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Theatre and theory: modern conventions of ideology

Chapter 2

Theatre and Theory
Modern Conventions of Ideology

[*Prologue.*]   If ye mean
To know the Play well, travell with the Scene.

(*Love's Pilgrimage* Prologue 13–14)

The Maid's Tragedy is a play for the stage. This is obvious, but is often in danger of being forgotten. It is only in the theatre that its power can be fully appreciated.

(Craik 1988: 26)

This chapter treats the sensitive relationship between the theatre and words *about* the theatre. In the history of Western thought, concepts, words, and ideas which they represent, have run wild on an autonomous, almost nominalist course, living their own, virtual lives. This is a deep-seated, conventional habit of thinking, which produces elegant and fascinating critical writing on the one hand, but on the other, communicates practically very little, and besides inhibits the *relevant* communication. Concepts, such as *art*, *theatre*, *artist*, *writer* or *author*, *text* and its *message*—to name the central obstacles—have become both instruments of approach to, and confines on, the knowledge of the real nature of drama and the theatre.

The theatre can be both conceptual and non-conceptual. By its nature it has potential for both. Human interaction, which is in a sense the material of the theatre (Zich 1931: 46), is primarily non-conceptual; it leaves the stuff that theatre is made on more or less unpronounced. Yet—as is the nature of definitions—the naming arguably has a certain restrictive effect on what the theatre is. A related perspective on the theatre—only 'a step further', as it were—the notion of the theatre as 'a communication of communication by means of communication' (Osolsobě 1970)—gives a much more pronounced, and therefore restrictive, conception.[1] Although the reference is the same, the definition conceptualizes the elementary situation (an audience at a play), and approaches it from the outside. In many respects, such conceptualization is rather 'unlucky'—if not misleading—for the purpose of taking the theatre *as it is*.

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1   Osolsobě admits the restrictiveness of his intentionally slogan-like definition; he calls it a 'useful hypothesis […] to work with' (Osolsobě 1974: 71). However, he takes the replacement of human interaction by human communication (and considering the theatre as a form of communication) for an *inductive* interference.

From the point of view of traditional criticism, there is nothing wrong with the above definitions. However, the stance of the 'namer', the 'definer' (the creator of the concept) is impossible; it is located *outside* the theatre, and cannot be involved in the actual 'communication'. The spectator, on the other hand, is always involved. Apart from that, communication, present in the latter definition, presupposes certain information or an idea that is communicated. Much of the attractiveness of the theatre rests on the fact that it escapes words; it cannot be easily transformed into sentences, and no words can embrace its meaning, although much criticism presupposes the opposite. Of course, there is modern theatre, the theatre of ideas, problems and doctrines. But that is another matter. The aim of this study is to point out the acquired ways of thinking which go against the early modern theatrical *practice*, namely the modern *hermetic* conception of language (language as an autonomous 'world out there'), and the related nominalist habit of giving concepts a being of their own, particularly in the arts.

My methodological approach is paradoxical from the point of view of language. By means of words I want to express the inadequacy of words to capture the dynamic nature of the theatre. By syllogisms I lay evidence for the shortcomings of logic. However self-contradictory this may seem, let me invoke a precedent in Kurt Gödel's Theorem (simplified *ad hoc*): Everything within a complex logical system is either inconsistent, or incomplete. Apart from what Gödel's Theorem implicitly says about (conceptual) thinking as such, the case for language is even more 'hopeless'; by language we communicate not only an abstract system of logic or mathematics, but a reality which is extralinguistic and—more or less unambiguously—four-dimensional, in its physical-temporal coordinates.

Outline

The first section of this chapter concerns 'critical mannerisms'; it proceeds from the observation that an overwhelming part of contemporary criticism on drama is cultural-historical analysis, hunting for ideas, cultural, social and/or political issues as present or represented in the words of plays. As for Fletcherian plays, 'From both ends of the political and theoretical spectrum, [recent] criticism has attempted to recuperate [17th-century] tragicomedy as a dramatic form worth serious attention of historical and political critics', as Nicholas F. Radel has summarized (Radel 1997: 162). Fletcher's plays are approached in terms of 'social criticism and engagement'; many a study 'shows the dramatists responding to social change. It detects … a desire for order and hierarchy, with the [Fletcherian] individualistic standards of the nouveaux riches set against the traditional code of noblesse oblige' (Al-mahi 1985: dissertation abstract). Plays, fiction, and poetry—indiscriminately—are read and studied as (often unwitting) documents of the era, be it documents of prejudice, discrimination, xenophobia, superstition, and other time-bound issues.

It may be said that English criticism is essentially political, or—broadly speaking—*engagé*. As M. H. Abrams observes, in his classical study on Romantic criticism, there seems to be a sense of continuity of Platonic criticism, which does not permit us

> to consider poetry as poetry—as a special kind of product having its own criteria and reason for being. In the dialogues [of Plato] there is only one direction possible, and one issue, that is, the perfecting of the social state and the state of man. [… T]he poet is considered from the point of view of politics, not of art. (Abrams 1958: 9, 11)

Modern thinking and modern criticism are influenced, and to a certain extent pre-destined, by a post-Romantic conception of art in that it invokes ideas inherent in the artistic object (in our case, the text and the drama) and gives them a more or less autonomous existence. As has been already mentioned (Introduction, 'A Brief Discourse on Collaboration'), one such independently existing notion is the idea of the author behind the work of art. Idealist philosophy, culminating in Romantic thought, has brought it into practice in what is called *the myth of the solitary genius* (Stillinger 1991). There are other anachronistic idea stereotypes that operate in modern criticism; some of these will be analyzed in the first section.

The second section, on theatre and ideology, deals with the ways in which modern theory and its conventions of ideology distort the integrity of plays in theatre practice; many of today's productions of early modern plays are mastered by the modern artistic worship of the idea and interpretation. Such approaches fail to make use of the full potential that the plays offer.

Fletcherian drama operates with aspects that require a sensitive balance in the relation between the theatre and the idea. To illustrate the issues, the last section analyzes a sequence from *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, comments on a recent revival of *The Womans Prize*, and briefly points out the use of logic in *A Wife for a Month*.

I Critical Mannerisms

> The map is not the territ'ry,
> The word is not the thing.
>> *The unofficial hymn of general semantics, sung to the tune of* America the Beautiful*, quoted in* Osolsobě 1992: 184n.

> Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius.
>> T. S. Eliot (1919; in Eliot 1972: 71)

Heinrich von Kleist, in his classical essay 'On Puppet Theatre', holds that once the actor is more than an unconscious puppet and becomes conscious of his acting, movements, or speech, something gets lost. The three examples that the narrator of the essay gives make clear what is meant. One may speak of the unconscious, or 'uninterpreted', state of acting, which is genuine and the only 'true', in Kleist's words. The conscious (or perhaps self-conscious) state of awareness is untrue, unnatural, stilted, or 'dead'. In this section I want to argue that modern criticism, by its obsession with words and with themes (or more generally, ideas), fails to capture the central element of the theatre, the non-conceptualized, uninterpreted reality. It is an element, which only the theatre—as an acoustic, visual, dynamic,

and unstable (unpredictable) art—has at its disposal. The film, as the theatre's *genus proximum*, is different in this; what is recorded is fixed, stable, and repeatable. If criticism is based on conceptualized and logical argumentation, does it not contradict the nature of the uninterpreted action on the theatre stage? Is critical argumentation always commensurate with the subject of the study? I claim that, in respect of the theatre, it necessarily and fundamentally fails in that it attempts to fix in time what is essentially dynamic (cf. Taylor 1985: 13).

Language and Theatre

From the noetic point of view, criticism is a desperate quest for certainty and stability. Hand in hand with the rising tendency to see words as records (Walter J. Ong; see below), criticism, and indeed critical thinking in general, has adhered to concepts—that is, verbal and mental stereotypes—as an ultimate certainty. Language, once it is taken as a record, is static, and when reading a text, we may reread the words, pause and reflect on them.

Theatre is dynamic. Treatises or textbooks on dramatic criticism will start with the premise that

> there are many […] elements in a drama that must be appreciated—those which are not so easily reached through the printed page—and the very words themselves can be fully known only if they are considered in their dramatic context. They must be heard in sequence, supported by actors' impersonations, related to the physical and visual elements of performance; and so, perhaps, revalued. (Brown 1966: 22)

Similarly, there have been observations, based on empirical knowledge, that interpretations and inferences made 'on the basis of the dramatic text only … evaluate something that, strictly speaking, does not exist as dramatic work at all.' Although they may be correct, they 'must essentially be rejected as unfounded' (Zich 1931: 96).

The primary element of theatre is action; once it has been acted, it is irretrievable. It moves inevitably in the four dimensions of the physical time and space. The same applies to language in the theatre. Disregarding the fact that, within a specific situation, words can acquire a new meaning, theatrical language is *heard*, not seen. In this, theatre continues in the tradition of the oral-aural arts.

Words (their recordability) leave at least the illusion that they are unchanging, stable, and free from decay. As Walter J. Ong says, in *The Presence of the Word*,

> A basic difficulty in thinking about words today is our tendency to regard them largely or chiefly or ideally as records. We are inclined to think of them as, at their optimum, written out or printed. Once we can get over our chirographic-typographic squint here, we can see that the word in its habitat of sound, which is still its native habitat, is not a record at all. The word is something that happens, an event in the world of sound through which the mind is enabled to relate actuality to itself. (Ong 1967: 22)

This observation sets out the fundamental difference between the modern conception of the word and its role, and that of an 'oral-aural culture', which is based

on the spoken, or *living* word as opposed to the modern written, or printed—and therefore repeatable—word. The difference applies even in an age 'long after the invention of script, and even of print, [when] distinctively oral forms of thought and expression linger, competing with the forms introduced with script and print' (Ong 1967: 22). Laurie Maguire, in her chapter on 'Oral culture' (Maguire 1996: 113ff.), has shown the relevance of this distinction in sixteenth-century England, and calls that-time England a 'residually oral' culture. The characteristics of an oral-aural culture apply—virtually perennially—to all early modern theatre, which is in essence an oral-aural medium. Language, in its early modern form, is unambiguously worked with as transitory, attempting to capture and convey the extralinguistic reality (cf. 'the breath of words' as opposed to 'my dumb thoughts' in Shakespeare's Sonnet 85).

Literary language has been gradually losing its original unity of word as sound and meaning, and has become an object, distanced from the meaning it conveys. It has created around itself a 'world of words'; as opposed to the oral 'world of meaning'. Modern literary language is an artefact, an object to be seen as much as read; it is (to a certain extent) an idealized 'world out there'. This notion and its gradual coming into existence are thoroughly treated in Gerald L. Bruns's *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language* (1974).

The basic difference rests on the original role of the word as a *sound*, a living and evanescent means of communication. In—what Bruns called—the Orphic tradition of language, the word *is* the meaning. Its utterance (like the songs of Orpheus) brings to life the things it utters. In the theatre, this type of word is still preserved; the word (that is, its meaning) is the means of stimulating the evanescent onstage *here-and-now*. Pauline Kiernan, in her book on *Shakespeare's* [implicit] *Theory of Drama* (1996), uses the distinction between the 'life-arousing' Orphic language, and the (rather modern) *hermetic* type of language, which creates a world of its own. The conclusion of her minute study is that Shakespeare's (and arguably Shakespearean) theatre can be legitimately considered as fundamentally Orphic.[2]

Criticism, in its essentially word-as-record conception of the language, cannot essentially come to terms with the theatre. It is on the one hand a rather obvious—though often neglected—fact that a dramatic text does not come to its consummation in the act of reading—as literature does—but in the theatre. On the other hand, the crucial problem of dramatic criticism is in the very act of naming and conceptualizing—and communicating. One part of this issue concerns stereotypes in thinking; another is an epistemological issue: dealing with the possibility of (indirect) cognition of reality by means of words.

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2   Pauline Kiernan, *Shakespeare's Theory of Drama*, Cambridge UP 1996. Kiernan's study is essentially intrinsic and ontological; she does not overly indulge in (the often misleading) contemporary analogues and the (deceptive) notion of context. Thus she approaches the issue without relating it to oral culture as such.

Concepts as Means to Understanding: Limits of Mediated Knowledge

Expressing reality in words orthogonalizes things. In order to be able to communicate real things, they have to be expressed in recognizable, meaningful and transparent terms, which have a fiduciary (contractual) significance. The concepts we use to communicate are reducing the reference to known stereotypes—although this is much of a simplification.

As an example of communicative stereotypes (concepts), which come short of communicating reality, let me take John Russell Brown's outstanding essay on Shakespearean acting (Chapter 2, 'Acting', in Brown 1966: 34–50). Brown, however, succeeds in the tacit acknowledgement that the reference escapes the words.

At the beginning he announces the 'quest for a historically correct acting style for Shakespeare', and argues that 'Elizabethan acting aimed at an illusion of real life, although vestiges of an old formalism remained' (34). Brown claims:

> If I am right, actors today have a better chance of interpreting Shakespeare than those who were his contemporaries, for modern traditions are based on a thoroughgoing naturalism unknown to Elizabethans. (Brown 1966: 34–5)

Whereupon he proceeds to give period accounts testifying that early-seventeenth-century actors achieved an illusion of real life.

The claim of the last quotation is problematic, if not altogether faulty. Early modern and modern acting styles are incomparable. The proposition is, from the noetic point of view, absurd: Elizabethan acting is the subject of Brown's study, therefore the unknown. It is therefore erroneous to make derivative statements about it. As it is, the statement evidently presupposes that it *is* known.

Besides, period statements praising life-likeness of later Elizabethan acting cannot be taken for absolute judgements. It is not necessarily naturalistic acting that creates an illusion of life. Even in terms of a puppet show one may speak of life-likeness.[3] Shakespearean praise of the achievement of an actor, is to say it was 'discharge[d] toth' life' (*Coriolanus* 3.2.106); why should one pronounce what is objectively (physically) true or generally considered obvious? Statements, in general, *claim that* something is true, rather than state the obvious fact; the latter would be truism. One thing is what criticism claims and what directions it points to; another thing is reality and practice. As for life-likeness, the concept itself is of an unstable, intuitive and subjective nature.

It seems that Brown's *naturalism* perhaps signifies different things. I have been using it in the sense of *imitating the audiovisual reality*, as this seems to be the state into which much imitative/realistic theatrical acting has got nowadays. Forty years ago, at the time when Brown was writing, the concept of *naturalism* seems to have stood for something slightly different. Brown concedes:

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3   Cf. A. D. Nuttall's claim that even 'conventional' tropes, phrases and echoes of other works have 'the taste of reality' (Nuttall 1990: 34ff.). The argument of Prof. Nuttall's essay is supportive of the claim of my study.

> I have said that Elizabethan dramatists and actors imitated life, but this does not mean that they tried to make their plays exactly the same as real life. […] A 'personal and exact life' was what Chapman expected the actors to give to his plays, and these words may serve to describe the naturalism which I believe to be the new power of Elizabethan acting. (Brown 1966: 44–45)

The terminological uncertainty aside, Brown proceeds in terms of standard critical argument. Yet, towards the end of his essay, he 'rectifies' his argumentation by referring to the *reality* of Shakespearean acting which *works*, and somewhat intuitively and figuratively, rather than logically suggests that

> today's actors […] should respect and enjoy the magniloquence and music of the language, enter into the greatness of conception, and play all the time *for* an illusion of real life. They must constantly expect a miracle—that the verse shall be enfranchised as the natural idiom of human beings and that all of Shakespeare's strange creation shall become real and 'lively' on the stage. (Brown 1966: 45; my emphasis)

In other words, if his essay should communicate what he wishes, he has to allow recourse to intuitive meaning (*viz* his use of 'miracle', 'strange creation' *etc*.). Similarly, at the very end of his essay, by way of summarizing, he finds 'inadequate' all attempts at 'defin[ing] by one word the style of the Elizabethans and of other actors who wish to respond fully to Shakespeare's text' (50). No wonder: which of the thousand adjectives available in the language captures best that which we do not know? Brown's way out is symptomatic: he opens up the issue into a verbalized, but uninterpreted and uninterpretable, maze. I leave it open to what extent Brown's terminology is unambiguous. As for the Elizabethan acting style,

> [a] Polonius is needed to invent a definition. Let 'epic' stand for the ensemble and socially realistic elements, and 'romantic' for the passionate, imaginative and individual; then, perhaps, the phrase 'Epic-natural-romantic-virtuoso-formal' may be adequate. (Brown 1966: 50)

Brown's thesis fails in the attempt to give a name to an acting style. If it does constructively contribute something to our understanding of Elizabethan acting and if it does communicate—and it has to me—then it is in the negative delimitation and in the sincere acknowledgement of the inadequacy of concepts we have known so far.[4]

The Imperative Consistency of Theory: Approaching through *Stereotypes*

Criticism relies on idea stereotypes. The modern conception of language of words as records, as it has been outlined above, supports the notion that conventional concepts have nominalist autonomy; they become pseudo-Platonic ideals that are reflected in the real world. The fundamental reason for this autonomy lies in *consistency*, which critical thought requires; concepts, if they are to communicate, must not fluctuate in their significance. This is what I shall refer to as *critical mannerisms*. Consistency of the argument becomes imperative. It is only rarely that the corrective of *reality* intervenes, as it does in the above case of Brown's essay.

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4   Cf. the epistemology of the medieval *via negativa*.

Conventionally, modern criticism goes by concepts. From a perspective of the concept, it approaches a work of literature and presupposes almost a physical existence of the term in its context. As an example, here is part of the abstract of a 1996 PhD thesis on 'masculine and feminine honour' in *Bonduca*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, which operates with the concept of 'honour':

> The issue of honor was a focal point in the broader discussion of ethical values which occurred during the early modern period. The discussion was caused, in part, by the rediscovery of classical philosophical works and ideas and was influenced by the social, economic and political changes caused by the breakdown of feudal society. The meaning of honor and the honorable life was discussed and debated in numerous courtesy books, which provided guidelines for ideal behavior, and was the frequent subject of drama and literature. (Hiles 1996)

In other words, the author conceptualizes honour and gives it a being of its own. (The argument, of course, surmises that 'the issue of honour was a focal point [in] the early modern period'.) Taken from a different—a bit more down-to-earth—point of view, honour could simply have been a fashion; the 'numerous courtesy books' could have been early modern counterparts to presentday magazines, such as *Esquire* or *Elle*. That is to say, honour in this sense was a mere object of snobbery. What analogous concepts are so unanimously prevalent in today's society? Do not we, the modern critics, palm off on the Elizabethans a consistency that is proper to our modern critical discourse? Do not we graft on our subject a stable concept that we need to work with in our discourse? Are not such approaches rather self-confirming? (Not to mention the fact that the subject in question is dramatic texts.) In any case, it seems quite comfortable to analyze plays by simply relating them to a pre-existing concept. One only makes new connections between conventional concepts that are known already. As has been observed, most modern criticism on drama 'tells us more about the nature of discursive literary criticism' than about the plays themselves (Taylor 1982: 1).[5]

It seems symptomatic that much criticism of early modern drama has been devoted to—what may be called—intellectual plays; intellectual in the sense that they bring forth theoretical premises. One such example may be John Fletcher's early play, *The Faithful Shepherdess*. It is the only play that Fletcher furnishes with a theoretical apology, or defence—his epistle 'To the Reader'—in which he outlines his dramaturgy of tragicomedy and accounts for the failure of the play on stage.

There are, in a broad outline, two ways of viewing this failure. One, which seems to be what Fletcher claims, is that the audience misunderstood his *idea* behind it; they misunderstood his novel mode of tragicomedy and expected 'a play of country hired Shepheards, in gray cloakes, with curtaild dogs in strings,

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5   In the context, Gary Taylor comments on the disparity among critical reception of *Henry V* ('to some Henry is the mirror of all Christian kings; to others, a Machiavellian militarist', Taylor 1985: 12), and especially on the 'static' nature of criticism. In *To Analyze Delight*, he devotes a whole chapter, 'Readers and Seers: 'Henry V'', to the issue (1985: 112–61). His comments are written, in a sense, as a reaction to Norman Rabkin's 'Either/Or: Responding to *Henry V*' (1981).

sometimes laughing together, and sometimes killing one another' ('To the Reader', 5–7).

The other interpretation of the play's failure is that Fletcher was right in his vision of tragicomedy. All the elements he outlines in his preface become indeed central to his later tragicomedies. What he failed to achieve in *The Faithful Shepherdess* is Kleistian spontaneity; they play is over-ingenious; it is self-conscious in what it enacts. But, paradoxically, it is perhaps this over-obvious presence of an idea behind the play that has won it a fixed place in criticism.[6] Just like Webster's *The White Devil* and some of Jonson's plays that failed despite the author's ambition, this is one of the few plays outside Shakespeare that have been repeatedly revisited by critics. The authors—Fletcher, Webster, or Jonson—feeling their effort had not been rewarded, wrote apologetic and complaining defences, which the Romantic interpretive tradition has seen in view of the 'unrecognized-genius' stereotype. The critical discourse has—on the grounds of the apologies of the failures—a starting-point on which to build. To what extent these starting-points are sound and reliable is left open to debate.

I have given several examples, in which a certain tendency may observed of imposing modern ideological conventions on material that is essentially different, if only in the measure of its nonverbalized spontaneity, which is indispensable in the theatre. It is a kind of critical anachronism, which, however, is an everyday practice within the stereotypes of criticism. The core of the error of these critical mannerisms lies in the habit of conceptualization, and is upheld by the attributes and conventions of modern critical writing.

II Theatre and Ideology: Modern Artistic Worship of the Idea

> [*Sly.*] *Paucas pallabris*
>> (*The Taming of the Shrew* Induction 1.5)

> [T]he neutral acting-area of the Elizabethan theatre should give us a clue to the nature of most of its drama. The stage can at one moment represent Rome, at another Alexandria, it can be the open country or a king's palace, a ship at sea or a battlefield. In the same way, the play itself is hospitable to all sorts of feelings and ideas that may find expression in the dramatist's words. Sometimes, indeed, the Elizabethans and Jacobeans did approach the 'drama of ideas', and in *Troilus and Cressida* and in Chapman's tragedies we may feel that the action and characters are subordinate to the working out of an intellectual theme. But these are extreme and uncharacteristic instances.
>> (Leech 1959: 181)[7]

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6   See also James J. Yoch (1987) and his discussion of *The Faithful Shepherdess*; he claims that 'Tragicomedy required of its authors considerable effort to legitimize their bastard plays' (Yoch 1987: 115). He mentions Marco Mincoff's essay '*The Faithful Shepherdess*: A Fletcherian Expriment' (in *Renaissance Drama* 9, 1966: 165), and W. W. Greg's *Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama* (1906; rpt. London: Russell and Russell, 1959: 264–75), in which he 'complained of the over-refinement of' Fletcher's play (Yoch 1987: 133n.).

7   The quotation continues as follows:

In Scene 21 of *Pericles*, in which Marina comes to her distracted father and is recognized by him, we know what the resolution must necessarily be: there is no mystery hidden from us, and we—one might say—merely observe the inevitable happening. Marina pronounces what we all know, 'My name, sir, is Marina' (21.131), and Pericles, unbelieving, finally accepts the incredible truth of restoration, 'Now blessing on thee, rise th'art my child' (21.200). By stating this, have I expressed what is so powerful in theatre, or do I merely refer to the reader's remembrance of what he or she felt in performance?

One may try to express the impressions in their wholeness and in this way try to pass them on; yet one will always refer to what the listener has known or experienced. It is never the thing itself that comes across, unless what is said provokes it in the listener's memory. The name always comes short of the actuality; the name omits what Kleist calls genuine—and so does Juliet: 'That which we call a rose | By any other word would smell as sweet' (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.1.85–86). But how does one pass on the smell of a rose? Or rather—to limit oneself to drama—how should one talk about the theatre and drama? John Russell Brown says, 'I have found that to talk about a play's significance or meaning is to recount one's own opinion or someone else's' (Brown 1970: 3). Language, in a sense, cannot *really* mediate it.

Proper dramatic criticism is in this sense opposed to literary analysis. As many critics have shown, analyzing the words of a play captures only a fragment of the whole, and not the most important one at that. Theatre is always the action *here and now*; the printed text, the word, is its mere potential, and reading is its insufficient surrogate (Zich 1931: 95–96). The necessary 'given' of dramatic/theatrical criticism is that the purpose (and consummation) of a drama is its performance. Brown, in his discussion of appropriate dramatic criticism of Shakespeare, brings this notion even further:

> Shakespeare's verbal art is, in fact, a trap; it can prevent us from inquiring further. […
> T]here are many other elements in a drama that must be appreciated—those which are
> not so easily reached through the printed page—and the very words themselves can be
> fully known only if they are considered in their dramatic context. They must be heard
> in sequence, supported by actors' impersonations, related to the physical and visual
> elements of performance, and so, perhaps, revalued. (Brown 1966: 19, 22)[8]

At the opposite extreme, and still on a notable level of dramatic achievement, we find
Beaumont and Fletcher choosing a particular dramatic action because they are interested
in the way in which it will develop towards its point of conclusion: ideas and attitudes will
emerge from time to time, but intellectual argument will remain a side-issue. (Leech 1959:
181–82)

8 Cf. Zich's 'Slova šálí rozum' (Words delude reason, Zich 1931: 80). Zich makes an observation (35 years older!) on the 'deceptiveness' (or *opacity*—as semiotics would call it) of poetic language in drama (see his Chapter IV on 'The Dramatic Text. The Dramatist's Work', Zich 1931: 73–111). For poetic 'opacity' see Jan Mukařovský's *The Aesthetic Function*, or Roman Jakobson's term 'poetic function' in his theoretical essays on 'literariness' (as in Jakobson 1995: 23–153). I have dealt with a productive type of opacity in the previous chapter ('Modern Stage Conventions of Realism'). As for the imperative necessity of read-

I have mentioned the widespread modern practice of assessing early modern drama as historical documents. It is, however, more frequent in textbooks on criticism than in critical practice. From the dramatic point of view, historical studies are of little or no avail. If a play is time-serving, and its topicality is totally lost on us, what is the point of reviving it? To take an example, Fletcher's *The Island Princess* becomes of special interest to modern interpreters because of its treatment of early modern colonial and Christian missionary policies (Solomon 1998).[9] This is not to say that I consider ideological analyses irrelevant for the theatre; these studies are necessary, but—like Shakespeare's verbal art—they often function as a 'trap'. My argument here is that the contexts of early modern politics and religion are the wrong reasons for reviving *The Island Princess*. They, in a way, blind us to the play's inherent dramatic qualities.

If drama is to be understood as plays for the theatre, not only as a playground for theorists, appropriate dramatic criticism should be preferred when approaching it. Performance criticism would be one of the ways. However, the scope of these studies is limited only to those plays that *have* been revived. That number is, of course, rather limited, and the selection of plays has been, to a large extent, determined by ideological purposes.

In brief, the problem at stake may be called modern conventions of ideology. Just as much of early- and mid-twentieth-century criticism was concerned with the psychological dimension of characters, disregarding the fact that the issue is often far from being relevant, so nowadays the key to early modern drama is the politics of theatre. These theatrical conventions of ideology lay emphasis on interpretations, that is, they materialize the assumed leading idea, or message, of the dramatic situation or the dramatic work.

The previous chapter analyzed one obstacle of getting nearer early modern drama; the critical stereotypes, or mannerisms, of making plays and theatre 'doctrinaire mincemeat' (Wardle 1992: 68), are another. Both of these two sets of conventions have in common the (perhaps related) tendency to make explicit what is—as I argue—meant to be left uninterpreted.

Irving Wardle, in his *Theatre Criticism*, remarks how 'common is the habit of reviewing themes instead of plays' (1992: 68). He testifies indirectly not only to critical mannerisms, but also to the convention of making a theatre *engagé*. Often

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ing Shakespeare's plays in sequence and in space, which Brown argues for, this component of theatrical reading is called *theatre acoustics* (Zich 1931: 109).

9   For a tendentious, ideological reading of *The Prophetess* see Jean-Pierre Teissedou's '*The Prophetess*, de John Fletcher (1579–1625): Puissance de la magie ou magie de la puissance?' (1980). In the conclusion to his analysis, he merely recapitulates the programmatic procedure of French theatre semiology of 1970s: 'La mise en scène comme les autres artifices de la représentation sont au service d'une morale de la prudence, de la parole contractuelle, de réserve modeste et de l'économie des forces qui contredisent l'éclat des interventions à grand spectacle. La magie est donnée à voir comme objet d'émerveillement, distancée et soumise en dernière analyse au débat politique sur le partage du pouvoir' (Teissedou 1980: 93).

it is an ideology that is sought after, by the ambitions of the producer, the critic, and—often too—the audience:

> When a play happens to touch on one of [the] approved subjects [such as] apartheid, sexual prejudice, police corruption, and the unalterable malevolence of the Tory Party […] we undergo a strong temptation to mark it up for good intentions, and turn a blind eye to [the new play's] shortcomings in other respects. The writer may show no talent for characterization, dialogue or story-telling, but at least he is handling something important. Conversely, if he is writing about nothing more important than human relationships, then good characterization, brilliant dialogue and deft plot construction may not save him from being accused of wasting the public's time. (Wardle 1992: 68)

It has become common to expect an explanation why the director and/or the company have decided to produce a particular early play. Perhaps it is dictated by reviewers, or perhaps—as an acquired reflex-arc—by the director's intrinsic feeling that the production has to be justified. As Lois Potter has commented,

> when the play finally reaches its first night, the reviewers respond by making the following highly original observations: 1.) the author of the play isn't as good as Shakespeare; 2.) when a play hasn't been produced for four centuries, there is usually a good reason why. (Potter 2001)[10]

Apart from this coerced need for self-defence, which naturally causes much damage to the plays, there are other conventions that productions have to face: 'To make matters worse, the academic […] may double (and double-cross) as a reviewer, trashing the production because it […] wasn't ideologically satisfactory' (Potter 2001).

There are a thousand natural shocks that the producer is heir to—and often quite contentedly at that, it seems. One such 'shock' is the post-Romantic quest for originality; in producing, the novelty—of the approach or the play, etc.—is tacitly imperative.[11] The assumption is that a past production has been entered into an everlasting 'critical memory', and is—in a vague sense—present with us; and so productions are criticized for their imitation of Olivier's Freudian *Hamlet* or Trevor Nunn's *Henry V*, disregarding the fact that the theatre is not a record but the *here and now*, which is gone for good once it is over.

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10   I would like to express thanks to Lois Potter for kindly giving me permission to quote from her, yet unpublished, paper.

11   Compare Vilém Mathesius' conception of originality with Kleist's notion of the unconscious beauty; the former is summed by Osolsobě: 'Mathesius zamítá originalitu chápanou jen negativně 've smyslu odlišnosti od toho, co je obvyklé', a vítá originalitu 'nevtíravou', projevující se 'hlavně pozitivně jako myšlenková a mravní samostatnost', originalitu, která 'je jen jakýsi vedlejší produkt určitosti mravní a myšlenkové' ('Mathesius rejects the originality understood in negative terms, 'in the sense of difference from what is common', and accepts the 'unimposing' originality, which manifests itself 'mostly positively as an independence in thinking and morals', an originality that is 'only a kind of by-product of a certainty in morals and thinking'.) [Vilém Mathesius, *Kulturní aktivismus* (= Okna, vol. 9), Praha: Voleský, 1925: 21]' (Osolsobě 1978: 27).

Another issue are modern dress productions. The claim is that early modern plays were originally produced in what was modern dress; therefore, why should we play in historical costumes? What I see as the most important point in this respect is what comes across as natural. The early modern costumes and the props were seen as standard at their time. The plays had a neutral setting; they were new or recent, and there was no point (and would not be even nowadays) in historicizing them. When watching Shakespeare, what do modern audiences consider standard and—therefore—neutral? Today's productions that attempt modernization violate the original standard (neutral) mode, and are often little more than self-indulgent. Unless the change is sufficiently justified, of course….

Lois Potter has observed, that 'Revivals of plays with no [or little] performance history […] tend to fall into two categories: Elizabethan-Wholesome and Jacobean Decadent. They are not necessarily bound by chronology…' (Potter 2001). These categories are two conventional production stereotypes, and function themselves as justification of the reviving. Either of the two modes comes across as 'legible', or 'recognizable'. Thus the play will not arrive on the stage as utterly new, but will manage to fall into one of the pre-existing slots.

Another way of *appropriating* 'obscure plays'—to use Lois Potter's concept, which is, in agreement with her argument, itself a 'recognizable' stereotype—is by referring them to existing myths, presenting them as parodies of Shakespeare or as in another way derivative plays. (Potter mentions the 1966 RSC production of *The Revenger's Tragedy* which 'emphasized the play's resemblances to *Hamlet*'.) In the way of summarizing, she maintains that

> we are more interested in context than in close reading, and the tendency to use metatheatrical frameworks for little-known plays is the theatrical counterpart of this interest. (Potter 2001)

Another run-of-the-mill critical approach to the plays that have not been accepted into the theatrical 'canon', is to pare them down to plot or character stereotypes:

> Both characters and values [in Fletcherian collaborative plays] are drawn from a common stock, as we see in *The Elder Brother* (1624–5), [in which the] familiar stereotypes include the scholar, Charles; the foolish father, Brisac, […] Eustace, a would-be courtier[, or] the humorous uncle, Miramont… (McLuskie 1981: 177)

Besides, there are the easy-to-put-up-with 'lustful tyrant' plays, the 'humour' plays, or the 'exotic-romance' plays. Has such criticism really captured what the theatrical potential of these plays is? Which critic would dare say that *Hamlet* is another melancholy-revenger play with the stock types of the usurper king, the scheming father Polonius, and the sycophants Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Or that *King Lear* is a 'foolish-father' play? My claim is that the favour or disfavour of criticism is mostly determined not so much by the theatrical qualities of the plays, but rather by (1) the measure of broader acceptance (belonging to 'the classics'), and (2) the presence of recognizable ideologies and/or (what Wardle calls) the 'approved subjects', which are easily defensible. Similarly—as I have contemplated in the Introduction—later Fletcherian plays can be seen either as repetitions of

older themes, or mature treatments of dramatic archetypes; that depends on how one wants to take it.

Criticism operates predominantly in terms of themes, ideas and doctrines. That is arguably appropriate in the case of much modern drama. Not so with the early modern. Yet, productions of early modern plays follow suit, complying with the critical conventions of our times. 'A semiotics of the mise-en-scène is constitutively a semiotics of the production of ideologies,' Umberto Eco cunningly insists (Eco 1977: 117).[12] However, by providing any kind of explicitness, the play is robbed of its semantic richness. Do we need a Hamlet with a machine gun or a National-Socialist-costumed Fortinbras, or a Richard III in a tank, to understand that a play has topical, political significance? How much of such treatments is positive political criticism, and how much is self-indulgence only?

III Plays, Productions, and Ideologies

Annophil.   What in words I dare not,
    Imagine in my silence.
                                                            (*The Laws of Candy* 4.2.15–16)

Clermont.   Words, are but words.

                                                            (*The Little French Lawyer* 1.1.73)

One may object that there are certain themes that simply *are* clearly political (or ideological in a broader sense). But are they necessarily so? Acting is a fundamental directing force in the understanding. It is in the actor's capacities to influence connotations and implications of his or her actions and lines. The spectators watch the actor and observe if their understanding of what has happened (or has been spoken) is correct. According to the actor's behaviour the spectator decides which implications (connotations and possible references) are appropriate. The actor's work requires a sensitive handling of what the lines offer; one such obvious case is for instance the delivery of a punch line or a joke.[13]

Let me give an (almost trite) example: in Jacobean plays, male friendship is an issue which is frequently misinterpreted and seen in today's homosexual perspec-

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12 For criticism of Eco's article see Osolsobě 1988.

13 I realized this clearly first while acting, and later again at a public reading of my translation of Peele's *The Old Wives Tale*, given by an actress. In her delivery, jokes, which seemed to me 'moderate' and not particularly hilarious, became sources of bursts of laughter. While acting, there is, like in the case of Kleist's puppet, a need of a certain acted 'unconsciousness' of the joke. In many types of jokes, the absurdity must be a result of—what Václav Havel calls—a clash of automatisms. The clashing automatisms must be left uninterpreted by, and at the same time present in the acting of, the actor. More concretely, the two clashing principles, from Havel's essay 'The Anatomy of the Gag' (Havel 1963; in 1999: 589–609), are (1) an erroneous implication of the exposition, which is absurdly against (2) the common practice.

tive. If an actor delivers a line, such as the frequent Shakespearean 'I love thee',[14] the homosexual connotations it provokes in today's mind are mostly misleading. The audience observe the actor in such situations and look for a confirmation of the connotations; that is to say, one indicator of significance (if not placed in a highlighted position) is not a definitive foundation for an interpretation. Understanding and knowing goes by iteration. In acting it is further the intonation and the colour of the speech, the gesture, or another word that are needed to turn a possibility into a certainty. It does lie in the actor's power to 'beat' negative connotations by not resonating with them. And similarly, the actor may provoke connotations that are not at hand in today's understanding.

Dramatic Ideas in Operation: Homosexuality in The Two Noble Kinsmen

There are, however, cases in which arguably the dramatist explicitly plays with the idea. Such a situation is more complicated in that an idea stereotype *is* present, and yet has to be under control. Let us take Arcite's and Palamon's dialogue that obviously borders on, if not explicitly makes use of, the issue of homosexuality:

> [*Arcite*.] Whilst *Palamon* is with me, let me perish
>   If I think this our prison. […]
> [*Palamon*.] And heere being thus together,
>   We are an endles mine to one another;
>   We are one anothers wife, ever begetting   80
>   New birthes of love
>
> (*The Two Noble Kinsmen* 2.2.61–62, 78–81)

How does it help the dynamism of the production to surrender to the available stereotype? If the production takes their relationship as admittedly homosexual, how does it put up with the fact that a couple of minutes later, both of them desperately fall in love with Emilia? I argue that Fletcher, in this scene, intentionally teases the audience with the suggestion. From their first entrance, Palamon and Arcite are portrayed as friends 'deerer in love then Blood' (1.2.1) and 'a paire of absolute men' (2.1.22). Their growing attachment to one another culminates in the passage quoted above, which makes use of sexually charged imagery: *mine* suggests 'source of pleasure and comfort' (Bawcutt 1977: 194), and is perhaps consciously used as a possible metaphor for the womb, supported by the use of *wife*, coupled with 'ever begetting | New births'.

In the passage that immediately follows, Fletcher (or any other author of this passage) builds up the tease to an extreme, almost to absurdity, turning it into a burlesque (which is a technique Fletcher applies repeatedly, as will be analyzed in Chapter 6 'Fletcher's Dramatic Extremism'):

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14   Such as Guiderius' speech to the disguised Innogen (*Cymbeline* 4.2.16); Othello to Cassio (*Othello* 2.3.241); Iago to Cassio (*Othello* 2.3.304); Lovell to Gardiner (*Henry VIII* 5.1.16); in Fletcher, Judas to Decius (*Bonduca* 2.4.888); Petillius to Junius (*Bonduca* 3.5.125); Jacamo to the Host (*The Captain* 4.2.49–50); Jamie to Arsenio (*The Spanish Curate* 1.1.100) to name at least a few.

> [*Arcite.*]   we are father, friends, acquaintance,
>   We are, in one another, Families,
>   I am your heire, and you are mine: This place
>   Is our Inheritance […]
>   were we at liberty,
>   A wife might part us lawfully, or busines,
>   Quarrels consume us, Envy of ill men   90
>   Crave our acquaintance […]
>   a thousand chaunces
>   Were we from hence, would seaver us.
> [*Palamon.*] You have made me   95
>   (I thank you Cosen *Arcite*) almost wanton
>   With my Captivity
>
>   (*The Two Noble Kinsmen* 2.2.81–97)

The notion that they would become 'one anothers Wife' is travestied in the enumerative list of all possible relations ('Father, Friends, Acquaintance, … Families, … Heir') and further by making virtue out of necessity: 'Shall we make worthy uses of this place | That all men hate so much?' (2.2.69–70). The unpronounced motive underlying the two prisoners' oratory is the despair in view of their endless captivity. If a production sticks to, and stays with, the motive of homosexuality, this notion and the entire dramatic development of the play are lost. Palamon and Arcite's seeming complacency is, of course, utterly false, as is shown by the further development of the play; once Emilia 'parts' them, their love turns to lethal rivalry. The irony of the sequence leading up to the entry of Emilia is carefully escalated:[15]

> [*Palamon.*] Shall I say more?
> *Arcite.*   I would heare you still.
> *Palamon.* Ye shall.
>   Is there record of any two that lov'd
>   Better than we doe *Arcite*?
> *Arcite.*   Sure there cannot.
> *Palamon.* I doe not thinke it possible our friendship
>   Should ever leave us.
> *Arcite.*   Till our deathes it cannot.   115
>
>   *Enter Emilia and her Woman.*
>   (*The Two Noble Kinsmen* 2.1.111–15)

In order to act this scene in the suggested dramatic momentum, the interpretation has to be inconclusive; it has to evade the entropy of the stereotype. To achieve that lies in the power of the actors (unless the director makes them give in). Or generally speaking—in a way of summarizing—actors and directors have a decisive power over the interpretation of the situation; they may surrender to the pre-existing idea stereotypes, or keep them at bay.

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15   I have pointed out the irony of this situation in my Master's thesis on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (Drábek 1998: 66).

Ideological Productions

In a theoretical approach, the previous argumentation may be plausible. However, practice mostly differs. It is very often an ideological impulse that becomes dominant in producing 'obscure' early modern plays, and frequently radically emaciates the original play for the sake of the director's purpose. A clear example of such an approach was a recent revival of one Fletcherian play.

In 2001, the Arcola Theatre put on a double-bill production of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and Fletcher's *The Tamer Tam'd* (c. 1611), under the title *Shrew'd* (directed by Patrick Kealey and Janine Wunsche). Both the plays were cut down substantially; 'Textual editing makes near gibberish of Fletcher's plot'—as a reviewer observed (Kate Bassett in *The Independent on Sunday*, 13 May 2001).[16] Fletcher's play was 'discovered lurking in the British Library … It is not a very good play, but it is an entertaining romp' (Sophia Veil in *What's On in London*, May 23, 2001 – May 30, 2001).

The reviews agree on one thing: the twin plays do not match. 'Fletcher's trouble is that his farcical play is a daft, dull rehash of Shakespeare's' (Maddy Costa in *Time Out*, May 16–23, 2001). Fletcher's *The Tamer Tam'd* 'was a startlingly proto-feminist entertainment for its time. It was indeed banned in 1633 for its 'wild and rebellious nature'. The Arcola deserves applause for rescuing this script from obscurity and indeed for its overall bold attitude' (Kate Bassett).

Judged in terms of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Fletcher's play *is* 'a daft, dull rehash'. But adequate criticism uses criteria appropriate to the work in question. Many critics have found it satisfactory to compare *Cymbeline* and *Bonduca*—on the grounds that both plays are set in times of the Roman conquest of Britain—and conclude that 'In *Bonduca* Fletcher has written a play which never emerges from the shadow that *Cymbeline* casts over it' (Leech 1962: 167). Similarly, other Fletcherian plays have been more or less dismissed as dependent—or even parasitical—on Shakespeare (such as *The Prophetess* and *The Sea Voyage* on *The Tempest*).[17] But Fletcher used sources—even dramatic ones—just like Shakespeare, and what he created are independent plays and ought to be approached as such. The audience of *The Tamer Tam'd* do not come to the auditorium with a copy of Shakespeare's *Shrew*.

It is of importance that in connection with the Arcola revival of Fletcher's play, everyone has been using the subtitle; the play's full title is *The Womans Prize: Or, The Tamer Tam'd*, and it has been insinuated that it 'was perhaps adapted to become … a continuation' of Shakespeare's successful play (Potter 1997: 9). The revivers of the play have set up the agenda—the framework—even before the play. 'It is indeed an interesting response to the question, 'Has Kate really been tamed, or is she delivering a tongue-in-cheek finale?'' (Sophia Veil). It is no more a play of 'the womans prize', but the taming of the Tamer. It is always considered only as a pendant, a supplement to Shakespeare.

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16   I am very much grateful to Taylan Halici from the Arcola Theatre, London, for sending me copies of available reviews.

17   For the treatment of these early modern twin plays see Chapter 7.

The obstacle in assessing this particular play is that no one has yet dared to stage it as *The Womans Prize* only, without the 'Tamer'.[18] 'The Arcola Theatre … is obviously a theatre with a vision and a purpose,' says Sophia Veil in her review. But what if the vision and the purpose is not what gives the play what it would need?

Logical Argumentation in Fletcherian Drama

When treating Fletcherian plays, a sound idea is not enough. In one aspect, Fletcher's plays dramatize—I am tempted to say, 'intentionally'—the limitations of logic as a noetic technique; syllogisms are shown as untrue or intriguing. Most inferences that Fletcherian characters venture turn out to be wrong or absurd. It is not only the deceptiveness of pursuing a particular idea but also the delusion of logical argumentations, syllogisms, and proofs—that is the fundamental obstacle in approaching the plays adequately.

As in several other plays—such as *Valentinian*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, or *The Custom of the Country*—in *A Wife for a Month* (1624), Fletcher's last unaided play for the stage, argumentation is used exclusively for manipulating and scheming. The corrupted and illegitimate kingdom of the play is governed by logical, yet absurd principles. Cassandra, an old gentlewoman, is sent by the lustful King to the virtuous Evanthe as a bawd:

> [*Cassandra*.] Your Lords life and your owne are now in hazard,
>   Two precious lives may be redeem'd with nothing,
>   Little or nothing; say an houres or dayes sport,
>   Or such a toy, the end to it is wantonnesse
>   (That we call lust that maidens lose their fame for)   10
>   …
>   Had *Lucrece* e're been thought of, but for *Tarquin*?   40
>   She was before a simple unknowne woman,
>   When she was ravisht, she was a reverent Saint
>   (*A Wife for a Month* 4.3.6–10, 40–42)

The play's central dramatic conflict between good and bad is constituted by legitimacy, virtue, and the mute fact on one side, and usurpation, corruption, the verbose deception and lies on the other. The positive side is represented by the legitimate successor to the throne, Prince Alphonso, who lost the capacity of speech at his father's death:

> [*Marco*.]   when his honour'd Father good *Brandino*
>   Fell sick, he felt the griefes, and labour'd with them,
>   His sits and his disease he still inherited,
>   Grew the same thing, and had not nature check'd him,
>   Strength, and ability, he had dyed that houre too.
> *Rugio*. Embleme of noble love!
> *Marco*.   That very minute

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18   The Czech version of the play of 1951 is also a case in point: it is an adaptation by Eva Bezděková, and was staged in ABC Theatre, Prague, under the title of *Zkrocení zlého muže* (The Taming of the Shrewish Man, Stříbrný 1987: 230).

His fathers breath forsooke him, that same instant,   20
(A rare example of his piety,
And love paternall) the Organ of his tongue
Was never heard to sound againe

(*A Wife for a Month* 3.1.14–23)

The evil brother, Frederick, his instrument, Sorano, and the whole court, are as-
sociated with lies and deceptions, as Tony the fool makes explicit:

Cleanthes. This is a monstrous lye.
Tony.   I do confesse it;   55
   Do you think I would tell you truth, that dare not heare 'em?
   You are honest things, we Courtiers scorn to converse with.

(*A Wife for a Month* 2.1.55–57)

That the conflict of the play is not only one between virtue and lust, legitimacy
and tyranny, truth and lie, but also between the muteness or silence of the truth
and the verbosity of intrigue (cf. Cordelia and Edgar in *King Lear*) is confirmed
by the punishment that Alphonso ordains to his deposed brother Frederick at the
end of the play:

[*Alphonso.*]   brother live, but in the Monastery
   Where I lived, with the selfe same silence too,
   Ile teach you to be good against your will brother,
   Your tongue has done much harme, that must be dumbe now   310

(*A Wife for a Month* 5.3.307–10)

To analyze this play from the 'positive' perspective (that is, what it positively states)
is to disregard the central pattern of the play, which is delusion, syllogism, miracle,
and paradox, best summarized in

[*Marco.*] The Rogue against his will has sav'd his life,
   A desperate poyson has re-cur'd the Prince.
Rugio. To me 'tis most miraculous.

(*A Wife for a Month* 5.1.11–13)

Fletcherian plays are subversive. This is meant not so much in the political and
ideological sense of the word (critics of one generation called Beaumont and
Fletcher court entertainers or even propagandists; those of another point to their,
almost revolutionary, subversiveness). It is rather in the plays' approach to stereo-
types; they constantly evade a fixed stance, a secure knowing where one stands.
If a character seems to develop in one way, the dramatist will very likely show
that this is an illusion; or rather, that this is a play. In such a situation, modern
criticism—which is essentially ideological—necessarily comes short of capturing
the plays in their import, let alone in tackling plays as sources of delight.

Fletcherian authors frequently use 'strained' assumptions, such as the improb-
able hypothesis or deception, in order to create, on behalf of the plays, an inten-
tional imbalance, a conflict at the level of theory (this issue will be dealt with in
Chapter 6). The central concern is the (hypothetical) conflict in the dramatic situ-
ation, and the dramatists are 'interested in the way in which it will develop towards

its point of conclusion.' At the same time—paradoxically enough—as Clifford Leech claims, 'ideas and attitudes will emerge from time to time, but intellectual argument will remain a side-issue' (quoted in Craik 1988: 40). Achieving this peculiar equilibrium between the theatre and thought is a necessary starting point when interpreting Fletcherian drama. In this requirement lies one of the major obstacles it has to overcome in modern theatre. Or—the other way round—modern theatre has yet to prepare grounds in order to appreciate Fletcherian drama appropriately. As Lisander says, in *The Lovers' Progress*,

> *Lisander.* The value of it, is as time has made it.

<div align="right">(The Lovers' Progress 3.3.87)</div>