition.

[31] 'A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus' (1.3.8).

> To mourn a mischief that is past and gone
> Is the next way to draw new mischief on.
> What cannot be preserved when Fortune takes,
> Patience her injury a mockery makes.
> The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief,
> He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.

BRABANTIO   So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile,[32]
> We lose it not so long as we can smile;
> He bears the sentence well that nothing bears
> But the free comfort which from thence he hears.
> But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow
> That, to pay grief, must of poor patience borrow.
> These sentences to sugar or to gall,
> Being strong on both sides, are equivocal.
> But words are words: I never yet did hear
> That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear.
> I humbly beseech you, proceed to th'affairs of state.

(1.3.200–221.)

The Duke called his soothing speech a 'sentence', which in this context, as Honigmann pointed out, could equally mean a word of wisdom, a judgement (as in a court), and an opinion.[33] In his response Brabantio plays with all these meanings and their conjunction with 'bear'; as a result, they cannot be told apart. The Duke's consolation is an empty and unhelpful commonplace ('sentence'), but it also imposes a behaviour on the addressee: Brabantio is expected not to lament over what happened ('he bears the sentence *well*'), and if he still does ('[he] [t]hat, to pay grief, must of poor patience borrow'), then he will have to endure ('bear') the judgement

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[32] The Turkish fleet is a danger to the whole state, and their manoeuvre around Rhodes almost immediately turns out to be what the Senator thought it was: 'a pageant / To keep us in false gaze' (1.3.19–20): they in fact threaten to 'beguile' Venice of Cyprus. Earlier in the scene the Duke promised to Brabantio that 'Whoe'er he be, that in this foul proceeding / Hath thus *beguiled* your daughter of herself, / And you of her', shall be punished according to Brabantio's liking. As Othello confessed with slight irony in his choice of words, the crucial element in the *witchcraft* he employed to charm Desdemona was to '*beguile* her of her tears' (1.3.157) by talking about his life. The first two lines of Brabantio's speech (and his choice of word) equate Othello's deed with the intentions of the Turkish fleet, while presenting the Duke's attempt to console him as hypocritical. Later in the play, Iago, preparing to deceive Othello by staging a dialogue with Cassio about Bianca and letting Othello overhear it in the belief that they are talking about Desdemona, uses the same word: ''tis the strumpet's plague / To beguile many and be beguiled by one' (4.1.97–8). And it is the same word that Lady Macbeth uses in the crucial passage in which they first discuss the murder of Duncan: 'to beguile the time / Look like the time, bear a welcome in your eye, / Your hand, your tongue – look like th'innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't.' (*Macbeth*, 1.5.62–5)

[33] See the note in his edition to line 1.3.200: '**sentence** opinion; decision (of a court), pithy saying or maxim. He adopts the conventional wisdom that "What cannot be eschew'd must be embrac'd" (*MW* 5.5.237)'.

('sentence'), apart from the sorrow which it is supposed to extinguish. Therefore the effects of such 'sentences' (opinions? pieces of wisdom? judgements?) are quite unpredictable. They can be ill, they can be good; they can sugar and they can gall the addressee's condition: they, 'being strong on both sides, are equivocal'. If Brabantio is willing to accept the sentence then it will provide him with comfort (although a 'free', or shallow comfort),[34] which will at the same time win the Duke's approval. However, if he finds himself incapable of being comforted by it (as he seems to imply he does), then not only will he remain alone and inconsolable with his grief, but he will also have to bear the Duke's disapproving judgement. According to Edward Pechter '[r]esponding aphoristically, Brabantio claims that proverbs are *contradictory* ("equivocal") and anyway powerless to either cause or cure real grief...'[35] However, in what sense the Duke's proverb would be contradictory, remains unexplained. Honigmann glosses this usage of 'equivocal' as 'equally appropriate'. He presumably takes his hint from the entry in the *OED* (*equivocal* 2a), which quotes this line to illustrate the meaning 'Of words, phrases, etc.: Having different significations equally appropriate or plausible; capable of double interpretation; ambiguous'. The choice of the *OED* is peculiar, since neither 'signification' nor 'interpretation' seems to fit the context of the quote: Brabantio is talking about the *effect* of what the Duke says.

Apparently the usage of 'equivocal' here cannot be explained by any of its standard meanings: neither linguistic ambiguity, nor lack of clarity, nor ethical dubiousness, nor apparent contradiction, nor 'defying categorisation' seems appropriate. It is perhaps more likely that its usage can be explained by its

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[34] Brabantio, obviously, is not entirely fair with the Duke, because the Duke never suggested that *any* sorrow can be overcome by taking it lightly, and not to act against something which has not happened yet is quite different from what is already a fact.

[35] Note to 200–7 in *Othello: Authoritative Text, Sources and Contexts, Criticism*, ed by Edward Pechter, The Norton Critical Edition (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Co., c2004); my italics.

etymological structure:[36] it implies some kind of equilibrium between two potential outcomes, which makes it strong 'on both sides'. This, of course, can be associated with the underlying principle of rhetorical education, the capability of *utramque partem disputari*, which, as Kathy Eden points out, is also built into the process of interpretation of texts in the Renaissance.[37] Furthermore, it points forward to one of the usages of the word in the Porter's speech: there the equivocator is capable of swearing 'in both the scales against either scale'.

2.2. 'Equivocation' in *Macbeth*

The word 'equivocation' in one of its forms (3×*equivocator*, 2×*equivocate*) occurs five times within no more than 40 lines of prose text in the Porter's Scene:

PORTER   Here's a knocking, indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate he should have old turning the key. [Knocking within.] Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' the name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty: come in time; have napkins enough about you; here you'll sweat for't. [Knocking within.] Knock, knock! Who's there i' the other devil's name! Faith, here's an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven: O! come in, equivocator. [Knocking within.] Knock, knock, knock! Who's there? Faith, here's an English tailor come hither for stealing out of a French hose: come in, tailor; here you may roast your goose. [Knocking within.] Knock, knock; never at quiet! What are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire. [Knocking within.] Anon, anon! I pray you, remember the porter.

                [Opens door]
                Enters Macduff, and Lennox

MACDUFF   Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed,

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[36] I am grateful to Peter Mack who in one of our conversations suggested the role of etymology.
[37] Cathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy & Its Humanist Reception* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 8.

	That you do lie so late?
PORTER	Faith, sir, we were carousing till the second cock; and drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things.
MACDUFF	What three things does drink especially provoke?
PORTER	Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes, and unprovokes; it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery; it makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him, and disheartens him; makes him stand to, and not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep, and, giving him the lie, leaves him.

(*Macbeth*, 2.3.1–35.)[38]

The most noteworthy occurrence is the form 'equivocator' used twice in the soliloquy part of the passage. This derivation applies the concept as a name of a profession, like the other two that surround it, the farmer and the tailor. The Porter talks about equivocators as one among the many 'professions[39] that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire' whose specimens he had planned to collect in his imaginary Hell. While the farmer manipulates with the price of the crops and the tailor steals from the clothes he is working with, the equivocator swears and commits treason (two concepts that recur together in the scene between Lady Macduff and her son). The equivocator swears 'in both the scales against either scale': he employs the crucial skill of any sufficiently trained public speaker to be able to argue for and against any cause (*in utramque partem disputari*). However, the image of the scales suggests that this skill involves cheating: the ability to swear in both the scales is paradoxical, since it means keeping a balance by adding to both opposing sides equally, which, in the context of the other two cheating professions and the legal

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[38] I quote the text of *Macbeth* according to Brooke's edition (Oxford Shakespeare).

[39] 'Profession' could mean 'persuing a certain religious faith', or the person's religion. Cf. OED, *profession*, I; cf. also in the account of Diego Lopez's execution by William Camden: 'he loved the Queen as well as he loved Jesus Christ. Which coming from a man of the Jewish profession, moved no small Laughter in Standers-by', quoted in Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004), p. 277. This would make Shakespeare's 'profession' ambiguous: it means both 'professional occupation' and 'religious belonging'.

court – evoked also by the balance[40] –, means to be able to swear (that is, to call God as a witness) to the ultimate binary opposites: truth and falsity.

The other activity that the Porter associates with the equivocator is generally read as yet another reference to the Jesuits:[41] he committed treason 'for God's sake', that is, invoked God's cause to justify disloyalty to the King of England. However, not only did the equivocator commit treason against the King, he also abused God's name by invoking him falsely, which is proven by the fact that he ended up in the Porter's Hell, instead of heaven. This occurrence of 'equivocation' could also be taken as a reference to the difference between human understanding and divine judgement:[42] while the equivocator could temporarily pervert the course of justice on earth, his attempt at misleading God's eternal judgement failed because God knows both the truth and the equivocator's intentions which his words could have concealed.

The equivocator, then, can manipulate his human (though not his divine) audience with his speech, and commits treason justified by hypocritical reasons, which secures him a place in Hell. The idea that linguistic manipulation has to do with the devil is obviously present here, however, 'equivocation' seems once more to

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[40] The historical argument that the occurrence of 'equivocation' should be read in the light of Garnet's trial may in fact restrict, more than enrich the understanding of the play. In the most widely performed Hungarian translation (produced in the first half of the 20th century) the poet and renowned translator Lőrinc Szabó used 'csűrcsavar ügyvéd' (*word-twisting lawyer*) to render 'equivocator' (*Macbeth*, trans. by Lőrinc Szabó, in *Shakespeare összes drámái* [The Complete Plays], 4 vols, Vol. 3: Tragedies, (Bucharest: Állami Irodalmi és Művészeti Kiadó, 1955)). The reason for his choice is unknown (unfortunately he did not comment on his word choices as he did in the case of his translations of the *Sonnets*), but the possibilities are interesting: he does not seem to be aware of the association with Garnet's trial, although he recognised the significance of the repetition of the word, and retained it in his translation. In addition, 'equivocation' as a concept does not exist in Hungarian. Finally, and most importantly, the association of verbal manipulation with lawyers seems to be so self-evident for the translator that it suggests a similar connection as the one assumed to exist for the audience of 1606 between equivocation and the Jesuits. However, this at the same time calls into question the importance of the historical connection. The effect of this scene, to a large extent, comes from the stereotypical association of a behaviour with a profession, and not what that profession specifically is.

[41] The Catholics were accused of double allegiance to the King and the Pope, and in cases of conflict, they argued, they would have had to obey the Pope.

[42] Cf. The passage by Gregory the Great, *Humanae aures...*, interpreted by Navarrus. See Chapter 2.

be used in its traditional rhetorical sense, rather than in the sense of mental reservation.

The entering Macduff, whose knocking prevented the Porter from letting other professions in, behaves like Hamlet or Viola/Cesario when they are confronted with their respective clowns, and accepts the game the Porter offers him. The Porter's ensuing speech revolves around the same ideas as his first one, this time in a vulgar tone typical of comic characters. Drink is straightforward as regards its effect on three states: it reddens the nose, puts to sleep and urges to urinate, while deceitful in relation to others, including lechery. Drink deceives by having the opposite effect than what it pretends to have. This is expressed in antitheses reminiscent, for instance, of the Gravedigger's quibbling in Hamlet, with the important difference that this time the Clown himself calls it 'equivocation'. Drink's essential nature is presented as duplicitous: it creates an expectation but ruins its fulfilment in the same process. The Porter ends his monologue with a pun: drink gives lechery a lie both in the sense that it ultimately reduces it (with another potential meaning describing the effect of drink on the male organ itself), and that it lies to it by taking away what it created, that is, by deceiving it. The choice of lechery as the victim of drink's deception is also noteworthy. Lechery itself is a sin, a desire to gain illicit sexual pleasure.[43] On the one hand, this could be a commentary on Macbeth's decision to take the crown from Duncan; on the other hand, it raises the ethical dilemma whether

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[43] Clifford Davidson, *The Primrose Way: A Study in Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'* (Iowa: John Westburg & Associates, 1970), p. 61: 'The references to lechery by the Porter (II, iii, 27ff) are also very clearly relevant to the main action of the play. Alcohol "provokes" lechery, then "unprovokes" it; "it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance." Macbeth's desire is provoked by his drunken ambition, but once the crown is possessed by him, he is not able to "stand to." His ability to have issue is denied him and in fact he finds himself cut off from all fruitful relationships. Finally, he is equivocated into "a sleepe" of security through the sisters' prophecies in IV, I, and thus his lust for the throne has ultimately given him the lie. Macbeth treads "the Primrose way" toward his damnation.'

it is morally acceptable to deceive sin (and by extension, the originator of sin, the Devil).[44]

The last time the word 'equivocation' is used in *Macbeth* and in Shakespeare's works is in the scene which presents Macbeth's first recognition of how the Weird Sisters' language deceived him. This usage, because it refers to prophecies, links the word to deception and social disruption, but not to mental reservation:

> I pull in resolution and begin
> To doubt the equivocation of the fiend
> That lies like truth. 'Fear not, till Birnam Wood
> Do come to Dunsinane,' and now a wood
> Comes toward Dunsinane.
>
> (5.7.42–46.)

As I will argue later, when I examine this passage in more detail as one of the examples for Macbeth's paradoxical interpretation of the prophecies, there does not seem to be any reason to think that 'equivocation' is used to mean mental reservation here: there is no mention of a secret meaning (Birnam Wood turns out to be an ordinary metonym), and misleading with ambiguity and double dealing have been among the meanings of the word that occur in the earlier plays, as well as in sixteenth century dialectical discourse.

2.3. Shakespeare's Usage of 'Equivocation' and the Political Context

Even though the stipulated influence of Garnet's trial and the topical political discourse on *Macbeth* would suggest that 'equivocation' would be used in a sense that presupposes a knowledge and interest in mental reservation, none of the six occurrences seem to imply a hidden qualification that the speaker utters only in his mind, addressed only to himself and God, with the aim of making a seemingly

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[44] Cf. also Malcolm, who, in the scene in which he tries Macduff's faithfulness, says he 'would not betray / The Devil to his fellow' (4.3.128–129).

unambiguous statement linguistically ambiguous, presenting the audience with a choice of meanings.

It appears, then, that in all the nine cases, Shakespeare used the concept of equivocation in one of its traditional rhetorical senses: linguistically ambiguous, unclear, misleading (through exploiting the logical fallacy of using polysemous words in two senses simultaneously to suggest or conceal connections), or duplicitous. The potential in ambiguity to mislead the other is perceptible in the occurrences in *Macbeth*, but it can be found in the earlier plays too, and these associations had already been present in the texts used in sixteenth and seventeenth century rhetorical and dialectical education. It seems clear that for Shakespeare, 'equivocation' never came to be linked as closely with the Jesuit doctrine as is usually assumed. He never seems to have used the word in the sense of mental reservation. This raises the question of how much explanatory value Garnet's case has for *Macbeth* specifically, and how much the ideas in *Macbeth* that are usually believed to originate from the aftermath of the Gunpowder plot are in fact the manifestation of a more general suspicion about language in the Renaissance.[45]

The importance of contextual information that can resolve seeming paradoxes and antitheses (the idea that a statement can be true and false at the same time by being true in one sense and false in another) had been present in, for instance, *Twelfth Night*, and had been explored in literature even much earlier, most obviously in connection with prophecies. What, as I attempted to demonstrate in my earlier chapters, is a novelty in the Renaissance is that the anxiety about being deceived by something innocent-looking becomes a central moral issue on a wider spectrum of discourses.

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[45] Matthew Baynham (' "Twice Done and then Done Double": Equivocation and the Catholic Recusant Hostess in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*', in *The Accession of James I: Historical and Cultural Consequences*, ed. by Glenn Burgess, Rowland Wymer, and Jason Lawrence (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 101–112) argues that equivocation should be traced back to earlier sources, at least to Southwell's writings, which, according to him, offer interesting parallels with the text of *Macbeth*.

According to the critical consensus, the Porter's is the only comic scene in the play (perhaps with the exception of the discussion between Lady Macduff and her son), nevertheless, in what way it is comic is hardly ever reflected on. If we regard his five usages of 'equivocation' as topical references, then the repetition itself has a comic potential. He seems to be obsessed with the word, keen to use it whenever it fits the context, which, especially in performance, can be very effective.[46] His obsession with seeing equivocation everywhere parallels the authorities' almost paranoid representation of all Catholics as equivocators (whose words are always potentially treacherous). Whether parodying the official state propaganda this way would have been acceptable or not is impossible to determine, but it is at least a problem that readings that interpret *Macbeth* as a 'royal' play (supposedly written specifically to be first performed for King James) would have to address.[47]

However, such a reading would potentially make the scene politically offensive, and Shakespeare does not seem to have acquired the new, politically charged meaning of 'equivocation' (even though its redefinition as mental reservation was the central point of Sir Edward Coke's indictment, as well as of Northampton's long speech at the trial). Therefore, I would conclude that the unparalleled number of the usages of the word in the Porter's speech, with the other potential references to

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[46] Cf. Bergson's classic study of laughter, in which he makes machine-like repetition one of the central characteristics of the comic.

[47] The classic exposition of this approach is of course in Henry N. Paul's much contested (and in many points disproven) *The Royal Play of 'Macbeth'*. On pp. 243–244, for instance, he says (without showing any sign that he would have been aware of the problematic implications): 'What can this porter talk about with sufficient satisfaction to the king and his courtiers to justify their listening at this critical moment to his drunken mumblings? [...] [When the dramatist] heard and read of Garnet's execution, he saw an opportunity to insert more apt material. He thought of Garnet the equivocator hanging from the gibbet and going straight to hell. [...] The language most certainly refers to Henry Garnet, arraigned, tried and convicted, and executed for *treason* "for God's sake," notwithstanding his effort to escape the consequences of this treason by means of *equivocation*. [...] The scene was, and is still, a dramatic triumph. Even to an audience with no knowledge of Garnet or of his doctrine of equivocation, and therefore no idea of what the porter is talking about, it is effective, But to King James and his court, to whom the implications of these words were instant máté clear, it must have been electrifying.' But cf. more recently e.g. Greenblatt (*Will in the World*, p. 335): 'Shakespeare constructed *Macbeth* around, or perhaps as, a piece of flattery. The flattery is not directed and personal, the fulsome praise characteristic of many other royal entertainments in the period, but indirect and dynastic.'

Garnet (*Farmer*) or Jesuits in general (*equivocator* as profession) is sufficiently persuasive for us to entertain the suggestion that *Macbeth* (at least in the form that it exists today) was in some way influenced by the Gunpowder Plot. This influence, however, is superficial, and affects the language usage rather than the conceptual layer and the dramaturgy of the play. In a sense, then, Coleridge was right to observe that the Porter's jokes do not fit the play: although what later critics recognise as the significance of 'equivocation' is not alien to the play, it is perceptible only with hindsight, and is not as organically connected to the play as is sometimes believed.

3. Equivocation as a Phenomenon in *Macbeth*

Equivocation (both in the sense of 'linguistic ambiguity' and 'mental reservation') is a trope of treason, because it 'engenders the false conceit' of security by a reassuring and seemingly unambiguous speech which, as the hearer eventually realises, means something other than what it seemed to mean. This property of language had been exploited before and regardless of the Gunpowder Plot, therefore it was not as unheard of and as new as analyses of *Macbeth* – taking seventeenth century Protestant accounts' claims uncritically – often emphasise.[48]

Henry Garnet's trial, the controversy about equivocation and the literary tradition of tragic prophecies (which *Macbeth* is an example of) share the recognition that whoever faces ambiguous/equivocal speeches has almost no chance of getting the meaning right (if there is a 'right' at all). The traitor can deceive and endanger authority and social order by ambiguities, and even think him/herself innocent: ambiguous speeches are true in some sense, as opposed to plain lies that could never be made true in any sense.

> There is a recognition of a certain power in language here, one which for all its aura of superstition and country lore is associated with decidedly real struggles and threats to the power of the throne. [...] Amphibology marks an aspect of language that neither treason nor authority can control. It is a power that cannot be trammelled up, mastered, or univocally defined, but it is a power: it compels and moves the speaker or auditor.[49]

The common feature of the deceiving traitor and the traitor deceived is the dynamic that the initial conviction about what the right course of action is proves to

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[48] According to Mullaney, 'While the reference was clear, however, the *relation* of Garnet's equivocation to the play was not. In its narrow historical context, "equivocation" has been of inestimable aid in dating *Macbeth,* but of doubtful use as a key to the entanglements of truth, lie, and treason in the play.' Seven Mullaney, 'Lying Like Truth: Riddle, Representation and Treason in Renaissance England', in *The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 116–137, originally published as Steven Mullaney, 'Lying Like Truth: Riddle, Representation and Treason in Renaissance England.' *ELH* 47.1 (Spring, 1980), 32–47, p. 123 (page numbers refer to the book version).

[49] Mullaney, p. 121. See also p. 124: 'From the perspective of authority, it does so illicitly – that is, in the place of authority and laws of State, reason, or sense. It is not when Macbeth lies but when the language he would use instead masters him that the power of amphibology strikes us, and its effects are not confined to the witches' riddles.'

be a mistaken belief. In the following sections I will explore the ways in which equivocation deceives in *Macbeth*: how ambiguous language usage turns out to be deceitful, how the Weird Sisters deceive Macbeth, and how moral judgement is affected by the fact that Macbeth both obeys and attempts not to obey the prophecies.

3.1. Equivocators in *Macbeth*

How much, and in what sense, can Macbeth himself be regarded an equivocator? How relevant is misleadingly ambiguous speech to the moral dilemmas that *Macbeth* makes its audience examine?

Analyses of the play often attempt to subsume all kinds of indecent or dishonest behaviours under the label 'equivocation'.[50] Not only Macbeth, but Lady Macbeth and Malcolm[51] are also treated as equivocators. However, in many such instances of deception the crucial element of equivocation, the usage of language that deceives by having different significations for the speaker (and the external audience) and the hearer(s), is missing.

Macbeth's behaviour once the murder has been found out is nevertheless a case in point.

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[50] It refers to phenomena that are both impenetrable and deceptive; a hidden meaning that would need to be known for a full understanding of certain speeches; withholding information from the interlocutors (while laying it open to the audience (Huntley, pp. 398–9)); something is ambivalent or contradicts itself (Brooke calls Malcolm an equivocal figure in this sense (p. 6), and claims that the play is equivocal about the Stuart Monarchy (p. 34.); Sanders calls Macbeth's attitude towards the prophecies equivocal (Quoted in Scott, p. 172)); and occasionally metatheatrical phenomena too: 'When, confronted at once thereafter with the deceptive truth of the prophecies, Macbeth denounces "th' equivocation of the fiend / That lies like truth..." (V.v.43–44), we should recall that it is the function of the player to lie like truth and of the audience to believe what it knows to be equivocation' (Scott, p. 174).

[51] Rebecca Lemon ('Scaffolds of Treason in *Macbeth'*, *Theatre Journal*, 54.1, *Tragedy* (2002), 25–43, in JStor <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25069019>, [accessed 6 February, 2012], p. 40) argues that Malcolm learns the traitor's art from Macbeth, and in the long scene in which Malcolm tests Macduff's faithfulness, he uses equivocation to find out how far Macduff would go to depose Macbeth. Malcolm, however, says nothing that means something else for him than for the other characters: he simply heaps false charges on himself (viciousness, lust, avarice). Malcolm either lied when he described himself with the various attributes of a tyrant and now takes it all back, or he is lying now and all the characteristics are true; however, no double sense is involved in the scene.

> MACBETH.   Had I but died an hour before this chance,
>   I had lived a blessèd time; for from this instant
>   There's nothing serious in mortality –
>   All is but toys: renown and grace is dead,
>   The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
>   Is left this vault to brag of.
>
> (2.3.93–98.)

There is no critical consensus whether this speech should be understood as a plain lie, equivocal deception or unintended dramatic irony.[52] Scott, for instance, notes that

> [a]nother of Macbeth's honesties consists in speaking lies which by his own actions, even the very words themselves, come true. Though there is a sort of honesty in the outcome, the starting point is outrageous hypocrisy with no intention of truth. There is thus a particular force in Macbeth's extravagant lament for Duncan.[53]

However, read as equivocation, this passage can be another instance of the desperate attempt to mislead without lying, the need which produced the doctrine of mental reservation. Macbeth – at this early stage of his career as a murderer – still feels the urge to deceive the lords, while still speaking the truth to himself (and his judge, the audience).

The only prolonged scene in which Macbeth is seen concealing information from other characters and simultaneously revealing it to the audience, is the Banquet Scene. Rebecca Lemon believes that Macbeth here 'unwittingly discloses his murder of Duncan and Banquo to his nobles',[54] but I think the tension of the scene comes exactly from the fact that although he constantly verges on revealing his secret, he never actually does so. For example, in one of the most memorable instances of using a sentence that cannot be simply regarded as true or false (because it is true in one sense but not in another), Macbeth addresses Banquo's ghost: 'Thou canst not say I did it – never shake / Thy gory locks at me' (3.4.50–51). Macbeth, of course, has not killed Banquo with his own hands (thus the sentence is true if understood

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[52] See e.g. Brooke, 'Introduction', pp. 13–14, where he quotes Muir who in his edition (notes to ll. II. iii. 89–94) adds to Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 359) and refutes Middleton Murry's position (*Shakespeare*, [London: Cape, 1936.] p. 332).

[53] Scott, p. 168.

[54] Lemon, pp. 40–41.

literally), but without his orders Banquo would still have been alive (thus it is false in the broader, more relevant sense of the word).[55]

This scene can be read beside a number of other scenes in Shakespeare where the tension is sustained by one character speaking in a way that the other characters understand differently from what the audience knows (or suspects) to be the character's actual meaning, while his/her speeches appear to be satisfying both audiences. Examples abound from comic ones, like the last scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, to darker ones like the trial scene in *Measure for Measure*, to tragic ones, like the machinations of Iago in *Othello*. Compared to these plays in which whole scenes (or even the main plots) turn around the double meaning produced intentionally by characters to mislead the others, *Macbeth* is in fact relatively lacking in the sense that Macbeth does not use ambiguity to mislead others as often as is usually assumed.

What, nevertheless, potentially creates the *air* of omnipresent equivocation is the constant talk of the need for dissimulation, the desire to conceal from the eye what is in the heart. Lady Macbeth, reassuring her husband before murdering Duncan, uses imagery that ultimately goes back to Virgil,[56] but can be traced in sixteenth century rhetoric textbooks,[57] as well as in a medal related to the Gunpowder Plot:[58]

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[55] As Sir Edward Coke argues in Garnet's trial, 'For the proper name of this offence, because I must speake of severall treasons, for distinction and separation of this from the other, I will name it the Iesuites treason, as belonging them to *ex congruo et condigno*, They were the proprietaries, plotters, and procurers of it, and in such crimes *plus peccat author quam Actor*, The Author or procurer offendeth more then the actor or executor, as may appeare by Gods owne Iudgement giuen against the first sinne in Paradise, where the serpent had three punishments inflicted vpon him, as the originall plotter; the woman two, being as the mediate procurer; and *Adam* but one, as the partie seduced.' [Anon.], *A True and perfect relation...*, sig. P1ᵛ.

[56] See Muir, ad loc.

[57] Cf. John Case's description of the *fallacy of equivocation*. The Sophists, being hidden behind and protected by ambiguity are capable of carrying out their destruction. They 'are lurking beneath it [i.e. *equivocation*], like the snake under the flower, and prepare many traps for the incautious.' In Case's description ('sub ea [sc. aequivocatione] (ut anguis sub herba) latitans', sig. Mm3ʳ) the Sophist is put in the role of the snake, who *is lurking* under the flower (the preposition *sub* suggests that *herba* here already means flower rather than the original grass). The flower itself has become, as it were, an extension of the Sophist-snake, as it corresponds to *aequivocatio* in the sentence: ambiguity occurs as a shield produced by the Sophist to hide his intentions, his real meaning. Case's

> ... to beguile the time,
> Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
> Your hand, your tongue – look like the innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under't.
>
> (1.5.62–65.)

It is perhaps noteworthy that while in Virgil the flower and the snake are two separate entities ('latet anguis in herba' – the snake lurks in the grass),[59] in Lady Macbeth's imagination they become one body with a deceitful externally pleasant appearance and a dangerous internal essence. Macbeth should *look like* the (almost tautologically) innocent flower, but be the serpent himself. The flower no longer exists at all; it is merely a projection, a disguise that the serpent-Macbeth has to put on. The disguise hides not only Macbeth's true intentions, but his whole self.

Illustration 2: *Coin commemorating the Gunpowder Plot*[60]

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usage of the iterative form (*latito*) instead of the simple verb (*lateo*) probably emphasises the hideousness of the act involved.

[58] Cf. Brooke (ed), Muir (ed), ad loc. Henry N. Paul calls attention to a medal (commemorating King James's wisdom in discovering the Gunpowder Plot in the last moment), which contained 'a serpent lurking among flowers, with the inscription DETECTUS QUI LATUIT SC.' (p. 227), see illustration below. Paul claims that a reproduction of the medal is printed in Henderson, *James I and VI* (Goupil, 1904), p. 211, as well as in Hawkins and Frank, *Medallic Illustrations* (in fact, this only contains its description). Hawkins and Frank refer to Pinkerton (*The Medallic History of England to the Revolution* (London: Edwards, 1790), in Google Books <books.google.com>, [accessed 27 November, 2012]), Köhlers (*Historischer Münz-Belustigung*, Volumes 15–16 (Nurmberg: Weigel, 1743), in Google Books <books.google.com>, [accessed 27 November, 2012], p. 153.) and *Histoire metallique des XVII provinces des Pays-Bas*, tr. by Gerard Van Loon, Volume 2 (La Haye: Gosse, Neaulme & De Hondt, 1732), in Google Books <books.google.com>, [accessed 27 November, 2012]) for the illustration. Pinkerton dates the coin to 1603, but Köhler's arguments for 1605 are convincing.

[59] Damoetas, one of the two shepherds who take part in the poetic contest, warns the youths who collect flowers and strawberries to 'flee from here: cold snake lurks in the grass'. ('Qui legitis flores et humi nascentia fraga, / frigidus, o pueri, fugite hinc, latet anguis in herba', 3.92–93. I give the Latin text according to this edition: *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI*, tr. by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63, rev. ed. (London: W. Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1978), the English is my translation) The snake in Virgil is an unexpected danger, part of nature, hiding in the grass where it cannot be seen, ready to attack.

[60] Image taken from Pinkerton, Plate 11.7.

Duncan is the first to express the deceitfulness of appearances in terms of a separation of human body parts (the face and the mind), which is followed by a number of similar examples in Macbeth's speeches. Macbeth contrasts the face with the heart twice, which is a commonplace image for deceit (Shakespeare himself used it in a number of cases).[61] First, when they decide that they will murder Duncan, Macbeth tells himself: 'Away, and mock the time with fairest show: / False face must hide what the false heart doth know.' (1.7.82–83). On the second occasion, advising himself and his wife before murdering Banquo, their faces are no longer false, but become almost detached from their bodies, a part of their armour, while their hearts endanger their purposes by, as it were, popping out from within their bodies to replace their faces in showing their true nature:

> LADY MACBETH   Come on –
>   Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks,
>   Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight.
> MACBETH   So shall I, love, and so I pray be you;
>   Let your remembrance apply to Banquo,
>   Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue –
>   Unsafe the while, that we must lave our honours
>   In these flattering streams, and make our faces
>   Vizards to our hearts, disguising what they are.
>
> (3.2.29–37.)[62]

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[61] Bassanio's speech (*The Merchant of Venice*, ed. by John Drakakis, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: A&C Black, 2011), 3.2.73–107) leading up to choosing the lead casket, can also be read as a (somewhat indirect) commentary on disguise in the sense that he contrasts outward look with the inward (true) qualities. It also foreshadows, in an uncanny way, what Portia will do a few scenes later. Bassanio begins his monologue with a statement ('So may the outward shows be least themselves'), separating inner truth from outward show, that will take Duncan so long to realise ('There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face'), and which he even then fails to employ successfully. This observation is then applied to two examples: one of law, another of religion. Even the most wicked cause can win support, if it is presented in a deceitfully embellished language, which veils the real outward characteristics of evil. The outward appealing appearance similarly easily veils even heretic positions, if it is accompanied by a 'sober brow', the approval of an authoritative figure whose truthfulness is taken for granted. Bassanio concludes with a generalisation: every vice is capable of presenting itself as its own opposite, a virtue. This is, again followed by an example, of the coward who appears to be brave. In this, the contrast between true and false is once more expressed in the contrast between heart (and later liver), and face. After a few sceptical observations on the existence of real beauty, he returns to the problem of ornament as a misleading concealment of the actual qualities, or in fact truth. The imagery of the deceptively calm seashore hiding a dangerous sea emphasises the life threatening nature of such concealments to the deceived. His final summary of this attack on ornament, phrased in a way once more reminiscent of Macbeth's comments on himself, emphasises what makes it so deceptive: that it is *a* credible truth which is nevertheless only seemingly *the* truth.

[62] Duke Vincentio puts on a priest's robe, because by the very message it carries it is generally accepted as a justification that whoever wears them says the truth. How deceptive that can become is

The numerous instances in which Macbeth invokes forces of nature to help him conceal his deeds (most emphatically, from himself) also contribute to the play's discourse of treason and dissimulation.[63] According to Scott, for instance, there are cases in which Macbeth attempts to equivocate with himself:

> On hearing Duncan proclaim Malcolm Prince of Cumberland, he seeks to deceive not only heaven but himself:
>
> Stars, hide your fires;
> Let not light see my black and deep desires.
> The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see
> (I.iv.50–53)[64]
>
> The passive voice tries to make the nameless act of the hand as impersonal as a deed fated by prophecy, even though Macbeth is now consciously considering action. His overt statement suggests positive effort to equivocate with himself: the tongue also (in an unavoidably mixed metaphor) conspires to wink at the hand. Reasoning about equivocation approaches the problematics of this kind of soliloquy or aside in this argument of Garnet as paraphrased by Morton: 'Thus, If I were alone and should talke with my selfe, and say one thing, vnderstanding a thing different from that, this is not a lie' (p. 68; cf. Garnet, p. 15). Morton's reply not only denies implicitly the dramatic conventions but dismisses the kind of conscious self-deceit declared by Sonnet 138 and indeed any verbalized self-consciousness: 'the vse of speech was not ordained for a looking glasse, whereby a man might see himselfe, but as the Interpreter of the mind, whereby he might be knowen of others. ... And can any by any wilfull lie deceiue his owne selfe, as thereby be made ignorant of his owne meaning? This were to distract a man from himselfe.' Yet not only does Macbeth seek to describe such distraction, he tries to induce it. Macbeth wants consciously to deceive himself.[65]

Macbeth, however, continues to be aware of the immorality of his deeds throughout the play. This passage (like others) is certainly an attempt at self-deception, but (just

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emphasised by the instances in which he explicitly refers to his priesthood through his robes as something that puts him beyond every doubt. *Macbeth* also testifies to the common notion that certain positions, in this case, the position of the King's host, in itself can serve as an assurance of order and predictability. Of course, this play is exactly about the unreliability of such common assumptions, and Macbeth makes this explicit in his 'If it were done' soliloquy: 'then, as his host / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself' (I.7.14–16). He does not even need to wear a disguise to achieve that deceptive effect, his title as host is 'thrust' upon him by Duncan; he deceives by not acting according to common, everyday assumptions.

[63] e.g. 3.2.49–53: 'Come, seeling night, / Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day, / And with thy bloody and invisible hand / Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond / Which keeps me pale!'.

[64] 1.4.51–54 in Brooke's edition.

[65] Scott, p. 164. Morton's argument (which I analysed in Chapter 3), indeed, appears strange with a perspective influenced by psychoanalysis (Morton's point was to disprove the Catholic argument that if the examiner is unjust then the examinee has the right to talk as if he was talking to himself).

like the others) a failed one: he never manages to convince himself that killing Duncan or Banquo is justifiable. This passage, just like *Sonnet* 138, reveals the unattainability of complete self-deception: the speaker of the sonnet also knows that he is deceiving himself, which means that he does not fully believe what he says, but rather knowingly chooses to suspend his disbelief.

Finally, in his speech just before murdering Duncan, Macbeth paraphrases Luke:[66]

> Thou sure and firm-set earth,
> Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
> Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,
> And take the present horror from the time
> Which now suits with it.
>
>   (2.1.56–60.)

This instance of concealment is particularly interesting because the Earl of Northampton uses the same biblical passage in Garnet's indictment speech to describe the horror that the Gunpowder Plot could have brought about if it had succeeded.[67]

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[66] see Muir, note to lines II.i.57–58. Luke, 19. 40: 'He saide vnto them: I tell you, that if these holde their peace, then shall the stones crye' (*The Holie Bible (The Bishops' Bible)*, STC (2nd ed.) / 2099.2, (London: Richard Iugge, 1568), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 10 November 2012]).

[67] 'The streights of time, the length of the triall, and the wearinesse of the Auditors, may be and are great discouragements to such a discourse as craues time, and were better not begun at all then not perfected. But since the Law and the Prophets in this case in hand, stand chiefly as the groundworke of deposing Kings and absoluing subjects from that right which they owe to their owne naturall and lawfull Soueraignes by the lawes of God and man; I shal be forced in discharge of duty at this instance to borrowe so much time of these attentiue hearers as must bee payd againe forthwith to the seruice of the State: For otherwise, *vae mihi,* as the Prophet threatens, *qui tacui*: and yet wee may conclude with another of the same rank that, *etiamsi tacuero, clamabunt lapides.' A true and perfect relation*, sig. Dd1ᵛ–Dd2ʳ.

3.2. Equivocating Prophecies in the Renaissance

Discussing sixteenth century theories of rebellion, Steven Mullaney quotes a number of sources that regard ambiguous speech as an essential element of sedition.[68] However, treason does not always originate from human agents:[69] other sources describe cases in which the rebel himself is the victim of ambiguity, being won over to the ranks of evil by supernatural sources that deceive with the help of sentences that 'may be turned both wayes, so that a man shall be uncertayne what way to take'.[70] The clearest statement of the relationship between prophecy, ambiguity and rebellion, according to Mullaney, can be found in Puttenham's rhetoric handbook, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589).[71] According to Puttenham, when

> the sence may be taken two wayes, such ambiguous termes they call *Amphibologia*, we call it the *ambiguous*, or figure of sence incertaine…these doubtfull speaches were vsed much in the old times by their false Prophets as appeareth by the Oracles of *Delphos* and of the *Sybilles* prophecies deuised by the religious persons of those dayes to abuse the superstitious people, and to encomber their busie braynes with vaine hope or vaine feare.
> […] and in effect all our old Brittish and Saxon prophesies be of the same sort, that turne them on which side ye will, the matter of them may be verified, neuerthelesse carryeth generally such force in the heades of fonde people, that by the comfort of those blind prophecies many insurrections and rebellions haue bene stirred vp in this Realme, [...] lead altogether by certaine propheticall rymes, which might be constred two or three wayes as well as to that one whereunto the rebelles applied it: our maker shall therefore auoyde all such ambiguous speaches vnlesse it be when he doth it for the nonce and for some purpose.[72]

While in the more widely used textbooks prophecy occurs as a distant analogue that illustrates the way in which ambiguous speech can deceive and instigate social

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[68] Mullaney, 'Lying like truth', pp. 118–119.
[69] Mullaney, pp. 119–121.
[70] Abraham Fraunce, *The Lawyers Logicke*. Quoted in Mullaney, p. 121.
[71] Mullaney, pp. 119–120. This text, even though presumably not widely known in its own age (Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric*, p. 76.) is often quoted today because of the obvious appeal of its elaborate discussion.
[72] George Puttenham *The arte of English poesie Contriued into three bookes: the first of poets and poesie, the second of proportion, the third of ornament*, STC (2nd ed.) / 20519.5 (London: Richard Field, 1589), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, III.xxii, sig. Ff3ʳ–Ff3ᵛ.

disruption,[73] Puttenham directly identifies prophecy (of which ambiguity is an essential component) as the potential cause of rebellion. Deceitful prophecies were coined by people with a specific aim, and never by God. Puttenham sees contemporary cases of deceptive prophecies as analogous to the doubtful speeches of the Delphic and other pagan oracles, and therefore they could also be suspected to lack actual superhuman agency,[74] which is an attempt to rationalise the threat that ambiguous language poses.[75] Shakespeare explores the more terrifying possibility that deception might originate from agents that are beyond human control. Mullaney notes correctly that when the traitor faces ambiguous prophecies that seemingly offer a choice, it is language that deceives him. At the same time, he disregards a crucial element in *Macbeth* that constitutes a similarity with the controversy about mental reservation: the problem of responsibility.

3.3. Macbeth Deceived: The Juggling of the Fiends

Analyses of *Macbeth* tend to employ double standards both in relation to other plays and within *Macbeth* itself concerning the questions of responsibility. In other plays, characters who use ambiguity to deceive others are often praised for their verbal adroitness, and the ones who misunderstand them are presented as if they could, and perhaps should, have seen through the misleading language usage.[76] As opposed to that, whether Macbeth deceives by equivocal statements or he is deceived by

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[73] Cf. also Morton's argument in *A full satisfaction...*, treated above (Chapter 3, Section 3.2).

[74] On this point I disagree with Mullaney, who notes, 'no source is suggested for the prophecy in cases such as Kett's, no agent demonic or otherwise is even obliquely mentioned', which, he argues, suggests that these prophecies are essentially different according to Puttenham, because the 'traitor is seduced by a language without origin' and '*Macbeth* is perhaps the fullest literary representation' of this kind of language, 'treason's amphibology' (pp. 121–122).

[75] Cf. the failure both Philanax and Basilius bear when they attempt the same with the prophecy in *Arcadia*.

[76] See the arguments in my previous chapter about critics on Viola/Cesario's 'hints'.

ambiguities,[77] he will always be held morally responsible. This would suggest that the play subscribes to both the Protestant and the Catholic position about the ethics of understanding: sometimes it is the speaker's responsibility to ensure understanding, sometimes it is the hearer's. Macbeth is thus pronounced guilty from the start, which prevents critics from asking in what ways the audience is made to realise his immorality.

Equivocation involves three participants: the speaker, the hearer(s) and the external audience. In the thesis, I consider two basic types of equivocation. In the first type (the topic of Section 3.1 above), the immediate hearers do not notice that there could be a second meaning and are misled as a consequence. In the second type, the immediate hearers notice the possibility of a second meaning, but end up being misled nevertheless. In the first type, when only the audience is aware of the ambiguity of a speech, the ambiguous character speaks directly to the audience, that is, provides them with extra knowledge, and thus makes them aware that other characters are being misled. For instance, comments by the narrator of *Arcadia*, what critics call Viola/Cesario's 'hints' in *Twelfth Night*, or Macbeth's remarks about Banquo at the Banquet scene feature this structure. In the second type, characters who hear the equivocal speech attempt to reduce it to a 'real/proper' meaning, but fail to do so because the inextricability of these speeches is caused by the fact that both meanings are in a sense true (cf. the Weird Sisters' first prophecy and Macbeth's attempts to clarify it for himself).

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[77] Lemon (pp. 40–41) argues that Macbeth is '*unable or unwilling* to recognize the witches' prophecies as misleading half-truths, [he] desperately clings to their speeches as authentic statements about his future', (my italics) which, I will argue, as opposed to Lemon's implication, they are, or rather prove to be. Scott (p. 173) similarly holds Macbeth accountable: 'Thus Macbeth *takes* literally what *needs to be* figurative, *fails* to measure words by sights, and *misplaces* both doubt and trust. He mistakes a complex of deceptions, but one that by that same token *should not be* deceptive that it *is* deceptive.' (My italics, except for 'is'.) Huntley ultimately also concludes that Macbeth was responsible for his own downfall, while initially he ascribed the tragedy to forces that are beyond Macbeth's control (p. 397).

In exploring how Macbeth is deceived by the prophecies, I consider the properties of equivocation that the analysis of the religious-political debate provided: ambiguous language usage is always impenetrable for the hearer as long as the speaker does not provide the hearer with the frame of reference against which the different meanings can be checked. I will look at the interpretation strategies that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth employ when they seek the meanings of the prophecies in order to decide on what course of action to follow. In the next section, this will serve as a basis of comparison of the degree to which Macbeth's actions are in accordance with his interpretations of the prophecies.[78]

The first of the two groups of prophecies are addressed partly to Macbeth and partly to Banquo:

FIRST WITCH   All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Glamis.

SECOND WITCH All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor.

THIRD WITCH   All hail Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter.

BANQUO   Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear
                   Things that do sound so fair? – I'th' name of truth,
                   Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
                   Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
                   You greet with present grace, and great prediction
                   Of noble having, and of royal hope,
                   That he seems rapt withal; to me you speak not.
                   If you can look into the seeds of time,
                   And say which grain will grow, and which will not,
                   Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
                   Your favours nor your hate.

FIRST WITCH   Hail.

SECOND WITCH Hail.

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[78] One sense in which, according to Huntley, equivocation is relevant to *Macbeth* is that it describes the experience that with certain phenomena (the Weird Sisters, for instance) it is practically impossible to determine whether they are real or merely appear to be real. I will try to demonstrate that more often the problem is not so much that the boundaries are indeterminate, but that the characters of the play are required to make sense of phenomena that seem to unite conceptually contradictory elements. The audience's vision encompasses both the understanding of those who perceive one potential (but in fact false) meaning, and the intention of those who create that double meaning, while knowing that only one of them is correct (in the sense that only one conforms to reality).

THIRD WITCH   Hail.

FIRST WITCH   Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

SECOND WITCH Not so happy, yet much happier.

THIRD WITCH   Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:
                         So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo.

FIRST WITCH   Banquo, and Macbeth, all hail.

MACBETH   Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more:
                         By Sinel's death I know I am Thane of Glamis,
                         But how, of Cawdor? The Thane of Cawdor lives
                         A prosperous gentleman; and to be King
                         Stands not within the prospect of belief,
                         No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence
                         You owe this strange intelligence, or why
                         Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
                         With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge you.

                         [Witches vanish.]

                                                                            (1.3.48–78.)

Huntley argues that these prophetic lines could be understood as each containing a mentally reserved qualification.[79] He uses the distinction introduced by the Protestant treatises to argue that the Weird Sisters' prophecies are especially deceptive, because they are not merely ambiguous but equivocal. The Weird Sisters, in his reading, employ the deceptive method of the Jesuits to push Macbeth towards his downfall: 'given the political background', this would mean that evil originates in the Weird Sisters, and Macbeth, hearing the prophecies, occupies the position of the Protestant authorities who have every reason to distrust the Catholic Sisters' words. However, Huntley also believes that Macbeth had entertained thoughts of murder earlier, and he merely feels reassured by the prophecies.[80] The responsibility begins to shift to Macbeth when Huntley claims that his 'mind *readily takes* the spoken half of their propositions for the truth that he will act upon. The hidden parts, however, which

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[79] Huntley, p. 397.
[80] Huntley, p. 397.

make up "the whole truth," work upon his conscience', and as a proof he quotes 1.3.140–143.[81] Later, in connection with the second prophecies, Huntley further argues that '*with proud recklessness he takes* only that half of their true propositions which he hears' (my italics).[82] But if *Macbeth* is read as the exploration of the evilness of linguistic deception (as the historical connection suggests),[83] then what else could Macbeth have taken than what he heard? When Huntley argues that Macbeth 'embraces'[84] and 'cultivates'[85] mental reservation, he presumably means that Macbeth practices equivocation, and that he fails to give thought to the potential hidden meanings in the prophecies. In that latter respect, he is contrasted with Banquo who 'knows "the devil can speak true" and not true simultaneously by hiding information: "... oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of Darkness tell us truths; / Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence" (I.iii.123–6)'.[86] But would Macbeth have been able to rely on anything else than what he hears with his *human ears* when '[e]quivocation leads to treason in that it holds back mentally one-half of a proposition in order to delude the hearer by that half which is spoken'?[87] Macbeth, as the hearer, is thus made morally responsible for

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[81] Huntley, p. 397 (my italics).

[82] Huntley, p. 398.

[83] 'By this time, treasonous equivocation which is not the whole truth has turned the world of value upside down. Macbeth is a traitor to the king; but when Macbeth becomes a king, then all those forces of righteousness against him become "traitors".' Huntley, p. 398.

[84] By the end of the article, Macbeth entirely replaces the Weird Sisters in their role as the Devil's agents: 'in *embracing* the Jesuitical doctrine of equivocation he communes not with God but with the devil, and he violates all three rules for its application: truth, discretion, and justice'. Huntley, p. 399 (my italics).

[85] Macbeth 'realizes the equivocation which is the key to his own tragedy to consist of the discrepancy between the words of the mouth and the meditations of the heart, a discrepancy whose *deliberate and foolhardy cultivation* for an evil end isolates him from the rest of humanity'. Huntley, p. 399 (my italics).

[86] Huntley, p. 397. (The *Macbeth* quote is 1.3.124–7 in the Oxford edition.) What, however, Huntley fails to make clear here is why the audience should understand these words of Banquo to refer to a hidden qualification, rather than to simple lying or equivocation in any of its traditional senses. Banquo, furthermore, here seems to be emphasising the responsibility of the hearer in interpreting potentially misleading texts, which would bring his position closer to the Catholics' opinion on this issue. Banquo's scepticism is seen as a counterpoint to Macbeth's unreflective acceptance of the first suggestions of the prophecies.

[87] Huntley, p. 398.

not seeking the hidden qualification that he could not be aware of; that is, Huntley slips into the Catholic position without noticing it.[88]

The three prophetic greetings addressed to Macbeth are enigmatic in many ways, and will partly remain so throughout the play.[89] As the audience knows at this point, the first two prophecies of the Weird Sisters have already become true: Macbeth had long been the Thane of Glamis, and the King has already nominated him the Thane of Cawdor. Unlike the audience, Macbeth only knows the first to be true. Therefore, when the second prophecy seems to be confirmed – it only seems to be confirmed, because in fact the words have *revealed* rather than *predicted* something true –, it suggest a context in which the third appears to be a prediction of a future event that may possibly come true at an unspecified later point in time. It is in this deceptive context that Macbeth needs to judge the Third Sister's greeting, which is itself ambiguous. What the Third Sister predicts (Macbeth's kingship) is undoubtedly fulfilled, but what 'shalt be' means is revealed neither to Macbeth nor the audience.[90]

Macbeth finds two possible interpretations: the one he later chooses (murdering Duncan) and that kingship will fall upon him without the need for doing anything: 'If chance will have me King, why chance may crown me, / Without my stir.' (1.3.144–

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[88] Another often disregarded point is that although Banquo first warns Macbeth (and, somewhat didactically, the audience) that the fact that certain parts of the prophecy are true, does not necessarily make the whole of it true – in fact, it may even be the indication of the manipulation of the malicious superhuman forces – he later also believes in its essential trustworthiness. Banquo initially has doubts about the benevolence of the Weird Sisters and the origin of their prophecy (1.3.123–127). Even more importantly, later he seems to follow the same basic pattern of thought as Macbeth did in his soliloquy: 'If there come truth from them, / As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine, / Why by the verities on thee made good / May they not be my oracles as well, / And set me up in hope?' (3.1.6–10). Just as Macbeth found it inconceivable that the same prophet can tell the truth in certain cases and lie in others, Banquo also convinces himself that his descendants will be kings by referring to those parts of the prophecy that have already come true.

[89] Greenblatt, 'Introduction' (*The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, general editor, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, editors, with an essay on the Shakespearean stage by Andrew Gurr (London; New York: W.W. Norton, 1997)), pp. 2559–60.

[90] The audience of *Macbeth* is in a similar position here to the reader of the passage in Sidney's *Arcadia* in which, after the rebellion, Basilius is giving his interpretation of the prophecy (see Chapter 4, Section 2). The audience's (and the reader's) privileged knowledge has the effect that the scene gives them insight into the trustworthiness of the prophecy, and calls their attention to the process of interpretation and the potential mistakes that Macbeth and Basilius make (in those cases in which the audience knows when the interpretation goes wrong).

145). His monologue which seeks to reconcile the two apparently diametrically opposed truths, and attempts to verify the prophecy by comparing what it appears to suggest to do with abstract moral principles.

> MACBETH   (*aside*) Two truths are told
> As happy prologues to the swelling act
> Of the imperial theme. – I thank you, gentlemen –
> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
> Why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man, that function
> Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not.
>
> BANQUO   Look, how our partner's rapt.
>
> MACBETH   (*aside*) If chance will have me King, why chance may crown me
> Without my stir.
>
> BANQUO   New honours come upon him
> Like our strange garments cleave not to their mould
> But with the aid of use.
>
> MACBETH   (*aside*) Come what come may,
> Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.
>
> (1.3.128–148.)

The truthfulness of the prophecy only occurs to him to be a dilemma because it seems to contradict both categories in a binary opposition: good and evil. Therefore he requires the interpretation of meanings and circumstances to find out to which moral category the suggestion belongs.

As in the case of ordinary ambiguities, the prophecies demand to be interpreted because they seem to suggest ideas that contradict Macbeth's conception of ethics. The prophecies 'solicit' Macbeth for certain actions, and it seems that according to him an action must be either good or bad, without a third possibility. However, what

the Weird Sisters seem to suggest, in its most ordinary interpretation, appears to contradict both goodness and evilness, therefore the ensuing paradox needs to be resolved for Macbeth to be able to choose the right course of action. According to Cicero, only what is morally good can be expedient;[91] Macbeth follows a possible corollary of the same principle: if something is expedient, then it cannot be morally wrong. Since the two truths that the Weird Sisters told him have both been advantageous, they cannot be wrong; furthermore they were both *true*, and if they had been coming from evil sources then they should have misled him, therefore, again, they cannot be 'ill'. But the suggestion cannot be morally good either, since even thinking about the murder causes his body to protest: Macbeth's moral *nature* is rebelling against making himself king by murdering the present one. Since he cannot decide whether the 'soliciting' is good or evil he conditionally chooses to refrain from action:[92] if it is his fate to become king, it might happen without him doing anything (and thus he may remain safe and morally impeccable).[93]

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[91] As I discussed in Chapter 1, according to Cicero, every action must be morally right (*honestum*) and expedient to the state (*utilis*). The two mutually require each other: nothing can be morally right that is not therefore also expedient, and nothing can be expedient that is not right morally. Cf. *De officiis*, II. iii.9–10; III.xxx.110: 'When they argued also that what is highly expedient may prove to be morally right, they ought rather to say not that it "may prove to be" but that it actually is morally right. For nothing can be expedient which is not at the same time morally right; neither can a thing be morally right just because it is expedient, but it is expedient because it is morally right.' (M. Tullius Cicero, *De officiis*, trans. by Walter Miller, The Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1947))

[92] Géza Kállay, in his reading of the Dagger-monologue (2.1.34–65), points to a similar case in which Macbeth, again, chooses not to choose. Macbeth tries to make sense of his vision of the dagger – to determine its ontological status – but ends up cutting short his own questions that apostrophise the dagger. It is significant that in neither of these cases is the audience better placed to decide what is the correct interpretation of the phenomenon than Macbeth. (Géza Kállay, ' "Kép szemének, kín szívének": Macbeth tőre Wittgenstein Filozófiai vizsgálódásai előtt', p. 318.) My analysis of *Macbeth* is indebted throughout to this book-length study of the play (examining the epistemology of *Macbeth* from the point of view of Wittgenstein's and Stanley Cavell's philosophy), as well as to the conversations with Géza Kállay before and during his 'Macbeth line by line' course on which I was a teaching assistant.

[93] Inga-Stina Ewbank ('Shakespeare's Liars', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 69 (1984), 137–168, pp. 160–161) reads this monologue as Macbeth playing Iago to himself: 'he ends up as the victim of a lie. [...] He has been a willing victim. [...] his imagination is all too ready to supply what the 'imperfect speakers' have left unsaid. He is even his own Iago in adducing corroborative evidence. "This supernatural soliciting..."' This interpretation, however, seems to me to disregard the fact that at this point, Macbeth's decision is to follow his moral principles, rather than the apparent suggestion of the prophecy.

When the events seem to contradict Macbeth's first interpretation based on his moral principles (Duncan proclaims Malcolm as his heir), he chooses the other equally possible and valid understanding of the prophecy, although his speeches (and the monologue of the 'two truths') indicate his awareness of the immorality of his deeds.[94] It is partly the uncertainty about the truth-value of the prophecy that makes the play enigmatic, because there is no absolute truth revealed even to the audience about it: whether the Weird Sisters plant the murderous thoughts into Macbeth, whether they know Macbeth's pre-established fate which they reveal here, or whether they are the manifestations of Macbeth's murderous desires.[95] Therefore it is not the 'correct' interpretation of the first prophecies (as there is no certainty about that), but the choices Macbeth makes during the interpretation of the prophecy and afterwards that determine the moral structure of the play.

The prophecy addressed to Banquo presents a different problem. Although the fulfilment of this prophecy falls beyond the limits of the play, it would presumably still immediately strike the contemporary audience member as true, assuming s/he was aware of the Stuart genealogy.[96] Because of this knowledge, it serves as a warning sign to the audience that Macbeth first simply disregards this prophecy, just

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[94] Greenblatt, 'Introduction', p. 2557. According to Huntley (p. 397), Macbeth had entertained thoughts of murder anyway, thus he simply feels reassured by the spoken part of the prophecies. It is, however, only a conjecture based on the interpretation of the lines 'Give me your favour: my dull brain was wrought / With things forgotten' to refer to earlier murderous thoughts, and Lady Macbeth's reproach that Macbeth told her about his plans (1.7.47–54) to refer to a conversation *before* the action of the play. There is nothing else in the text to suggest this interpretation, and Huntley's first proof could be a simple lie to the lords to conceal the physical and therefore visible signs of his *newly acquired* thought of murder as one option, while Lady Macbeth can refer to an equally hypothetical discussion between Macbeth's arrival to the castle and the supper.

[95] Greenblatt, 'Introduction', pp. 2559–2560, Brooke, 'Introduction', p. 3.

[96] This kind of prophecy (*vaticinium ex eventu*), in which what is a historical fact for the members of the audience is presented as a future event for the fictional characters, enhances to a large extent the credibility of the prophets (and their prophecies) for the audience. Therefore, Macbeth cannot be read as a didactic warning against giving credit to witchcraft: the audience here is clearly asked to believe that the Weird Sisters can predict the truth, and that their knowledge is not entirely a fraud. According to Greenblatt, ('Shakespeare Bewitched', in *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, ed. by Susan Zimmerman, *New casebooks* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 109–139, p. 113), *Macbeth* is not a play to attack witchcraft in itself, because it appears that the same events could have taken place without the intervention of the Weird Sisters too. I would, however, contest this position: I believe that the appearance that the Weird Sisters reveal knowledge otherwise inaccessible to mortals is essential to Macbeth's belief in his own destiny as a vocation.

as Banquo himself disregards the ominous statement that he will not be as happy as Macbeth, and that he will definitely not be a king.

Macbeth, until the very end, believes that the prophecies reveal such true knowledge of the future that comes from beyond the human sphere. In line 131, he calls them 'supernatural soliciting';[97] to Banquo he says that his newly earned title has been *given* to him; and in his letter to Lady Macbeth he insists that 'they have more in them than mortal knowledge'. He decides to kill Banquo and Fleance because of his belief in the prophecy the Weird Sisters addressed to Banquo, and he never expresses any doubt about their truthfulness until the report about the approaching Birnam Wood.

Since Macbeth believes the prophecies, he has every reason to take them as his calling: not a possibility but a task that as a (tragic) hero, he has to live up to. In this case he is faced (and consequently he confronts the audience) with a moral dilemma similar to that of the Catholics who defended themselves or other members of their faith. Are deeds permissible that common human norms prohibit, in order to achieve what appears to be a higher good? Can Macbeth place himself above the human limits and disregard rules that ordinary humans abide by, in the belief that his permission to do so comes from superhuman powers?

It is apparent from Macbeth's soliloquies and arguments with Lady Macbeth that he is fully aware of the immorality of killing Duncan[98] (and later Banquo[99] or Macduff's family[100]), therefore it is crucially his choice that he will fulfil the prophecy notwithstanding that knowledge.[101] This choice is made with what appears

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[97] Although it is also possible that this simply means 'temptation' (Peter Mack's suggestion).

[98] Cf. Greenblatt, 'Introduction', p. 2557.

[99] Cf. the Banquet scene.

[100] 5.7.34–36: 'Of all men else I have avoided thee. / But get thee back, my soul is too much charged / With blood of thine already'.

[101] While Macbeth has some doubts about the course of action to be taken and whether even a supernatural soliciting can justify potentially immoral deeds, Lady Macbeth's interpretation of the prophecy, based on Macbeth's letter, reveals a more straightforward ethical structure in her thinking: for her the *belief* in the truthfulness of the prophecy turns it into an *instrument*, a 'metaphysical aid'

to be a genuine belief in being ordered by a superhuman power to achieve the end 'given' to him – to be the King of Scotland –, and that belief is the result of the Weird Sisters' doubtful prophecy.

The prophecy that the First Apparition gives to Macbeth, on the contrary, is plain and straightforward: 'Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth: beware Macduff, / Beware the Thane of Fife' (4.1.85–86). It warns Macbeth of Macduff, which Macbeth takes as a confirmation of his suspicion that Macduff will turn against him. The audience at this point knows that Macduff has in fact fled to England already, therefore the prophecy for them reaffirms the trustworthiness of the Weird Sisters, while at the same time it highlights the fact that Macbeth lacks the knowledge of what is past and what is present. This prophecy becomes deceptive when read together with the Second Apparition's:

SECOND APPARITION	Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth.
MACBETH	Had I three ears, I'd hear thee.
SECOND APPARITION	Be bloody, bold, and resolute: laugh to scorn The power of man; for none of woman born Shall harm Macbeth.[102]

(4.1.91–95.)

This is in seeming contradiction with the previous prophecy: if *no man* can harm Macbeth, then neither can Macduff. However, it is exactly the fact that the two prophecies appear to be contradictory that is misleading here. As it will turn out later, Macbeth's misunderstanding results from his attempt to resolve the contradiction by taking the more reassuring one as true and – without conviction – aiming to make sure the first does not come true, however unlikely it seems. In fact the two

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in achieving the *end* it suggested: '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' (1.5.24–29).

[102] Cf. *Twelfth Night*, 3.1.155–160: 'By innocence I swear, and by my youth, / I have one heart, one bosom and one truth, / And that no woman has, nor never none / Shall mistress be of it save I alone. / And so adieu, good madam; never more / Will I my master's tears to you deplore.' In both cases, what to the hearer appears to be a hyperbolical emphasis, is in fact a qualification that radically changes the meaning.

prophecies do not contradict each other, but are simultaneously true. But the Second Apparition's prophecy is deceptive on its own as well. It first evokes the discourse of manliness that permeates the whole play[103] to suggest a context in which the interpretation that Macbeth takes – that no living person can defeat Macbeth's strength – will seem incomparably more likely than the actual one – that only someone who was not born to the world by his mother can defeat him.[104] Huntley attempted to account for Macbeth's mistake by assuming a secretly reserved qualification in the prophecy,[105] but I would contend that the restriction to the meaning is indeed expressed in full, and Macbeth is *nevertheless* bound to disregard it, because without the knowledge of the circumstances of Macduff's birth, neither Macbeth nor the audience has any reason to take it for the qualification it later is revealed to be.

The Third Apparition once more reassures Macbeth that he does not need to be concerned about the issues that ordinary military commanders face (including conspiracy), that his position is safe; it is, as it were, protected by metaphysical agency:

THIRD APPARITION   Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care
                          Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are:
                          Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until
                          Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinan Hill
                          Shall come against him.

                                                              (4.1.105–109.)

The first part of the prophecy is again plain and true: there really are no conspirators (left) that Macbeth would have to be afraid of, and even if there were, they would not

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[103] Cf. Cleanth Brooks, 'The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness', in Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (London: Methuen, 1968), 17–39.

[104] In linguistic terms, the prophecy of the Second Apparition is ambiguous between 'of woman born' being a free adjunct or an obligatory complement of the phrase headed by 'none': Macbeth takes 'of woman born' to be a pleonastic confirmation of the meaning that 'none' already conveyed (that is, as an adjunct), whereas it will turn out to be a genuine qualification that restricts the scope of 'none' (that is, a complement).

[105] Cf. Huntley, p. 398: 'with proud recklessness he takes only that half of their true propositions which he hears: (1) No man born of woman can harm you, Macbeth [not counting a Caesarian section]; (2) You will not be vanquished till Birnam woods move to Dunsinane [omitting of course the exigencies of military camouflage].'

be able to harm him (unless they had been 'not of woman born'). The second part misleads by warning Macbeth about seemingly impossible dangers ('That will never be: / Who can impress the forest, bid the tree / Unfix his earth-bound root?', 4.1.109–111). Because of the impossibility of a moving forest, Macbeth interprets the clause introduced by 'until' to mean 'never', while it later turns out that 'until' is used in its most ordinary, literal sense: to indicate a time limit imposed on his reign. Apart from the context, the prophecy itself is also misleading because of the ambiguity of 'Birnam Wood': the sense in which it is true that it is 'coming' involves the metonymical sense (just as Dunsinane is a metonymy for Macbeth's reign, which he understands immediately), while Macbeth takes its literal meaning.

The apparition of the eight kings differs from the other three prophecies: it is purely visual and it does not mislead Macbeth, but directly responds to his question.[106] For Macbeth, the show of eight kings confirms his greatest concern that instead of his lineage, Banquo's will succeed to the throne. For the audience, by being the reaffirmation of the prophecy given to Banquo (it was put in doubt by Macbeth's successful murder of Banquo), it works as a confirmation that the Weird Sisters' prophecies may be deceptive in their suggestions, but they accurately predict the future.[107]

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[106] The other three prophecies were mainly verbal and partly visual, but Macbeth never reflected on that element (not even at the revelation of their respective truths). Therefore their visual layer seems to signify to the audience, rather than to Macbeth (although even for them, the relevance of the armed head and the bloody child would be far from clear). Scott (p. 172) is incredibly optimistic about the capabilities of human understanding: 'Yet they are not wholly tricks, for taken literally the words conflict with the companion prophecy about Macduff; there is this much of a verbal signal to interpret them warily. And the mixed propositions of verbal and visual do somewhat more to express the nature of the verbal equivocation: as various critics point out (*though it surely takes second-guessing to perceive it*) the bloody child hints at Macduff's caesarian birth and the crowned child holding the tree suggests the heir to the crown bearing a cut branch.' (Italics mine.) Unfortunately, he never explains why a bloody child would be a more adequate visual representation of someone born with C-section than in the natural way; or how much *second-guessing* it would take to figure out its significance from a member of the audience who is ignorant of the plot of the play.

[107] Interestingly, the prophecies in the second group, as opposed to the Jesuits' strategy, respond according to the questioner's primary intention (and not to a secondary one) in that they respond to the question he asks, and appear to tell the truth (if what happens in the end is regarded as the truth), although in a way that Macbeth is unlikely to understand.

It is a further remarkable feature of this scene that, as opposed to the introspective moral scrutinising between the first prophecies and the murder of Duncan, Macbeth does not seem to be concerned with ethics any more. Apart from his expression of remorse to Macduff for killing his family, he seems to be anxious only about losing the earthly benefits he gained through his deeds: his kingship, peaceful old age, friends, and the succession of his line.

3.4. 'come Fate into the list': Macbeth Against the Prophecies

Macbeth's recognition that he has been misled by the prophecies happens in several stages and is spread out over the whole fifth act.[108] His responses to the revelation of the meanings in which the prophecies are true are paradoxical throughout the play. He never stops believing that the prophecies are true in the sense that they predict a future that is already determined, and their account of it is accurate. At the same time, on a number of occasions he cries out against believing them and attempts to change the future he otherwise believes to be unchangeable. As he will recognise towards the end of the play, hearing the news of the approaching Birnam Wood, 'There is nor flying hence, nor tarrying here' (5.5.48); if he believes the prophecies then the movement of Birnam Wood indicates that his downfall is inevitable; if he does not believe them, then he cannot hope for the supernatural protection in which he trusted.

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[108] In 5.3.1–12 he is confident that both the Second and the Third Apparition's prophecies protect him; in 5.3.57–59 he repeats his interpretation of Birnam Wood, immediately followed by a scene in which Malcolm presents his battle tactic with the cut branches, forecasting the fulfilment of the prophecy to the audience. In 5.5.30–52 Macbeth receives the news of the approaching Birnam Wood and realises that the prophecy instead of protecting him, in fact predicted his downfall, and in the next scene (5.6.1–6), Malcolm orders his troops to drop the branches in a speech that uses the language of apocalypse, the overturning of pretence by the revelation of the true nature of things ('Now near enough: your leafy screens throw down, / And show like those you are', 5.6.1–2). Despite the unfavourable fulfilment of the prophecy about Birnam Wood, in 5.7.1–4 Macbeth still has faith in the protective force of the Second Apparition's words, which for a short time seems to be confirmed by his encounter with Young Siward (5.7.10–14). Finally, the meaning of the 'not of woman born' prophecy that Macbeth could not guess is revealed both for him and the audience when he meets Macduff (5.7.33–64).

Macbeth, already as a king, reflects on the prophecy given to Banquo for the first time, after their conversation.

> Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
> And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
> Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding; if't be so,
> For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind,
> For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
> Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
> Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
> Given to the common enemy of man,
> To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings.
> Rather than so, come Fate into the list,
> And champion me to th'utterance.
>
> (3.1.60–71.)

Up to this point, Macbeth had based his actions on the advantageous prophecies the Weird Sisters addressed to him. This is the first time that he considers that the prophecies given to Banquo link their fates together. The unhappy happiness promised to Banquo at the same time predicts the breaking of Macbeth's lineage. His response is paradoxical: while he still believes the prophecies to be accurate predictions of a pre-determined future, he decides to challenge 'fate' to a chivalric duel, hoping that he will be able to change it, that is, to cut Banquo's line of successors by killing both him and his son Fleance. When he sees the apparition of the eight kings whom Banquo signals to be his descendants, Macbeth curses the prophets and those that believe them ('Infected be the air whereon they ride, / And damned all those that trust them.' 4.1.153–154). If he himself were not one of those that 'trust them', then, of course, the curse would be meaningless.

When Macbeth learns about the approaching Birnam Wood, he expresses distrust in the truthfulness of the prophecies for the first time.

> I pull in resolution, and begin
> To doubt th'equivocation of the fiend
> That lies like truth. 'Fear not, till Birnam Wood
> Do come to Dunsinan', and now a wood
> Comes toward Dunsinan.
>
> (5.5.42–46.)

According to his interpretation of the situation, he had believed what the prophecies suggested, and acted in accordance with them, but they deceived him. His orders to prepare for the fight suggest that he believes that the prophecies were lying and there is a chance of defeating the approaching army; but if he no longer believes that the prophecies predicted his fate then why would he still have to 'pull in resolution', that is, be afraid of their fulfilment? (Or, if he knowingly decides that he will fight against his fate as his chivalric upbringing teaches him, then his actions are equally incongruous with his earlier ones.) This speech contains the last occurrence of 'equivocation' in Shakespeare. It is either the Weird Sisters or their prophecies that 'lie like truth': an enigmatic but not unprecedented expression (see Sir Edward Coke's speech on Garnet's trial)[109] which grasps the paradox that what the Weird Sisters' words seem to mean is false, while what they did not seem to mean is in fact true. Just like the Jesuit's equivocation, the Weird Sisters' words do not simply lie: the sense in which they are true is concealed by another sense which seems incomparably more obvious according to common understanding, and according to what the context suggests. There does not seem to be any reason to think that 'equivocation' is used to mean mental reservation: there is no reference to secret meaning (Birnam Wood turns out to be an ordinary metonymy), while misleading with ambiguity and double dealing have been among the meanings of the word that occur in the earlier plays, as well as in sixteenth century dialectical discourse.

Macbeth reacts in a similar manner to the revelation of the circumstances of Macduff's birth:

> Accursèd be that tongue that tells me so,
> For it hath cowed my better part of man;
> And be these juggling fiends no more believed
> That palter with us in a double sense,
> That keep the word of promise to our ear
> And break it to our hope. I'll not fight with thee.

(5.7.47–52.)

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[109] 'Such have been the iniquitie of false tongues, who have always sought to proove the trueth a liar'. [Anon], *A true and perfect relation*, sig. Y2ᵛ

He cries out against believing the Weird Sisters, while he still believes that what they prophesied is true. He recognises that their prophecies were deceptive not by simple lying, but by being true in one sense (on the surface: to the ear, the counterpart of the mouth) and false in the other (the intention: to the hope, the counterpart of the heart). In his last lines, Macbeth is finally clearly aware of his paradoxical behaviour:

> Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinan,
> And thou opposed, being of no woman born,
> Yet I will try the last. Before my body
> I throw my warlike shield: Lay on Macduff,
> And damn'd be him that first cries 'Hold, enough!'
>
> (5.7.60–64.)

He believes the prophecy and even as he decides to defy it, he reaffirms the same belief in a similar manner to his earlier decision (3.1.70–71) to act against the first group of prophecies.

The Weird Sisters' prophecies employ both linguistic ambiguity and misleading (or incomplete)[110] contextual information to the effect that they successfully deceive Macbeth. The prophecies, because the interpretation of the various parts seems consistent and appears to be confirmed by the truths that emerge in the course of the action, put Macbeth into a false feeling of security.[111] In the context of the practices attributed to the Catholics, the fact that Macbeth is deceived by the prophecies, even as he deceives Duncan and the Scottish court, can be read as the figuration of the anxiety about deception through language that the English authorities experienced and disseminated, and that resulted in a desire to control language, and within language, meanings:

> But if amphibology seduces the traitor, it also presents authority with a considerable dilemma, and with it we move into a linguistic sphere the law

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[110] Cf. 'imperfect speakers' (1.3.70) as opposed to Macbeth's letter: 'I have learned by the perfectest report' (1.5.2).

[111] This is the uncontrollable deception that Mullaney calls treason's amphibology: 'What Shakespeare gives us is not treason's lie – something the court might well have expected, something it could regulate, define, control, and perhaps anticipate – but treason's amphibology. Not Garnet's equivocation, but an equivocation that lies like truth' (p. 123).

cannot control. […] [I]f we find in the Renaissance an increasing awareness and deployment of the power of language – power in a real sense, as a weapon for conquest and control – we also find in it a charting of the boundaries of rule, beyond which authority can only watch and listen to treason's amphibolic spectacle.[112]

As I attempted to demonstrate in my earlier chapters, ambiguous language usage is rarely detectable, and even when it is, it is only the fact that it is ambiguous that is detected, while the desired 'correct' meaning will usually remain hidden as long as the speaker refuses to give it out. Therefore, as Mullaney points out, equivocation has put the authorities into constant and justified anxiety, since it is never controllable: 'Although theologically sound, puns and amphibologies would be of dubious value if control of a situation was paramount. As our tales of treason suggest, amphibology resists control.'[113]

The play demonstrates that ambiguous language is not controllable by anyone. In analysing *Macbeth*, it is not enough to designate one meaning as the correct one, because none of the meanings can be regarded as absolutely and uniquely correct. Scenes in which ambiguous speeches are misunderstood are dramatic exactly because the contending meanings are simultaneously available (and in a sense true) to different characters. The effort to pin down the 'correct' meanings in the play, and to argue that that is the meaning that Macbeth *failed* to understand or that he *should have* understood, is reminiscent of the anxiety and hope that the authorities experienced when they understood the doctrine of equivocation. It betrays a yearning that if Macbeth had seen through the Weird Sisters' deceitful ambiguities, then he could have somehow been saved.

However, *Macbeth* exemplifies a more pessimistic view of the limitations of human understanding. The hearer of equivocal/ambiguous sentences can never discover for certain the intended meaning because s/he lacks the necessary point of

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[112] Mullaney, p. 121.
[113] Mullaney, p. 123.

reference: even if s/he discovers the ambiguity itself, it only gives him/her a minimum of two equally plausible choices. The tragic recognition intimated by the play is that Macbeth could never have guessed how, for instance, the bloody child modifies the meaning of 'none of woman born', therefore even if he had not failed to observe the basic moral principles, he would have been doomed once his fate had been revealed to him.

4. Conclusion: Equivocation *Will* Undo Us

Macbeth, as a tragic hero, was bound to misunderstand the prophecies.[114] If we examine the prophecies in the narrower context of the Gunpowder Plot and the debate about Jesuitical equivocation, it becomes clear that even though the prophecies appear to the audience as if they had offered a choice to Macbeth, they in fact do not do so, at least not any more than any lie does. They are tailored specifically to his understanding, and they are formulated with the view of misleading him.

It has been suggested that the Weird Sisters deceive Macbeth by using mental reservation in their prophecies. But prophecy is an inherently and impenetrably deceptive language usage, which would make the Weird Sisters exclusively responsible morally. The distinction between verbal ambiguity and equivocation is only valid in an argument which supposes that Shakespeare was making an ethical statement from a clear moral standpoint about traitors who equivocate when they face authority. In relation to the prophecies, however, Macbeth would have to be identified with King James, as he would be the one who is deceived, and not the one who deceives.

Huntley's examples,[115] moreover, defeat his own point: the distinction between 'mere amphibology' and 'Jesuitical equivocation' is futile when the inquiry is directed at the hearer's (in this case Macbeth's) understanding of the propositions. Supposing a distinction between 'ambiguity' and 'equivocation' requires the implicit

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[114] Prophecies are almost invariably disregarded (e.g. Creon in Sophocles's *Antigone* or Leontes in *A Winter's Tale*) or more often misunderstood by protagonists. Servius's *Commentary*, for instance, relates misunderstood prophecies to ambiguity in connection with Anchises's recognition at its fulfilment that he mistook (and of course disregarded) Cassandra's prophecy about their new homeland. Renaissance textbooks (in connection, for example, with the figure of Croesus), often make the same link between prophecy and mistaken action, even to the point of customarily associating it with the disruption of social order. Cf. Chapter 1.

[115] Apart from the fact that they are arbitrary, because nothing in the texts suggests the presence of a reserved qualification.

acceptance of the Protestant position of the debate. While this is almost inevitable from the perspective of present day moral precepts about language usage, it may not be the best way of understanding the tragic structure of a play like *Macbeth*. It was recognised in the Renaissance that intentionally employed ambiguity, from the point of view of its immediate hearer, will always be deceptive, regardless of whether it is verbally ambiguous, or contains a mentally reserved qualification that provides context for a further interpretation of a seemingly unambiguous proposition. As the biblical examples analysed by Morton and Persons suggest, practically any ambiguous sentence can be argued to contain a mentally reserved qualification and vice versa: it is only a matter of how we analyse it, of how much we rely on contextual information in interpreting the text. The real difficulty is to know when some special context has to be taken into consideration instead of the most obvious, 'generally accepted' meaning. If ambiguity and equivocation had been intrinsically different, there would be hope for controlling other speakers' meanings/intentions. The doubt about the possibility of such control seems to be more deeply ingrained into *Macbeth* than the discourse about mental reservation could sufficiently explain.

If it is impossible to control the ambiguous speech of the prophecies, then those readings which see a moral fault in Macbeth's misunderstandings are also intrinsically flawed, because they are the product of a hindsight that is available only to the spectator, but never to the tragic hero facing the prophecy. The fact that the Weird Sisters use ambiguous speech, more than the mere fact that they are presumably witches, puts them among the demonic powers that conspire for Macbeth's downfall. Nevertheless, this deception, inherent in the language and nature of the prophecies, does not make Macbeth's actions morally justified. While Macbeth is undoubtedly misled by the prophecies, he at the same time temporarily disregards the unfavourable parts (or parts that do not fit his pre-set mind), and then attempts to change them, even though he never ceases to believe that the Weird

Sisters predicted an already determined future based on their 'more [...] than mortal knowledge' (1.5.2–3).

Macbeth sins, violates the laws of both the human and the transcendent sphere. His belief in the truth of the prophecies offers him two choices. Macbeth chooses to transgress human morality, fully knowing that his actions are immoral, and therefore he is entirely responsible for the murders he commits from the human point of view. But, perhaps more importantly, Macbeth also transgresses the boundaries set for him by the metaphysical powers: he equally consciously decides to act against the prophecies and attempts to murder Fleance and fight with Macduff. While killing Duncan is Macbeth's first sin from the human perspective, the attempt to change the predicted future (his attempt to kill Banquo and Fleance) is what provokes the reaction of the metaphysical universe of the play. Macbeth is in total control of the events after murdering Duncan, while control seems to fall out of his hands when he fails to have Fleance killed. Banquo's ghost appears to Macbeth to ruin his inaugural banquet (also threatening to reveal his secrets), while Duncan's ghost never does. Finally, it seems that of all the people whose murder Macbeth planned, he only fails with Fleance and Macduff, the ones, as it were, protected by the Weird Sisters' prophecy.

Prophecies in literature, once all their potential meanings are revealed, appear to the reader/audience much like equivocation as theorised by the Catholics. They offer a choice between two meanings to the addressee, one of which is ethically (or epistemologically) right, the other is wrong. It is, consequently, the responsibility of the addressee to find the right one and to act according to it; and it is his/her fault if s/he fails. Tragic and comic heroes whose future is predicted in prophecies, or who need to take action based on their interpretation of equivocal speeches, in most cases fail to choose the meaning of the speaker. From their point of view, prophecies work according to the Protestant model of equivocation: oracles offer a seemingly

unambiguous and self-contained response to their question, a piece of advice on how they should act. But in fact, the response conceals another potential meaning. To discover it, and be able to choose responsibly, they would have to know something that only the speaker (and sometimes the reader/audience) knows. Prophecies are constructed with reference to the way the hearer will understand them, and therefore are designed to mislead, which they almost invariably do. Thus, the choice between the right and wrong interpretation is a disturbing illusion of the external viewer, the reader or the audience of a book or a play: there appears to be a choice to make, which is relatively obvious with this quasi-divine knowledge. As opposed to that, the tragic or comic hero exhibits the limitations of human understanding which is bound to fail to recognise that there is a choice at all (or to misunderstand what the choices are). Watching the hero faced with equivocation that is employed to manipulate him, the members of the audience can observe how they could at any time face a similar choice, which they would be just as likely to fail to recognise, or even if they recognised it, they would not be able to pick the right option.
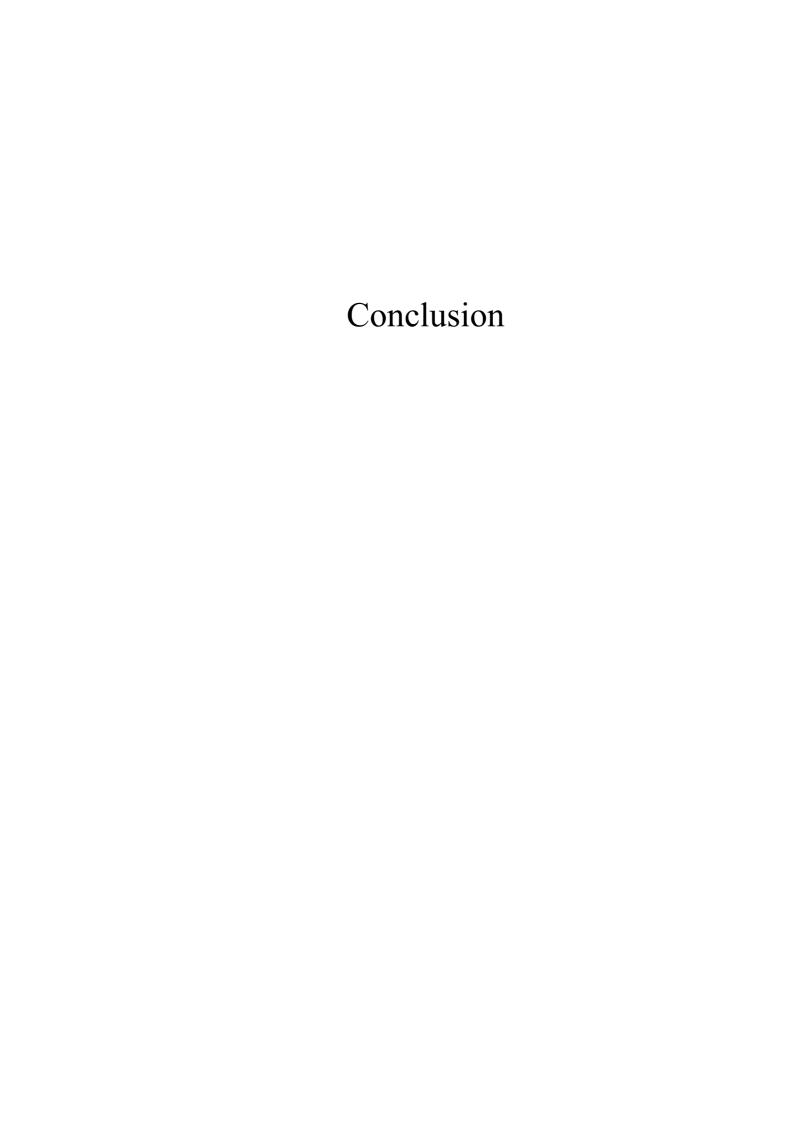
The Weird Sisters are the medium through which metaphysical knowledge enters the physical world, the world of men. The transmission of superhuman knowledge, however, is often problematic. The fact that Macbeth misunderstands the prophecies shows his human limitations: although as a hero he has an enhanced understanding of higher knowledge, not even he can have full understanding of metaphysical truth (or in this case, the future). While the audience can experience a fuller knowledge than Macbeth, they also realise that the ordinary human being would understand even less than Macbeth does. Duncan is often regarded as a weak king because he falls into the same trap twice, a trap which he seemed to recognise at the beginning of the play:

> There's no art
> To find the mind's construction in the face;
> He was a gentleman on whom I built
> An absolute trust.

<div align="right">(1.4.11–14.)</div>

But if this credulity marks Duncan as a bad king, then Macbeth is no better. While Duncan believes what he sees, and knows he cannot penetrate the heart just by looking at the face, Macbeth believes what he hears, and realises only at the end that one outward meaning of the words can conceal a number of inward meanings of the heart. In this respect, the play explores the limitations of human knowledge. Gregory the Great's interpretation of Job's words that entered the discourse of equivocation with its reading through Gratian's *Decretum* by Navarrus is not only a warning about how speeches have to be formulated, but also a reminder of the gap, or indeed chasm, between the capabilities of divine and human understanding: 'The ears of men judge our words as they sound outwardly; the judgment of God, however, hears them as they are brought forth inwardly. Among people the heart is weighed through the words, but in front of God, the words are weighed through the heart.'[116] No matter how much we would like to believe that we can ever see right into the other's mind, we will never, without doubt, get beyond the face.

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[116] 'Humanae aures verba nostra talia iudicant qualia foris sonant; divina vero iudicia talia ea audiunt qualia ex intimis proferuntur.' *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob*, Cura et studio Marci Adriaen, Libri 23–35, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 143B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), p. 1276 (XXIII.x.15). My translation.

Conclusion

Did Jesus lie when he said 'De die autem illo vel hora nemo scit, neque angeli in caelo, neque Filius, nisi Pater'?[1] Did he use an ambiguous phrase to convey a message to those who have the knowledge to establish the context and understand him, while concealing the same information from those who have no right to know it? Or was the context, instead, given in a qualification which he uttered only within himself? The mere fact that these questions are asked again and again in the polemic over equivocation reveals a central problem of the discourse: no one answer, satisfying every aspect, can be given, because the response changes with the position (God's, the speaker's, the hearer's) that we take. The only way to answer such questions is to choose one of these three possible positions as the point of reference from which to examine the sentence's truthfulness. The Catholics and Protestants of the controversy, as well as critics of *Macbeth*, disregard this, therefore while they equate their position with that of the hearer of the speeches, they in fact possess exactly the piece of contextual information (the reserved qualification, as it were) which no hearer had access to (and therefore the information s/he had was insufficient to make sound judgement).

The equivocator in the imaginary hell of the Porter in *Macbeth* is a despicable figure. He commits treason 'enough for God's sake', and equivocation, as Macbeth understands much later in the play, 'lies like truth'.[2] This figure of the equivocator,

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[1] Mark, 13. 32. 'But of that day or houre no man knoweth, neither the Angels in heauen, nor the Sonne, but the Father.' (*The Holy Bible (Douay-Rheims Bible): Volume 1 of Holy Bible Faithfvlly Translated Into English: Ovt of the Authentical Latin, Diligently Conferred with the Hebrew, Greek, and Other Editions in Diuers Languages* (Iohn Cousturier, 1635), in Google Books <books.google.com>, [accessed 10 November 2012]); 'But of that day and tyme knoweth no man: no not the Angels which are in heauen, neither the sonne him selfe, saue the father only' (*The Holie Bible (The Bishops' Bible)*, STC (2nd ed.) / 2099.2, (London: Richard Iugge, 1568), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 10 November 2012]).

[2] Cf. Hamlet's poem to Ophelia: 'Doubt thou the stars are fire, / Doubt that the sun doth move, / Doubt truth to be a liar, / But never doubt I love.' (*Hamlet: The Text of Q2*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Cengage Learning, 2006), 2.2.114–8).

however, was not born in *Macbeth*, and not even during the trials of Henry Garnet or the ensuing religious controversy. The figure had been forming for a while, and his attributes include further sins, such as pouring 'the sweet milk of concord into hell', as Malcolm puts it in his mock self-accusation.

This occasionally sensationalist imagery that aims at making the horrendousness of the Catholics' crimes palpable, can be seen in the making from Renaissance interpretations of classical rhetoric and dialectic to Donne's *Ignatius*. The tropes drawn on to formulate an unfavourable public opinion about equivocation and those who use it (the equivocators), are often highly abusive, and some of the metaphors recur in a number of works, forming a language of characterising and deploring equivocation. Thus, ideas associated with equivocation or the usage of ambiguity in public speech that are taken for granted in present-day discourse, are definitely already present in the late sixteenth century. However, what is taken for granted today (and what seems to me to produce a bias in analyses of Renaissance literature), was not yet obvious: in fact, it is exactly at this point of time when the view (more-or-less shared today) that speaking ambiguously is not simply a matter of faulty language usage, but the sign of immorality, developed.

The imagery perhaps most commonly associated with the discourse about equivocation characterises it in terms of a dichotomy between the heart and the tongue, what is intended in the mind and what is expressed with the mouth.[3] An unnatural separation of what is meant and what is said had been a commonplace for lying and treacherous speech in general, but it has special relevance to the problem of

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[3] Cf. Matthew 12. 34: 'You vipers broodes, how can you speake good things, whereas you are euil? for of the aboundance of the hart the mouth speaketh' (*Douai-Rheims Bible*). 'O generation of vipers, howe can ye speake good thynges, when ye your selues are euyll? For out of the aboundauce of the heart, the mouth speaketh' (*Bishops' Bible*). Luke 6. 45: 'The good man of the good treasure of his hart bringeth forth good: and the euil man of the il treasure bringeth forth euil. for of the aboundance of the hart the mouth speaketh.' (*Douai-Rheims Bible*). 'A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth foorth that which is good: And an euyll man, out of the euyll treasure of his heart, bryngeth foorth that which is euyll. For of the aboundaunce of the heart, his mouth speaketh' (*Bishops' Bible*).

ambiguity because of the new associations that emerge in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

In Euripides' eponymous play Hippolytos makes an important distinction which will be quoted over and over again throughout the discourse about equivocation: 'My tongue swore, but my mind is not on oath.'[4] This line apparently became notorious in its own time already. Aristophanes parodies it three times (*Thesmophoriazusae*, l. 275, *Frogs*, l. 101, l. 1471), suggesting that Euripides was contemptuous about conventional morality, and Aristotle mentions a lawsuit against Euripides in which the line was quoted as a proof against him.[5] In the play, Hippolytos makes this claim in an argument with Phaidra's servant, who after making him swear not to expose to anybody what she was going to tell him, reveals the stepmother's love for the stepson. Interestingly, although Hippolytos makes this statement in the heat of the debate, he never actually discloses his knowledge to anyone.

In the *De officiis*, his book on moral obligations, Cicero uses this line to demonstrate the difference between justifiably and unjustifiably broken oaths. 'For swearing to what is false is not necessarily perjury, but to take an oath "upon your conscience," as it is expressed in our legal formulas, and then fail to perform it, that is perjury. For Euripides aptly says: "My tongue has sworn; the mind I have has sworn no oath".'[6] Oaths can be sworn on lawful and unlawful promises. If, for instance, an oath is sworn to pirates (with whom any kind of legal contract is by definition unlawful), then the swearer has no obligation to fulfil his oath, whereas if the oath is sworn with the knowledge that carrying it out is lawful, then it is obligatory to fulfil it, even if it is disadvantageous to the swearer. Thus, Cicero finds

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[4] Euripides, *Hippolytos*, in *Children of Heracles*, *Hippolytus*, *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, ed. and trans. by David Kovacs, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1995), l. 612. I am grateful to Géza Kállay for calling my attention to the central role this line plays throughout the whole debate.

[5] See commentary to line 612 in Euripides, *Hippolytos*, edited with Introduction and commentary by W. S. Barrett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[6] Cicero, *De officiis*, III. xxix. 108. (Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De officiis*, trans. by Walter Miller (London: William Heinemann, 1947))

it conceivable, and in certain cases even morally justifiable, to have two messages: one that the speaker intends, and one that the speaker says. George Abbot quotes the same line with Cicero's translation in *De mendacio*, to argue that when Catholics use it to justify swearing falsely, they in fact justify committing double perjury, because not only does such a person take the Lord's name in vain, but he is also guilty of deceit, misleading the credulous and causing misery to all.[7] Persons refers to the passage in Cicero, arguing that in certain cases it is lawful not to keep promises, even if they are confirmed with an oath. In his interpretation, Cicero quotes Euripides' line as a justification of the principle that it is the speaker's understanding that is binding in an oath, not the hearer's. Therefore, it is not perjury to say one thing, and mean something else, 'when any violence or force is vsed'. In *The encounter...* Morton accuses Persons of insincerity on this point, for intentionally leaving out parts of Cicero's text, and misrepresenting others: 'Yea, *M. Parsons?* can you play the gelder so openly, to cut off the words which follow and are of so great importance?'[8] Persons fails to quote Cicero's important condition that swearing to do something without the actual intention of doing it is justified only if the person to whom the oath is given is an unlawful enemy, a pirate for example.[9] Furthermore, Cicero only says it is not perjury to swear in this way, he calls the speech itself false:

> This is soone said by you of Cicero, and may as easily be confuted out of Cicero, who held that the oath, which he spake of, is false, and also that notwithstanding the falsitie thereof, it was lawfull to vse it against theeues, who are lawlessemen: which piece of Philosophie our Christianitie did neuer allow.[10]

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[7] Abbot, *De mendacio*, sig. H2^v–H3^r (in *Quaestiones sex*, STC (2nd ed.) / 36 (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1598).

[8] Morton, *The encounter*, STC (2nd ed.) / 18183 (London: [W. Stansby at Eliot's Court Press] for Iohn Bill, 1610), in *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/>, [accessed 28 January, 2011], sig. Hh1^r–Hh1^v.

[9] Morton, *The encounter*, sig. Hh1^v: 'This verifieth my former exposition, concerning the outward Court of man, supposing that the meaning of Cicero is, that seeing Theeues and Robbers are outlawes, the oath which shall not be kept with them can not be periury, and so censured by any law of man: for when there is no *Ius*, which is to be violated, there can be no periurium. And in all this there is no note of our Equiuocators mixt clause of Reseruation'.

[10] Morton, *The encounter*, sig. Hh2^r.

Even if it is not perjury to swear falsely, in Christian doctrine it is still a lie to say something that is not true according to the speaker's knowledge. The fact that human laws do not punish such misleading oaths does not make them justified to the divine audience: 'If he say yea, then is not that true which they sweare, and consequently (howsoeuer it stand in the outward court of man) it being *false*, it must be in it selfe, and in the inward court of our conscience a flat *periury*.'[11] The spatial opposition of the internal and external is thus applied in yet another way to suggest moral judgement of human actions.

Finally, Persons's interpretation of Euripides' line – that because by quoting it, Cicero affirms that such oaths do not constitute a fraud or perjury, therefore mental reservation is also acceptable – is an 'absurd collection'. What is on the tongue ('I will giue thee this') directly contradicts what is in the mind ('I will not giue thee this'), therefore it perfectly fulfils the Augustinian definition of the lie: 'Mentiri est contra mentem ire'. If Persons insists on using Euripides' line as a justification of mental reservation, then he has to confront the fact that by accepting the analogy, he more or less admits that mental reservation is lying.[12]

The doctrine of equivocation produces, or rather reveals, irresolvable problems in forming, conveying, or concealing meanings. By allowing for the possibility of a concealed restriction on the meaning, the advocates of the doctrine suggest that no sentence is intrinsically unambiguous, and that there is always a possibility that circumstances exist that are unknown to the hearer, some of which may change the meaning of the statement substantially. Since the hearer is either aware or not of these circumstances, every utterance will be potentially ambiguous from the perspective of the hearer, while remaining unambiguous for the speaker,[13] and in

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[11] Morton, *The encounter*, sig. Hh2ᵛ.

[12] Morton, *The encounter*, sig. Hh2ᵛ–Hh3ʳ.

[13] Or another hearer who happens to know the concealed circumstance, like Christ's disciples as opposed to the Jews who misunderstand him. For example, if a Catholic priest is interrogated in

those cases in which the speech contains mental reservation, the interpretation that
conforms to reality does not agree with what is uttered. Therefore, the hearer will
either misconceive the speech (if he takes it unambiguously in its apparent meaning),
or conceive it as ambiguous, but lack the essential information to select the speaker's
meaning. Consequently, even if the hearer is not misled (because he is aware of the
potential restriction), it is as if no reply had been given to his question,[14] because for
him the speech either means what it seems to mean,[15] or something completely
different which he may not even be able to guess.[16] The hearer can never ascertain
whether there is a mental reservation, and if there is, what it is. If Christ's words are
taken to be verbally ambiguous, as Morton argues they should be, then the result is in
fact not very different from when they are taken to contain mental reservation, only
the hearer is in a different position. The reader of the Bible, or the disciples who,
according to Morton, conceived Jesus's speeches correctly (according to his
meaning, as it conforms to reality), believe that they are aware of a relevant
circumstance, his divinity (which is parallel with the mentally reserved qualification
in the case of the examined Catholic) that renders a potentially ambiguous speech
unambiguous: they are not in the position of the Protestant examiner of the Catholic
priest, but in the position of someone with a detailed contextual knowledge (like
God's). Therefore, if a proposition with mental reservation is a lie because it
deceives those members of its audience that are unaware of certain circumstances,
then Christ's speeches are also lies: he did not formulate his sentence to accord with
the frame of mind of those who asked the question but with his own, God's and those

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front of other Catholics, they will know that his reply 'I am not a priest' has to be taken with some
reserved meaning. It is interesting from this point when Allen and Persons in one of the cases limit
the usage of mental reservation to cases where it will not mislead other Catholics into thinking that
the priest was lying, and either cause scandal or set an unwanted example for unlawful practice.

[14] Cf. Sir Edward Coke's argument that it does not make sense to interrogate Jesuits, because they can
avoid revealing what they know with the help of equivocation.

[15] Cf. 'I am no priest <as bound to tell you>', in which case the uttered response creates exactly the
opposite impression of what is true.

[16] Cf. 'I am going to that house for dinner', in which case the secondary intention (dinner) is confessed
instead of the primary (to celebrate Mass).

who 'knew' him. Thus, he is parallel to the Jesuit or a deceitful character like Pyrocles/Zelmane, Viola/Cesario or, in certain cases, Macbeth.

The idea that the hearer can 'misconceive' speeches presupposes that there is one unambiguous truth to which a statement can conform. This model works with simple examples like the ones discussed in the pamphlets, but it becomes a more complicated issue in cases where it is not obvious what 'conforms to reality'. Could one say that Orsino misconceives Viola's description of her love when he grasps the emotion, even though he mistakes its object? Is it possible to say that Macbeth misconceives the Weird Sisters' prophecies when neither he, nor the audience can be sure in which of the many possible significations the Weird Sisters meant their words or where their knowledge comes from? After all, was Macduff born of woman?

Literature provides innumerable examples for such misconceived speeches, most often, perhaps, in the cases of prophecies that are almost always misunderstood (or sometimes simply disregarded by their addressees). Given the long-standing literary tradition of maliciously or benevolently deceitful prophecies, this is another reason why interpreting *Macbeth* merely in the context of Jesuitical equivocation misses the more fundamental point. It would, perhaps, be more accurate to view it the other way round: that in the debate about Jesuitical equivocation at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a trope was recognised and made part of reflection and discourse that previously was only available in the form of art.

Equivocation obliterates the fixed frame of reference essential for interpretation without the interpreter even noticing it, or with the interpreter only noticing it when the deceit has worked and the consequences are already irrevocable. Equivocation can only ever be recognised once it is already too late, when the piece of information that had been kept from the hearer is finally revealed. This recognition comes too late, because the disadvantageous event or action that the speaker aimed to conceal from the hearer has already taken place: the hiding Catholic subject – completing his

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oath with a mentally reserved qualification like 'if the Pope so wishes' – attempted an assault, and Macbeth faces the only man that has the power to kill him, because, in a sense, he was not given birth by his mother.

In the undecipherable prophecies of the Weird Sisters and the Delphic Oracle there seems to be lurking the vain human desire to know the future, to be spared from making choices in the belief that fate will take care of everything. The age-old anxiety seems to be there too that such metaphysical knowledge cannot be transferred to the physical world without tragic consequences, as well as the dread that there would be nothing to do against what is revealed even if what it predicts is undesirable. Macbeth and Basilius choose not to wait until their fate is fulfilled, moreover, they attempt to change the details that do not please them. And the dread of the knowledge of one's future – at the same time desired – does not seem to be unjustified: Basilius reawakens from his seeming death when his future sons-in-law at his bier 'as at a bar, (...) plead', Macbeth succeeds in murdering neither Fleance nor Macduff, and thus the Weird Sisters' prophecies are fulfilled.

> And be these juggling fiends no more believed
> That palter with us in a double sense,
> That keep the word of promise to our ear
> And break it to our hope. I'll not fight with thee.
>
> (5.7.49–52.[17])

– he warns the audience, representatives of the limited mankind whom his words can perhaps still reach and save.

In the controversy, ambiguous speech is described in terms of a discrepancy between what is said with the tongue or mouth (or what is seen in the face, cf. Duncan), and what is in the heart or mind of the speaker. Such imagery suggests a dichotomy between what is without and what is within, what is directly accessible with the senses and what needs to be reconstructed from indirect evidence. What is within is concealed and thus invisible for the perceiver, even though, as Catholics

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[17] *Macbeth* is quoted according to the following edition: William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by Nicholas Brooke, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

and Protestants agree, that is the primary meaning. The internal meaning, except for God, will always remain accessible only through the external meaning; and if the external meaning is itself ambiguous, then the interpreter has almost no way of telling which is the meaning that the speaker intended, until it somehow reveals itself by an incident which, albeit too late, provides the missing information.

Disguise and lying (uttering a plain falsehood) can achieve the same effect, but ambiguity and equivocation do it in a way in which what is said out loud will in all likelihood seem as a true and sufficient response, whereas it is true only in a different sense, the sense in which the speaker intends it, and to which the hearer has no access, because the spoken words that should represent the inner words, are in fact there to veil them, and to mislead the hearer. Ambiguity is dangerous because logic alone is not enough to resolve it.

Sidney's *Arcadia* displays a still sustained belief in real, fixed identities and meanings that, however well disguised or veiled, can always be reconstructed through the careful examination of the congruities and incongruities of the external signs, with the appropriate usage of reason. At the same time, the constant failure of characters to succeed in such examinations (of disguised identities, dissimulated intentions, ambiguous prophecies) exposes that belief as untenable, or only tenable with the consideration of the limitations of human understanding. The more common experience (and the more unsettling one) is to fall for deceit that works by using something familiar and reassuringly trustworthy-looking (a priest's robe, the host's behaviour, a hyperbolically commonplace expression) to conceal the unexpected, dangerous fraud. Duncan and Macbeth, as is the common experience, are likely to fall in the trap set by the ordinary appearance, the fair show that the Thanes of Cawdor put on, or the Weird Sisters' ambiguities.

The members of the audience who observe Macbeth's fate unfolding are in a good position, because they know well before Macbeth that seemingly unambiguous

prophecies always conceal unuttered treason. Their position is like that of God listening to the equivocating Jesuit, because they know that it is the fate of tragic heroes to misunderstand the seemingly straightforward and unmistakable prophecy that relates to their future. What the members of Macbeth's first audience presumably also had to consider is what to do with their other recently gained knowledge, the knowledge that the imperceptibly mistakable speech is not only the figment of the author's imagination, or the metaphorical expression of a deeply rooted anxiety, but a literal possibility. Not only the stock in trade of witches, nor only the tragic hero's dilemma, but just as much their own.

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