

Sucking the Sweets of Sweet Philosophy: Shakespeare's Dramatic Use of Philosophy

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TRANIO

Glad that you thus continue your resolve
To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy.
Only, good master, while we do admire
This virtue and this moral discipline,
Let's be no Stoics nor no stocks, I pray,
Or so devote to Aristotle's checks
As Ovid be an outcast quite abjur'd.
Balk logic with acquaintance that you have,
And practise rhetoric in your common talk;
Music and poesy use to quicken you;
The mathematics and the metaphysics,
Fall to them as you find your stomach serves you.
No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en;
In brief, sir, study what you most affect.
(*The Taming of the Shrew*, I.i.27-40¹)

The challenge of philosophical bardolatry

The works of Shakespeare provide a special opportunity to explore the connection between literature and philosophy since the plays were written during a period of significant philosophical upheaval. Epistemic questions about the limits of human understanding, met-

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all quotations throughout the essay refer to *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, et. al., New York-London, Norton & Company, 1997.

aphysical questions about the intelligibility of causal relations, and ethical questions about the existence of an underlying moral order and the divine right of kings all dominate the early modern philosophical landscape and they shape many of Shakespeare's plays. So it is natural to think about the plays from a philosophical perspective.

Such a connection between philosophy and literature is not unique to Shakespeare; we find it in several other English Renaissance writers. As Sir Philip Sidney writes in his *Defence of Poesy*, reflecting a common sentiment of the time, "philosophers offer us rules or precepts; historians give us examples, and poets provide us with both"².

We need to be careful, however, since Shakespeare's relationship to philosophy is quite different from other writers of the period. His appeals to philosophy are far more fragmented than the unified vision found in writers like Edmund Spenser and John Milton. Unlike those writers, Shakespeare is not attempting to forge the great English epic or develop a mythology for a pure Protestant England. He is writing entertainment and he incorporates philosophy in ways that are fragmented, rather than fully or systematically developed, and the philosophical elements he includes are frequently misrepresented. Shakespeare is simply not as careful in this regard as other writers of the period because his goals as a dramatist are different.

For example, the version of stoicism we find in *Julius Caesar* is an inaccurate caricature of unemotional narcissistic pessimism that bears little resemblance to the perspective advocated by Seneca or Marcus Aurelius³. When Cassius abandons his Epicurean ideals to follow Brutus's stoicism in the final act of the play (*Julius Caesar*, V.i.95), for example, he promptly gives in to premature pessimism and commits suicide the moment he hears the rumour that Titinius has been surrounded (V.iii.28-45).

This misrepresentation of the principles of stoicism matters little to Shakespeare, however, since he is using stoicism largely to reveal Brutus's nobility and humanity, through his consistent failure to fully live up to his stoic ideals. Since a mistaken caricature

² Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, London, Thomson Nelson, 1965, pp. 106-7.

³ A. D. Nuttall offers a convincing description of this difference. A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008, rpt. 2008, pp. 171-220.

of stoicism works just as well, if not better, for this purpose than a more accurate or nuanced account, Shakespeare has little incentive to get stoicism right.

We must be careful, therefore, to avoid what I will call philosophical bardolatry⁴. The fear is not that we will attribute too much knowledge and foresight to Shakespeare, but that we will attribute an explicitly philosophical intention that his plays lack. We simply cannot derive a unified philosophical vision that lies behind the plays, whether we attach that vision to Shakespeare or to some set of Renaissance conventions and beliefs he might have drawn from the culture around him. We don't even see Shakespeare making an effort to use philosophical themes or material to cultivate the sort of intellectual wit found in plays written by Marlowe, Greene, Nashe and other University Wits.

From a historical perspective, therefore, a philosophical exploration of Shakespeare may seem unpromising, especially if we are searching for philosophical elements that have been developed in a complete or systematic way. For Shakespeare uses philosophy to follow what will affect us, to use the words of Tranio that open this essay, and not to pursue some independent intellectual goal. In what follows, I argue that while this is certainly true, he nevertheless uses philosophy to accomplish various dramatic goals in ways that are sophisticated and insightful.

The essay breaks down into three sections. First, I provide an overview of the way Shakespeare uses philosophy to pursue three kinds of dramatic goals in the plays. Next, I outline the way our study of those effects contributes to philosophy. Finally, I explain how focusing on the issue of dramatic contribution enables us to address three important concerns about any effort to link literature to philosophy. By the end, I hope to show how thinking about the dramatic role philosophy plays in Shakespeare's dramas can help us develop a more complete account of the relationship between philosophy and Shakespeare while avoiding the spectre of philosophical bardolatry.

⁴ It's interesting that the first use of the term 'bardolatry' can be found in George Bernard Shaw's criticism of Shakespeare's failure to engage seriously with social and philosophical issues. George Bernard Shaw, *Three Plays for Puritans*, New York, Brentano's, 1901, p. xxxi.

What is the dramatic contribution of philosophy to the plays?

Shakespeare incorporates philosophical elements in many of his plays. In some cases we find philosophical material taken from texts and positions floating around London during the time when he wrote. In other cases, we find various forms of philosophical method, including the varieties of reasoning, logic, and rhetoric Shakespeare would have learned in his Latin grammar school education. Both types of elements make distinct contributions to the dramatic worlds Shakespeare creates on stage. This inclusion of philosophy fits into a larger pattern of metaleptic layering found in his writing⁵. Shakespeare layers his plays by introducing extra-diegetic elements or references to the broader world offstage to fill out or enhance the world created through a performance.

The inclusion of philosophy, therefore, joins other innovations in his plays, like the various references to acting that we see or the staging of plays within the plays. Sometimes Shakespeare uses this layering for comic or political effect, like the reference in *Hamlet* to the boy acting troupes that were putting London theatre companies out of business around the time of that play's performance (II.ii.325-36). At other times, he uses it as a grander gesture, as in Antonio's statement at the start of *The Merchant of Venice* that "I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano; / A stage where every man must play a part, / And mine a sad one" (I.i.77-79). This line, which paraphrases a line written by Erasmus⁶, is repeated again in Jacques's famous "all the world's a stage" soliloquy in *As You Like It* (II.vii.138-65). At other times, Shakespeare makes explicit references to the Globe Theatre, which creates in the audience a broader awareness of their relationship to the current performance. We see this, for example, in Prospero's lament in *The Tempest* that "The solemn temples, the great globe itself, / Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve" (IV.i.153-54).

⁵ I use the term 'metaleptic' here in Gérard Genette's original sense of a narrative layering that involves paradoxical references to other, logically distinct, layers in the narrative structure. In this case it is the inclusion of extra-diegetic elements into the imaginative world created onstage. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 234-35.

⁶ "For what else is the life of man but a kind of play in which men in various costumes perform until the director motions them offstage?" Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, Engl. transl. by Clarence Miller, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 44.

We also see metaleptic layering in the way Shakespeare refers to political events, whether references to the rebellion of the Earl of Essex in *Troilus and Cressida*⁷ or the Midlands peasant rebellion of 1607 over grain prices in *Coriolanus*⁸. While potentially dangerous (a performance of *Troilus and Cressida* was postponed for several years due to its dangerous political references and satire⁹) these extra-diegetic references to offstage events add depth to the action onstage by recruiting the immediate concerns of the audience. The inclusion of discussions about the ethics of regicide or the justice of war extends and clarifies those concerns¹⁰.

A final example of this layering, one that joins the inclusion of philosophy, can be seen in Shakespeare's use of epilogues that straddles the liminal domain between actor and character. We see this clearly in Puck's epilogue at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in Prospero's epilogue at the end of *The Tempest*.

In all of these examples, metaleptic layering plays a role within the dramatic world of the play that is partly conditioned by the identity that element has in the extra-diegetic world offstage. That off-stage role informs its meaning or dramatic significance within the play. Such elements are, we might notice, precursors to the longstanding tradition of setting Shakespeare's plays in the contemporary world, where contemporary references fill out the meaning of what happens

⁷ For a full discussion of the connection between Achilles and the Earl of Essex, see David Bevington's introduction to the Arden edition, Third Series, of *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. David Bevington, Walton on Thames, Nelson, 1998, pp. 398-429.

⁸ "Let us kill Coriolanus, and we'll have corn at our own price" (*Coriolanus*, I.i.8-9). George David offers a full discussion of the connection between this scene and the Midlands rebellion of 1607. George David, "Plutarch, Insurrection, and Death in *Coriolanus*", in *Shakespeare and Politics*, ed. Katherine Alexander, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 110-29.

⁹ David Bevington makes a convincing case that the play was further delayed not only because of its reference to the Earl of Essex but also because of the connection between Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, and the character of Ulysses. Outside of the production of *Richard II* for the Earl of Essex and his supporters on the eve of his attempted rebellion, *Troilus and Cressida* is arguably Shakespeare's most politically dangerous play. The fact that it displays a wide range of approaches to political philosophy only adds to its clear relevance to philosophical discussions about Shakespeare.

¹⁰ We might think here, for example, of the changes in the way Richard II, Bolingbroke, and Henry V reason about the wars they engage in and the way those shifting patterns throughout the 'Henriad' dramatize the emergence of a more modern conception of the crown.

on stage. We might think here, for example, of a recent staging of *Hamlet* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in which Polonius places a wiretap on Ophelia before her encounter with Hamlet. This completes the image of the court as a surveillance state, and it dramatically reinforces Ophelia's lack of self-determination. Even her body is not her own. While in some cases contemporary staging distracts audiences for no clear purpose, in other cases such a staging contributes to the play in a way that is meaningful and perfectly in keeping with Shakespeare's own use of metaleptic layering.

What I want to suggest is that Shakespeare's use of philosophy performs a similar dramatic role within the plays, and while that appeal arises through language, rather than props or sets, part of the modern feel of the plays and part of their ability to fit so well on the modern stage is a result of the range of ways Shakespeare develops multiple metaleptic layers, including a layer of philosophy.

In all of these instances of layering, the world beyond the stage intersects the onstage world in ways that connect the events being staged to the concerns we, as an audience, bring to the play. Shakespeare is a master of this layering, and he uses philosophy in this process to accomplish three dramatic goals: (i) broaden the context, (ii) clarify character, and (iii) highlight the role of choice in action. I will start with the way Shakespeare uses philosophical elements to deepen or broaden a play's context.

Since drama in Elizabethan and Jacobean England relied heavily on verbal rather than physical stagecraft, Shakespeare uses philosophical elements to increase the scope of the action that takes place in a way that is similar to his consistent references to an unspecified backstory to the play. Consider Lady Macbeth's reference to nursing children (I.vii.54-55¹¹) or Beatrice's reference to her earlier romantic relationship with Benedick (*Much Ado About Nothing*, II.i.242-45¹²). Shakespeare does something similar with the role nihilism plays in *Macbeth*. To demonstrate this I turn to the three arguments Macbeth offers against killing King Duncan.

¹¹ L. C. Knight offers an influential discussion of this point. L. C. Knight, "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism", in *Explorations: Essays in Criticism Mainly on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, New York, New York University Press, 1964, pp. 15-54.

¹² Joost Daalder provides a discussion of the significance of this point within the play. Joost Daalder, "The Pre-History of Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*", *English Studies*, 6 (2004), pp. 520-27.

He begins by offering the prudential argument that killing Duncan would not be in his own interest since he is likely to be killed in return:

MACBETH

But here upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor. (*Macbeth*, I.vii.6-10)

Next, he offers an argument based on his duties to Duncan as his host and kinsman:

MACBETH

He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. (I.vii.12-16)

Finally, he offers an argument based on the idea of a personified moral order:

MACBETH

Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
The deep damnation of his taking-off,
And pity, like a naked newborn babe
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on th' other. (I.vii.16-28)

There are three orders of argument in this soliloquy. The first is the pragmatic argument that the murder cannot succeed, because "even-handed justice" will instruct others to murder the murderer, and the

people who will take up arms against him will succeed, since they will be driven by the political need to restore order rather than blind ambition. The second argument is based on the duties and obligations inherent to Macbeth's social position. If he violates those duties, he will remove himself from the social order, which foreshadows Macbeth's isolation and abandonment later in the play. The final argument goes beyond political and social order to appeal to an abiding moral structure that can be personified by angels. This set of three arguments is the most comprehensive response to the issue of regicide that we find in any of Shakespeare's plays¹³.

How does Lady Macbeth undo this line of reasoning? Her principal argument is that it would be unmanly of Macbeth to "break this enterprise" to her (I.vii.47-51). But what is this contract? Macbeth has not explicitly promised to kill Duncan. He simply shares Lady Macbeth's commitment to the goal of his becoming king. To see where this contractual language of an implied promise comes from, we must look earlier in the play where Lady Macbeth says that Macbeth is not without ambition, but lacks the "illness should attend it":

LADY MACBETH

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
 What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature;
 It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
 To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
 Art not without ambition, but without
 The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
 That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
 And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
 That which cries 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;
 And that which rather thou dost fear to do
 Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
 And chastise with the valour of my tongue

¹³ It is important here, as it is in every case, to avoid the temptation of attributing any one character's position to Shakespeare himself. While Macbeth offers a strong argument against regicide in this passage in the sense that it reveals a threefold structure, the strength of that argument does not imply that Shakespeare was pro-monarchy or complacently in favour of any particular social order. For a thorough exploration of Shakespeare's avoidance of moral and political absolutes with respect to questions of authority, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2010.

All that impedes thee from the golden round
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal. (I.v.13-28)

Ambition, in Lady Macbeth's view, should be attended by release from moral restraint, a claim that might remind us of the claims put forward by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, where Socrates maintains that the worst fate to befall a human being is not to become the victim of a tyrant but to become a tyrant, because the soul of the tyrant makes a person the enemy of everyone and forces him to perform acts that are not his own.

Lady Macbeth, like Callicles, looks upon morality not as natural, but as a conspiracy of the weak against the strong – a conspiracy to deprive the strong of the goods that should naturally belong to them. Looking more carefully, Lady Macbeth says that what Macbeth "wouldst highly" he would also "holily". So Macbeth does not share the views of Callicles and Lady Macbeth. But, she goes on to say, Macbeth "would not play false, and yet would wrongly win". The problem, as she sees it, is that he does not abandon the end, even as he recoils from the means that are necessary to gain that end. He fears to do what must be done even though he would not wish it undone, if it were done.

This inspires Lady Macbeth to develop an ingenious response that anticipates Hobbes' strategy a few decades later in *Leviathan*. She uses the language of a promise or a contract to create a moral veneer over the self-interested or instrumental means to becoming king (I.vii.48-51). Lady Macbeth is able, in other words, to help Macbeth re-envision the strong moral arguments of his soliloquy by translating them into language of a Hobbesian contract, providing him with a gateway that converts him into the nihilist that his ambition demands of him. Lady Macbeth's contractarian language makes the move possible despite his clear vision of the moral arguments against killing Duncan.

For an audience dealing with the uncertainties of their current monarch and the possibility of a civil war, a king who dabbles with nihilism in this way would be every bit as unsettling as a king who dabbles in witchcraft. Shakespeare uses nihilism, therefore, to deepen the play's context by drawing on one of the period's deepest fears in a powerful and subtle way. This inclusion of nihilism,

presented under the guise of a contract, creates a powerful sense of offstage depth. The sophisticated character of the pattern of reasoning he uses to accomplish that depth is reinforced by the way it anticipates a line of reasoning offered by Hobbes just thirty-six years later. Shakespeare's sense of dramatic tension seems to have taken him straight into a surprisingly sophisticated use of ethical reasoning. This line of reasoning leads us to a second way Shakespeare uses philosophical material to enhance the play's performance. He uses it to highlight the role of choice in action.

Looking again at *Macbeth*, the sophisticated arguments offered by the two Macbeths enhances our experience of Macbeth's choice to kill Duncan. His action is not determined by character or context, as it would have been in a medieval morality play. His choice and his subsequent actions matter and we experience them as being up to him. The ethical argument we experienced earlier gives us a clear sense of this and as a result those scenes build the play up to the famous dagger scene (II.i.33-64).

What is important to see in the dagger scene is that the element of choice, enhanced through Macbeth's earlier use of ethical reasoning, has a profound and important impact on us, the audience. It splits our experience into two parts. On the one side is our ethically motivated sympathy for Macbeth, which hopes he does not proceed with Duncan's murder. On the other side is our interest as theatre-goers to experience a thrilling drama, hoping he kills Duncan. The clear discussion of the ethics of regicide, in other words, reinforces our dual allegiances to what will make for a good and ethical life versus what will make for a good play. The dagger scene, therefore, becomes a moment in which we collude with Macbeth and this partly implicates us in Duncan's murder. Our physical presence sitting in front of Macbeth, anticipating of the drama that will unfold, makes us accomplices to murder¹⁴. We are, or at least parts of us are, encouraging or egging him on in this critical moment of choice,

¹⁴ We might argue that in this case, as in several others, our physical presence in front of the stage is necessary for the dramatic device's full success. This provides one reason to think that in some cases the performative role of philosophy within the plays can be tied to an actual performance rather than our thoughts or observations about a performance. While that stronger version of my thesis is supported by some of what I argue in this essay, it is not necessary to the position I defend here.

a moment that is made all the more real as a result of the ethical arguments we have been offered as witnesses or members of the audience.

This accomplishes two important things within a performance of the play. First, it ensures that we remain connected to Macbeth as an audience even when his actions threaten to alienate us. This is a problem that must be addressed in any performance of *Macbeth*. On this reading, Shakespeare builds one important solution to that problem into the heart of the play. The second purpose this split accomplishes, something arguably of greater philosophical value, is that our tacit collusion with Macbeth connects us with darker elements within our own psyches. This adds to the power of the play as well as to its ultimate significance for philosophy.

The ethical arguments we hear in Macbeth's earlier soliloquy, therefore, make a significant dramatic contribution in this overall sequence. This effect only becomes clear within the context of a performance, because it is our physical presence before Macbeth that transforms our eagerness for a good play to become an act of collusion, an act that is reinforced by Macbeth's earlier rehearsal of the ethical arguments against Duncan's murder.

Such a use of philosophy or philosophical patterns of reasoning is not uncommon in the plays. Shakespeare frequently turns to expressed patterns of reasoning, some more explicitly philosophical in content and character than others, to enhance a dramatic moment of choice in a way that enhances our sympathy and connection to the characters, no matter how far removed they are from us through their ugly or immoral acts. The pattern is so consistent that acting texts on how to perform Shakespeare frequently emphasize the importance of effectively portraying the patterns of reasoning found within the plays¹⁵.

This focus on the moment of decision leads us to a third and final way in which Shakespeare uses philosophy to enhance the performance of his plays. He uses it to shape character. We can see this most clearly, I think, in the various ways he uses reasoning in both love and

¹⁵ See, for example, the acting manual written by the famous American Shakespeare director Barry Edelstein, which uses the role of arguments within the play as a central device that actors must master. Barry Edelstein, *Thinking Shakespeare: A How-to Guide for Actors, Directors, and Anyone Else Who Wants to Feel More Comfortable with the Bard*, New York, Spark Publishing, 2007.

war. Turning first to love, Shakespeare uses reasoning to extend the roles that wit and verbal sparring commonly played in Elizabethan drama to heighten the romantic tension between a couple. His use of reasoning became more sophisticated over time and it became more effective and philosophically interesting as a result.

We can see this, for example, by examining the reasoning found in *As You Like It*, where a character like Touchstone makes explicit references to philosophy (III.ii¹⁶). While those references are largely comic in their effect, the play marks a shift in Shakespeare's style, a shift that most likely reflects a change in the acting company. For shortly before Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It*, the actor Robert Armin replaced Will Kemp in the company. Kemp was a physical actor famous for his jigs and his ability to perform the sort of physical humour we associate with roles like Costard in *Love's Labour Lost*, Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. With *As You Like It*, Shakespeare begins to use more wit and wordplay as he starts writing for Robert Armin. He creates characters that resemble such 'allowed' or 'licensed' royal fools as Richard Tarleton, who was a favourite in Queen Elizabeth's court.

As just one indicator of the importance of this shift for philosophy, it is easy to see how this move eventually paves the way for characters like Feste in *Twelfth Night* or even the Fool in *King Lear*. Such characters carry greater philosophical weight than the earlier, more physical comedies, and it is interesting to notice that this move was initiated by the demands of performance. The key to thinking about this move in philosophical terms, however, is to recognize the way Shakespeare begins to appropriate reason and the language of philosophy in order to shape his characters rather than simply to achieve some comic effect.

Perhaps the clearest example of Shakespeare using patterns of reasoning to dramatize character within a comedy, one that has clear implications for discussions of feminist philosophy and ethics, can

¹⁶ Touchstone offers a wonderful parody of philosophy in this scene when Corin asks him how he likes the country, making arguments first on one side then the other while hassling Corin to back up his claim that the manners of the court would make no sense in the woods. The scene sounds like nothing more than a parody of the *elenchus* found in Plato's early dialogues. At one point Touchstone even teases Corin, asking him whether he has any philosophy in him (III.ii.20).

be found in *Much Ado About Nothing*¹⁷. In this play, patterns of reasoning and barbs of wit dramatize not only character differences but also the differences between male and female patterns of thinking within an honour culture. More importantly, as Carol Cook argues, it does so in a way that highlights the pervasive anxieties and the potential for violence that can be found in such a culture¹⁸. We might compare, for example, the pattern of reasoning Benedick's friends use to trick him into revealing his love for Beatrice with the pattern of reasoning Beatrice's friends use to trick her.

Benedick enters his scene daydreaming about the ideal wife (II.iii.23-30). His friends then sing a song about the way women fear men's infidelity (II.iii.56-71) before starting a conversation where they explain that Beatrice is in love with Benedick but can't bring herself to tell him and may kill herself as a result (II.iii.136-38). They wonder what she sees in Benedick and they end with a series of compliments about Beatrice.

Beatrice enters her scene walking silently. Her friends start by saying Beatrice is too proud, followed by the observation that Benedick is in love with her and that they have convinced Benedick not to confess his love because Beatrice, though witty, is incapable of love (III.i.42-45). They wish they could tell her about her character defects (III.i.49-58) but she will only use her wit to dismiss them (III.i.75-80). Hero then says that she should therefore tell a lie to Benedick about Beatrice so that he will fall out of love with her (III.i.84-86). This is followed by praise of Benedick.

The line of reasoning used by the women is more sophisticated and dark, and her reaction to what she overhears is importantly different.

¹⁷ Since *Much Ado About Nothing* was most likely written one or two years before Armin joined the company, we must conclude that its combination of physical humour and verbal wit shows that Shakespeare was already moving in the direction of more sophisticated forms of verbal wit and reasoning around that time. We might notice, for example, that Dogberry's scenes are largely isolated from the world of wit found in Messina.

¹⁸ Carol Cook, "'The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor': Reading Gender Difference in *Much Ado*", *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 101 (1986), pp. 186-202. We find a similar reflection on the dynamics of an honour culture in Montaigne's essay "On Some Verses of Virgil". Questions remain over the extent of Shakespeare's familiarity with John Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essays*. For a helpful discussion of Shakespeare's relationship to Montaigne's essay see Stephen Greenblatt's forthcoming introduction to his edited collection of Montaigne's *Essays*. Stephen Greenblatt and Peter Platt, eds, *Shakespeare's Montaigne*, New York, New York Review of Books Press, 2014.

While Benedick believes what he overheard simply because Leonato is part of the conversation (II.iii.196), Beatrice believes what she overhears because her friends say that her poor character prevents them from being able to speak with her about her flaws. Beatrice leaves the scene bent on taming her character, viewing a marriage to Benedick as a means to reform and a way to be brought more fully into the life of Messina. She ends the scene in sonnet form, minus the final couplet, a plaintive note that reinforces the veiled threats of her friends (III.i.108-17). Benedick, meanwhile, leaves his scene flattered and after their next encounter he engages in a wonderfully comic bit of prose reasoning that reveals his change in attitude when we compare it to the cynicism of his earlier patterns of thought:

BENEDICK

Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner'; there's a double meaning in that 'I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me'. That's as much as to say, Any pains that I take for you is as easy as thanks. If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain; if I do not love her, I am a Jew. I will go get her picture.

(*Much Ado About Nothing*, II.iii.227-32)

Whatever ethical insights we might gain into the power dynamics between men and women within an honour culture of courtly love by experiencing an effective staging of *Much Ado*, much of what we learn will be derived from Shakespeare's careful use of patterns of reasoning to fill out his characters.

Similar passages show up throughout the other plays. We only have to think, for example, of the contrast between Richard II, Bolingbroke, and Henry V that is created by their varying patterns of reasoning about the justification and costs of going to war. Reasoning in all of these cases contributes to characterization by articulating a point of view or by drawing contrasts in perspective, values, and background commitments. It clarifies a motivating vision of the world and spurs a person to action. In this way, Shakespeare uses patterns of reasoning throughout the histories and the tragedies for dramatic effect. He has a distinct sense of the way reasoning develops character in a way that is theatrically active, especially in an age that focused on techniques of verbal staging. Speaking the lines in these passages, we might say, is closer to climbing a ladder than following a chain. It is active rather than passive and perfectly suited to the early modern stage.

Of course the reasoning itself, from a philosophical perspective, is frequently unexceptional, but the plays expose a character's process of decision-making in ways that make us care about him in part because the reasoning behind the decision engages many of our own concerns. As a result, Shakespeare's use of patterns of reasoning gives us a sense of intimacy with a character even when they are contemplating regicide or some other wholly foreign decision. Our experience of the reasoning that takes place within the plays generates what we might call a paradoxical proximity of intimacy and detachment that is one of the clear contributions philosophy makes to their dramatic success. This success provides one reason to think about them as philosophical, a reason that uses philosophy to think carefully about the sources of each play's dramatic innovations.

What contribution does Shakespeare make to philosophy?

Having explored the dramatic contribution of philosophy and reasoning to Shakespeare's plays, I would now like to explain how thinking about the performance of Shakespeare's plays contributes to our work as philosophers. First, I will argue that this approach expands the way philosophers already think about the relationship between literature and philosophy. I will then argue that it can help us develop new ways to think about the relationship between drama and philosophy, ways that are tied more explicitly to our thoughts about performance.

There are several ways philosophers have thought about the contribution literature can make to philosophical reasoning. Most of those contributions are enhanced or extended by focusing on questions of performance. I will examine three examples, one from each stage of philosophical reflection.

First, literature is thought to function as a source of inputs to philosophical reflection. For example, following Aristotle's discussion of the way we arrive at our first principle through experience and reflection, some philosophers argue that literature and literary imagination play a special role in the formation of our first principles¹⁹. This is extend-

¹⁹ Tzachi Zamir develops and defends this approach to Shakespeare in *Double Vision*, where he argues that our experience of the plays makes a sub-doxastic contribution to the formation of our first principles. Tzachi Zamir, *Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007.

ed by a recognition of the contribution that patterns of reasoning and other forms of philosophical elements make to the dramatic success of the plays because it reveals the way that Shakespeare designs the plays to explicitly draw on the processes that enter into the formation of our first principles. If I am right, for example, that Shakespeare uses philosophical elements as part of a broader process of metaleptic layering and if I am right that he does this by drawing on the concerns we bring to a performance by highlighting the patterns of reasoning that connect with those concerns, then Shakespeare's plays and his use of philosophy connects directly with the way we form first principles. A study of the contribution philosophy makes to the dramatic success of the plays, therefore, can provide us with a more expansive window on how we form first principles and how that process is connected with the concerns and patterns of thought that animate our lives.

Second, literature has been thought to aid the process of philosophical reflection. For example, some argue that it provides a laboratory for the imagination to probe our intuitions on specific questions in the context of an extended thought experiment²⁰. The literary dimensions of the thought experiment are considered to be important because it insures that the experiment is fully realized and because the literary success of that realization can act as an independent check or confirmation of our intuitions²¹.

Thinking carefully about the way philosophy figures into the dramatic success of Shakespeare's plays expands this approach to the link between philosophy and literature by introducing a set of considerations that move beyond the imagination. The performance of a narrative increases the number and range of independent checks that are placed on a thought experiment. While this increases the difficulty of establishing our intuitions about the coherence or possibility of ideas or claims, it also increases our confidence that we will detect inconsistencies or an incoherence that we might have missed in a purely verbal or linguistic description of a scenario. A performance also makes a thought experiment public and therefore open to public inspection.

²⁰ For a clear account of the recent literature on thought experiments, see Tamar Gendler, *Thought Experiment: On the Powers and Limits of Imaginary Cases*, New York, Routledge, 2000.

²¹ Elizabeth Camp articulates an account of this use of literature. Elizabeth Camp, "Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 33 (2009), pp. 107-30.

This important limit on what can be presented as conceivable should increase our confidence in any conclusions we might draw.

In this way, at least two features of a performance expand the understanding that literature provides us with a laboratory of the mind: the requirement that it is enacted in a physical space in real time and the presence of an audience, which collectively responds to a performance's plausibility. Both features make an important contribution to the idea that literature provides us with a rich set of thought experiments in which we can test our intuitions in a process of reflective equilibrium. This provides a second reason to believe that thinking carefully about the philosophical dimensions of the performance of Shakespeare's plays can expand the insights we might gain from the plays.

Finally, some philosophers approach the literature/philosophy connection as part of the output of philosophical reflection rather than part of the inputs or the reasoning itself. In one such approach, literature provides a way to explore the 'ramifications' or impact that certain philosophical positions might have on our lives. It asks what would it mean to experience our lives through certain conclusions?²²

We can expand this approach to the connection between literature and philosophy if we focus on the connection between philosophy and performance. I say this for two reasons. First, when we experience a performance of one of Shakespeare's plays we are experiencing the world as part of a public experience as a member of an audience. This enables us not only to experience a world defined by a set of positions or commitments, it enables us to experience that dramatic world publicly, allowing us to know what it would be to experience those commitments more broadly. Second, because Shakespeare uses philosophy to enhance the way we experience the play through the extra-diegetic concerns that we bring to the performance and because he uses philosophy to help the play escape the boundaries of the world onstage, our experience of the ramifications or impact that certain philosophical positions or approaches might have on our life is expanded because it engages a deeper and wider range of responses. In other words, because of the role played by metaleptic layering, Shakespeare's plays bring our world into the theatre and they send the world onstage out into our lives. If the hope of literature is to explore an experience of

²² David Wood defends an account of this approach to literature. David Wood, *Philosopher's Poets*, New York, Rutledge, 1990.

the implications of our philosophical commitments, thinking carefully about the relationship between philosophy and performance in Shakespeare's plays can only expand that process.

In addition to the expansion of these three roles that philosophers have identified for the way literature might figure in the inputs, process, and outputs of philosophical reflection, there are also contributions to philosophy that are unique or specific to a focus on issues of performance. We can divide these contributions into two categories. First, the plays can bring out performative dimensions of philosophical topics that are easily missed. Second, some topics are inherently performative and therefore can be better understood through the context of a play. An example of the first contribution is the topic of deception. For instance, focusing on the theatrical devices that Iago uses to deceive Othello can help us identify an important species of deception that philosophers generally overlook.

An example of the second sort of topic is the topic of forgiveness. Forgiveness is inherently performative and it is a performance that Shakespeare first turns to in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as a device for ending a comedy. He returns to the act of forgiveness several times over the course of his plays and I believe there is a great deal of insight to be gained by looking at the way Shakespeare alters the narrative role of forgiveness over time to achieve an ending that works on stage²³. To illustrate that general claim here, I will focus on *Othello* and the topic of deception rather than forgiveness.

Shakespeare's *Othello* provides a philosophically rich account of deception that focuses more on careful staging than on outright lies. Shakespeare introduces the template for Iago's actions in Act II, when Iago offers an account of the fight between Cassio and Montano that leads to Cassio's demotion (II.iii). The scene is central to the plot of the play because it sets in motion the basic features of Iago's plan and because of the way in which an audience experiences Iago's power through his clever use of dramatic irony.

The scene is built around exits and entrances. It starts with Iago privately encouraging Cassio to drink more wine for the sake of his soldiers despite the fact that Cassio admits he can't handle alcohol.

²³ Sarah Beckwith develops an insightful account of forgiveness in Shakespeare's later plays. Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011. On this book see the section "Selected Publications in Shakespeare Studies (2011-2012)" in this issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare*

After a period of drinking, Cassio exits and the party breaks up, leaving Iago and Montano onstage. Roderigo appears but Iago tells him privately to leave and find Cassio. He then tells Montano that he is worried about Cassio's drinking problem. Cassio and Roderigo enter the stage fighting and Montano, worried now that Cassio may be drunk, attempts to protect Roderigo, a person he doesn't know, by stepping in and telling Cassio to stop. The two of them fight; Cassio injures Montano, and Othello comes back with the partygoers and asks why there is so much noise.

What follows is an inspired bit of staging that reveals Iago's impact. There are two audiences present: the theatre audience and the onstage audience consisting of Othello and the people who returned with him. Iago offers a masterful summary of what everyone has seen while leaving out important pieces of information that the theatre audience knows but the onstage audience does not. He tells the truth but not the whole story. He starts by telling Othello that he is committed to Cassio and has no intention of incriminating him. He then reports that he was speaking with Montano when Cassio entered the room chasing a strange man. Montano asked Cassio to stop; the stranger fled, and Iago chased him. When he returned, Cassio and Montano were fighting. He ends by saying that certainly the stranger who ran away must be responsible. He leaves out the fact that he knows Roderigo, that he prompted Roderigo to taunt Cassio, that he led Cassio to drink, and that Montano admonished Cassio because he was misled into believing Cassio has a drinking problem. Othello thinks Iago is trying to protect his friend and Montano thinks Iago is trying to cover up his friend's drinking problem. It's clear to Othello that Iago isn't telling the whole story, but given Iago's friendship with Cassio, Othello thinks that any missing pieces must clearly incriminate Cassio. So he rules Cassio responsible for the fight and demotes him.

In less able hands, such dramatic irony, where the audience knows something the hero does not, can lead a theatre audience to feel superior to the characters. The audience believes that if they were in the protagonist's shoes they wouldn't be duped. In this case, the theatre audience, watching the stage audience, clearly sees how they too would have fallen into Iago's trap. The stage audience emphasizes this because it dramatizes the way that incomplete information can distort the ability to properly interpret the meaning or significance of what you actually do see or experience. After all, Iago doesn't lie to Othello.

His story fits everything the stage audience saw. Iago simply doesn't tell the whole story. This move forms the template for Iago's plan, which is precisely what he tells us in the scene's closing soliloquy:

IAGO
 And what's he then that says I play the villain,
 When this advice is free I give, and honest,
 Probal to thinking, and indeed the course
 To win the Moor again? (*Othello*, II.iii.310-13)

The advice he will give will be free and honest. The deception will lie in the significance of what is left out rather than any explicit falsehood. From this scene onward, Iago can say things that are factually true and offer sound advice to trap Othello.

This starts in Act III when Iago suggests to Othello that Cassio looks guilty about the conversation he was having with Desdemona when he's simply nervous about asking for her help (III.iii.38). Shortly after this, Iago echoes back Othello's speech, leading Othello to think that he is trying hard to hide something damning about Desdemona (III.iii.110-12). This is important. For the plan to work, Othello must think that any missing pieces of information are damning rather than excusing. Iago then warns Othello that while Desdemona is pure, it can be hard to tell what is in the heart of a Venetian woman because of their aristocratic manners and dress (III.iii.205). Othello assures Iago he isn't suspicious at all (III.iii.230) but then mutters to himself that Iago must know more than he is willing to let on and he experiences his first doubt, suspecting that he's too old, too coarse, too black, and too far removed from common life as a military commander to be able to interpret what is going on (III.iii.247; 267-78).

Iago reinforces those doubts through another trick. Othello confesses that he is starting to doubt Desdemona's fidelity and he explains that the only way to fix his doubt is to get certain proof. "Make me to see't, or at the least so prove it that / That the probation bear no hinge nor loop / To hang a doubt on, or woe upon thy life" (III.iii.369-71). Iago responds by asking him how he could ever be certain. Would he "grossly gape on, behold her topp'd?" (III.iii.400). He goes on to describe what he might see in lurid detail just as he did in the opening act with Brabantio. Would he be satisfied if he saw them "as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys" (III.iii.408)? What Othello misses is that this act of imagination threatens to alter the way he thinks of Desdemona.

Suggesting that Othello imagine Desdemona and Cassio having sex, therefore, is just as effective for Iago's purposes as a false accusation. What is ingenious is that he slips this into a claim that no evidence can function as proof of infidelity.

Throughout this long central scene Iago introduces patterns of thought that bypass Othello's empiricist demand for clear evidence. By talking about dreams and asking Othello to imagine the pornographic scenes he *could* witness, Iago distorts the lens through which Othello interprets his situation without triggering any demand for clear evidence.

So how might this inform our understanding of deception? One standard account of deception, most fully developed by Kant, is that deception undermines human agency by causing us to develop and rely on false beliefs about the world. If our beliefs are false then our ability to self-govern through reasoning about the world will be limited. Deception, therefore, compromises our autonomy. It works because we trust the sincerity of a speaker to be a reliable indicator that they intend us to take the content of a stated proposition as true and we do that because we trust that the speaker's belief in the truth of the statement is the source of his motivation to speak²⁴. The central example of deception, on this account, is an explicit falsehood stated as the truth.

In *Othello* we find a different form of deception. What Iago says is not explicitly false but suggestive, incomplete, or misleading. The faulty beliefs that results from Iago's plan do not involve false descriptive propositions as much as inapt characterizations or interpretations of the meaning or significance of what someone sees or hears. This undermines autonomy not by severing the person who has been deceived from the world through false belief but through a distorted picture of the world and such a distortion can be achieved through a prompted act of imagination as well as telling an explicit truth but not the whole story.

²⁴ This account of deception is amplified by Lycan's version of Grice's account of meaning. By uttering *x* (to an audience *A*), *S* meant that *P* if and only if: (a) *S* uttered *x* intending that *A* form the belief that *P*, and (b) *S* intended that *A* recognize that (a), and (c) *S* intended that *A* form the belief that *P* (in part) because of *A*'s recognition that (a). Paul Grice, "Utterer's Meaning and Intention", *Philosophical Review*, 78 (1969), pp. 147-77 and William Lycan, *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, New York, Routledge, 2008, pp. 86-97.

Shakespeare's use of scepticism to develop a powerful instance of dramatic irony in *Othello*, therefore, can help us distinguish two modes of deception. The first, more standard variety, involves statements that are explicitly false but stated in a way that the speaker's motivation appears to be her belief that the statement is true. The second involves statements that are true as descriptions but are put forward in a way that distorts our interpretation or understanding of the significance or meaning of the facts they describe. This second sort of deception arises in cases where the act you perform with your language differs from the act suggested by the content of your language. The split is not between your statement and the world but between what you say and what you are doing with your statement. Two simple examples here are the common refrain, "Are you certain?" which serves to reinforce Othello's doubt and Iago's consistent use of apparent restraint. He claims, for example, that he would rather have his tongue ripped out of his mouth than to implicate Cassio, but that statement itself does much of the work to condemn him.

In order to get a handle on this second type of deception we need to clearly distinguish between the content of what we say and the act we are performing through a speech, between the dramatic act of what the speaker is doing through a speech and the content of that speech. Dramatic deception is not a slip between the truth or falsehood of the propositional content of one's speech but rather between the expressive and illocutionary acts that the speech is engaged in. It is fundamentally a performance, a performance that fails to pay the same respect to the truth as an outright lie.

There are at least two ways we might think about the implications this has for the way we think about the relationships among truth, belief, and deception.

First, it is common to attack Kantian accounts of deception by pointing out that in some cases a person may not have a legitimate claim to the truth and so it may be permissible or even, in extraordinary cases, obligatory to lie. My reading of *Othello* points to the opposite problem. By emphasizing the act of assertion, Kantian accounts of deception may well overemphasize the moral significance of deceiving someone through an explicit falsehood²⁵. In some cases saying what is true may be

²⁵ Bernard Williams develops a related criticism of what he calls the fetishizing of assertion. Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 100-110.

more damning than saying what is false. This is the chilling realization we have when Iago confronts the audience by saying: "And what's he then that says I play the villain, / When this advice is free I give, and honest" (II.iii.310-11). The very fact that a statement is literally true can make it a greater danger to autonomy. It distorts while it avoids the obstacles of evidence that might surely trip it up. It engages in slander under the guise of assertion. It brings chaos rather than falsehood.

Second, this reading of the play, which starts with the way Shakespeare uses the problem of deception to enhance its dramatic irony, reveals a particularly potent form of unethical language. People can make claims that are true in content but malicious in intent or effect. We might draw a clear parallel here between Iago and certain potent forms of hate speech. Statements of fact, even when those statements are true, may not be innocent because of the way they are caught up in a larger human action and the way they connect with human vulnerability, isolation, and manipulation. So even if a jealous or controlling man's wife has been unfaithful in some of the ways he alleges, such a charge or assertion might be deceptive because the motivation behind the assertion or the way in which the assertion is being used or the effect it has on the people who hear or utter it is abusive, racist or in some other way false²⁶. This is something we miss if we fail to see the distinction between the two modes of deception that become clear once we attend to the specific ways in which Shakespeare uses the philosophical problem of deception to enhance the dramatic tension of *Othello*.

Overcoming philosophical challenges

In this third and final section of the essay I argue that thinking about the dramatic dimensions of Shakespeare's plays helps address three general concerns that have been raised over recent efforts to connect

²⁶ Slavoj Žižek makes a similar claim. He writes: "Even if all the reports on violence and rapes had proven to be factually true, the stories circulating about them would still be 'pathological' and racist, since what motivated these stories were not facts, but racist prejudices, the satisfaction felt by those who would be able to say: 'You see, Blacks really are like that, violent barbarians under the thin layer of civilization!'. Slavoj Žižek, "The Subject Supposed to Loot and Rape: Reality and Fantasy in New Orleans", *In These Times*, 20 October 2005.

literature and philosophy. My goal with respect to each of these concerns is to explain how focusing on performance provides new ways of responding to them. All three concerns attack the idea that a work of imaginative literature or a play can be thought to possess philosophical insights.

I will call the first challenge the Archimedes problem. If Archimedes did, in fact, come to an important insight about the relationship between volume and mass while bathing in a tub and if part of the reason for that inspiration was that the tub provided a clear and dramatic instance of that principle, we would not conclude that bathtubs are mathematically or philosophically interesting or valuable. They may have been valuable to a mathematician or a philosopher because they played a role in their insight, but that does not entail that bathtubs possess philosophical or mathematical value. While a pleasant soak may have been a source of inspiration to Archimedes, all we need to know about the relationship between mass and volume can be fully and completely described without any reference to that experience. The tub is, at best, a memorable but mathematically irrelevant object.

The same problem threatens to arise for the philosophical insights we might gain from an experience of a work of literature or a play. The fact that we can state the lesson in an essay, or the fact that we can provide reasons to defend the truth of a claim a literary work inspires, demonstrates that the work is not, strictly speaking, necessary. And since nothing about a literary work compels our assent and since most works do not attempt to develop the claim that something is entailed by premises that the audience holds as true, a literary or dramatic work cannot count as a sufficient condition for recognizing the truth of a claim that it is held to support. Imaginative works, even when they are richly philosophical, are not arguments. They make no attempt to provide the necessary or the sufficient conditions for establishing the truth of a general claim or insight.

It is important, however, not to overstate this potential challenge. The central question is whether the literary features of a work are separable from the message or insight the work is thought to communicate. My argument in this paper is that this problem becomes less acute if we focus on the dramatic or performative dimension of Shakespeare's plays. I say that because I have not suggested that we can simply read the philosophical lessons off the text. The insights

become apparent only when we apply the text to a possible performance and think carefully about the work that the philosophical material does in creating that performance.

For example, I argued that it's our physical presence as an audience in the dagger scene of *Macbeth* that brings out the relevance of Macbeth's earlier ethical arguments against regicide. With *Othello*, it was experiencing the dramatic irony of Iago's patterns of deception that made us aware of a second kind of deception. To be clear, I am not arguing that we could never have come to those truths in any other way. What I am arguing is that the literary features of the performances do real philosophical work in producing the insights we draw from a performance. It is the performative dimension of the included philosophy which does that work. Therefore, the content of the insight is not separable from the dramatic value.

It's important to remember that the key question raised by the Archimedes problem is whether the literary or dramatic features of the play do real philosophical work, not whether that work could have been accomplished in some other way. The answer to that central question, at least in the case of Shakespeare, seems to be yes, because the presence of the philosophical elements contributes to the dramatic success of the plays. From what we have seen the connection moves in both directions. The dramatic performance of the play does real philosophical work and the philosophical dimensions of the play makes a real contribution to the dramatic or literary success of the play. So the thesis I defend here *can* establish a genuine connection between the literary or dramatic value of a work and the philosophical insights that works might generate, since the connection works in both directions.

I will call the second problem the exclusivity problem. The nature of a literary work is that it supports numerous interpretive approaches. This is especially true when it comes to Shakespeare. As Keats famously points out, Shakespeare's greatest intellectual virtue is his negative capability, or the fact he "is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"²⁷. But if we think that a work can hold or possess an insight then we exclude those interpretations that are at odds with

²⁷ John Keats, *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats*, New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899, p. 277.

the philosophical insight we believe lies within the work²⁸.

I think we can partly overcome this concern within the context of Shakespeare's plays because any philosophical insight we might gain from them is not predetermined or independently determined by the text because the relationship between the text and our world is mediated by a performance. Just as one staging of a play does not exclude other stagings, one approach to the philosophical material we find in a play need not exclude others.

This brings us back to my earlier observation that the philosophical dimensions of Shakespeare's plays contribute to a general pattern of metaleptic layering. The fact that the philosophical dimensions to the plays involve the introduction of extra-diegetic features of the world implies that the philosophical content is not exclusively a feature of the play. That is part of the point in distinguishing between a play and its performance.

So nothing in the account I have offered suggests the exclusion of other interpretive schemes. Quite the opposite. What makes the plays philosophically fruitful in many instances is precisely the flexibility of the interpretive schemes they encourage and the multitude of ways we can connect the plays with our ongoing interests and concerns offstage.

A third challenge might be called the problem of verification. Some philosophers view literature as a thought laboratory where we try out new ideas or conceptual schemes. The problem that is sometimes raised for this analogy is that there is no clear counterpart to a method of confirmation or disconfirmation. We might think that the dramatic or literary success of a work reveals something true about a claim that is explored in a literary work, but that success is largely a product of forces that are blind to truth. Nothing in the success of the work indicates the truth of the claims that work entertains. To put this in the strongest terms available, the act of philosophy or philosophical inquiry is foreign to, or even hostile to, literary value²⁹.

Once again, I believe that focusing on the performance of Shake-

²⁸ Katherine Thomson-Jones has articulated the most complete discussion of this criticism. Katherine Thomson-Jones, "Art, Ethics, and Critical Pluralism", *Metaphilosophy*, 43:3 (2012), pp. 275-93.

²⁹ Peter Kivey offers a description of this concern based on the difference between philosophical inquiry and the appreciation of literary value. Peter Kivey, *Philosophy of Arts: An Essay in Differences*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 125.

Shakespeare's plays addresses this concern by introducing an additional entity. On the approach I have been defending it is not simply a philosopher facing a work of literature and it is not simply a case of attempting to represent a certain philosophical position or claim that might be found within that work. In the approach I defend there is a middle or mediating entity, a performance that lies between the text and our response.

As we have seen, this performance can often provide an interesting blend between the diegetic world of the play and the real world offstage. So the act of critical receipt parallels the act of directing the play more than it does the act of witnessing it. But given what we have seen, Shakespeare's plays have an essentially dramaturgical character and so to address the performance issues that are inherent to a proposed production we must address the various problems that arise out of the play's metaleptic layering. In many cases, therefore, questions about philosophy will be essential to a proposed production and the truth or consistency of the reasons we apply to those questions will be constrained or shaped by the features of the world that layering appeals to.

And so we find that thinking carefully about the relationship between philosophy and the performance of Shakespeare's plays enables us to address three important concerns that have been raised concerning the role literature might play in philosophical reflection.

Conclusion

It is exciting to see the many ways that philosophers are thinking carefully about Shakespeare's plays. The primary conclusion I draw in this essay is that philosophers need to think more carefully about their performance. I think that for many philosophers there is a fear that the performance elements, while interesting, stand in contrast to the philosophical richness of Shakespeare's plays. Their attitude toward the performance is not unlike Lucentio's servant Tranio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, who might tell us in this context that the purpose of theatre is pleasure and bringing in too much philosophy simply ruins it. Philosophy might be appropriate to a literary exploration of the plays, but the performance elements are oriented toward the pleasures of the theatre and so they don't carry any real

philosophical significance on their own. My argument has been that this is simply not true when it comes to thinking about Shakespeare since his interest in philosophy, especially before the later romances, was oriented by his dramatic goals. As a result, the intersection between philosophy and performance in the context of Shakespeare's plays provides us with rich material for philosophical thought. It enables us to recognize the contribution that philosophy makes to the dramatic success of the plays and it enables us to recognize the contributions the plays make to philosophy.