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Ways of Seeing in Renaissance Theatre: Speculating on Invisibility

In a list of goods bought for his company, the Lord Admiral's Men, Philip Henslowe records making a payment for a rather remarkable garment: "a robe for to goo invisibell."[1] However, Henslowe himself does not seem particularly impressed by his acquisition. For all its magical promise, this robe of invisibility sits innocuously in the middle of a list of other costumes purchased since April 3, 1598, including such basics as a "payer of long black wollen stockens."[2] Furthermore, the invisibility robe was not especially expensive. "Bowght" with "a gown for Nembia," it is jointly priced at £3 and 10S. It is impossible to know how much of this sum was spent individually on the robe and how much on the gown, but comparison with other items in the inventory provides a sense of the relative cheapness of the double purchase.[3] According to the same section of the accounts, Henslowe paid over a pound more for a "black satten dublett" and a "payer of rownd howsse paned of vellevett," and about twice as much for "a dublett of whitt satten layd thicke with gowld lace, and a payer of rowne pandes hosse of cloth of sylver, the panes layd with gowld lace."[4] Invisibility came cheaper than Elizabethan glamour. But while the sumptuous garments are fastidiously described (at least in terms of their pricier properties), the "robe for to goo invisibell" is, appropriately enough, a blank. This item is identified by its function, but its appearance and material features remain obscure.

So, how did early modern actors and playwrights represent invisible characters? It is a trick that (dis)appears in a range of Renaissance drama. In *The Tempest*, the spirit Ariel interferes with the shipwrecked arrivals on Prospero's island, but is invisible to them; in *Doctor Faustus*, the magician and Mephistopheles steal the Pope's food and drink while remaining unseen; and a stage direction in *The Old Wiues Tale* demands "*Enter Jack invisible*," much as one in *The Late Lancashire Witches* specifies "*Enter an inuisible spirit*."[5] Clearly, the most mimetic way of making an actor invisible would be to keep him offstage, but the action of appearing invisible refuses such verisimilitude. It is a rather different proposition from moments when dialogue refers to figures

that are not seen by onstage characters and the watching audience, or when figures are visible to other onstage characters but are invisible to the audience.[6] By contrast, staged invisibility is not a (comparatively) simple matter of disappearing or removing oneself from view, but rather of showing up unseen. This kind of invisibility is performed. Characters are staged as invisible across different genres, in comedies, tragedies, and mythical plays produced in professional playhouses in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[7] Etymologically, "theatre" means "to see or behold," and so to make the invisible theatrical is to perform a paradox.[8] It is to create a tension in the act of viewing whereby what is seen is not what is meant. But it is this very awkwardness that makes staged invisibility revealing for an understanding of how vision worked in Renaissance playhouses. Staged invisibility intensifies the interpretive work that underpins all theatrical viewing, where spectators see actors but can read characters, or view synecdochic props (e.g. ropes) but recognize a fictional location (a ship at sea). Understanding the dynamics of staged invisibility provides an insight into how audiences engaged with the visual content of plays and clarifies the mechanics of theatrical seeing. This exploratory essay investigates not only how invisible characters were staged in Renaissance theatre, but also what it means to represent invisibility, and what the viewing of invisibility might tell us about how theatricality works. An easily understood theatrical signifier, the invisible-character-visible-actor nevertheless exposes the complexity of representation. The visual contradiction central to staged invisibility poses questions about the materiality of performance, as well as about the various practical, subjective and ideological forces that influence how spectators interpret what they see. The scope of this essay is accordingly broad.

Renaissance spectators viewed the stage in an era of visual uncertainty. Not only was professional theatre a relatively new medium in which dramatists necessarily experimented with their viewers' interpretive skills, but vision itself was exposed as unreliable in various cultural discourses. On the one hand, sight retained its traditional status as the "noblest of all the senses."[9] After all, this faculty was considered to have a greater spiritual function than the other

more material senses.[10] Richard Brathwaite explained that the bodily eye had a special connection with the soul's eye: "Passions of the minde receiue their greatest impression by the *eye* of the bodie; and soonest are they allayed when the *eye* is most temperate."[11] But this same pre-eminence of the eye made sight spiritually dangerous too: "there is no passage more easie for the entry of vice than by the cranie of the eye."[12]

These long-standing spiritual qualms were intensified by changing optical understanding. Stuart Clark has shown how the European "inherited confidence" in sight's reliability was undermined during the early modern period.[13] Aristotelian theories of perception conceived of visual experience as generally accurate. In the thirteenth century, scholars such as Roger Bacon and Thomas Aquinas adapted the doctrine of *species* and "creatively mapped [it] onto interpretations of Aristotle."[14] While the precise behavior of *species* was debated, one widely accepted understanding of the visual process conceived of it as dependably representational: objects emitted sensible forms (*species*) which carried their likenesses to the eye, like a stamp making an impression in wax. However, "the 250 years between the early fifteenth and the late seventeenth centuries" saw the "collapse of the 'representational' model of vision based on *species*" since "visual anomalies and paradoxes multiplied to such a degree that they overwhelmed the cognitive theory that permitted them to occur."[15] As understanding of the eye deepened, so too did awareness of how easily it might be deceived. Artistic advances with perspectival and anamorphic techniques testified to the eye's vulnerability to manipulation. At the same time, the forces of reformation and counter-reformation brought debates about idolatry to the fore, giving a renewed emphasis to fears that an admiring gaze might all too easily slip into blasphemy. Optical findings were enlisted in moral tracts warning against the spiritual peril of vision. Thus George Hakewill admonished:

> Neither doe our eies onely serue as panders, and brokers, or rather traiterous porters, for the inletting of these enemies vpon the soule, but also as false reporters in naturall, & artificiall things [...Who

> has not seen that thrown] in the water a little peece of silver, seemes to be double in qua[n]tity? and straight things crooked? that from the topps of high mountaines, heardes of cattell seeme to be but Ants?[16]

Knowledge about how vision worked was changing at a time when the spiritual stakes of seeing were especially fraught.[17] Looking at the staging of invisible characters helps to clarify some of the ways in which theatrical and ideological perspectives interacted.

The Cultures of Invisibility

The appeal of staging invisible characters partly draws on a broader cultural fascination with the concept of invisibility. Stories about invisibility in early myth work to expose the darker impulses of human nature.[18] In Book II of Plato's *Republic* Glaucon questions whether the human commitment to justice is genuine, and illustrates his point with the story of the Ring of Gyges. The shepherd Gyges happens upon a ring that turns him invisible; he uses his newfound power to seduce the queen, kill the king, and usurp the kingdom. Glaucon concludes that giving such a ring to either a just man or an unjust man would produce the same outcome: both men would steal, indulge in their lust and kill as they pleased. Ethical behavior depends upon holding people accountable for what they do; more specifically, people and the actions they take need to be *seen*.

Early modern writers likewise understood invisibility as the ultimate (if hypothetical) moral test. Barnabe Barnes lauded honesty as one of the four cardinal virtues of good princes. Taking a more optimistic stance than Glaucon, he claimed this value would not dissolve when removed from sight: "For if [the honest prince] were possessed with that ring which *Plato* mentioneth, by which *Gyges* going invisible became king of *Lydia*, hauing power to do what he list: yet wold his wisdom & honestie restraine him from all violence."[19] The same moral idea has a negative spin in sectarian tracts that accuse Catholics of various hidden villainies. Thus John Jewel rails against Catholic authorities for withholding scriptures from the people, asking drily: "Doe they suppose that theyr sleyghts be not yet espied? or that they can nowe, as thoe they had

Gyges ring, walke inuisible?"[20] Lodowick Lloyd describes the foiled Babington plotters as having sought "to walke vnseene, with Giges ring" and Henry Burton warns that, while Jesuit priests have been banished from England, "they learne thereby, to walke the more invisible, hoping by *Gyges* his *Ring*, to obtaine their desire."[21] Invisibility represents a fantasy of freedom from social structures and the ability to act without consequence. In post-Reformation propaganda, invisibility metaphors symbolized fears of "papists" operating without regard for Protestant authorities. Stories about invisibility in less theologically charged literature provide a paradoxically voyeuristic pleasure: they show what people would do if they were not being watched.

Narrative accounts of invisibility usually read like thought-experiments in Renaissance literary and discursive texts. Invisibility is an obviously fictional device, rather than a real-life possibility. Defending the value of poetry and of the literary imagination itself, Philip Sidney points out that even Plato made his philosophy accessible by "interlacing mere tales, as Gyges ring and others, which who knoweth not to be flowers of poetry did neuer walk in Apollo's garden."[22] The definitively fictional quality of this story also lies behind John Marston's satirical scorn: "Tell mee browne *Ruscus*, hast thou *Gyges* ring, / That thou presum'st as if thou wert vnseene!"[23] Such passing references presume a shared understanding, at least amongst sophisticated readers, that human beings could turn themselves invisible only in the imagination. Stories utilizing invisibility plotlines require a literary acceptance of the device, rather than a literal belief in its reality. Even so, magic books credulously supply spells that produced charms of invisibility, or which summoned up sprits who could work the special effect.[24] Reports of the attempted assassination of the Prince of Orange in 1582 highlight both the wickedness associated with invisible action and the stupidity of believing it possible. A Spanish merchant named Gasper Anastro incited his young clerk to kill the prince, offering the King of Spain's pardon along with substantial riches. These inducements were strengthened, some reports alleged, by "a certain Iacobin Frier (called *Peter Timmerman*)" who made the boy believe "that hee

should goe inuisible, hauing giuen him some caracters in paper, and certaine little bones, as of frogges, which they found in his pockets, with many coniurations and such like fooleries written in his tables."[25] All-too visible, the would-be assassin was captured and executed. The arch-sceptic Reginald Scot makes the boy's tragic naivety equivalent to falling victim to a practical joke: he pairs the anecdote with that of "a foole, who was made beleeue that he should go inuisible, and naked; while he was well whipped by them, u[n]to (as he thought) could not see him."[26] Only the criminally gullible could fall for such a ruse.

Yet invisibility incantations were prevalent enough for Scot to feel the need to debunk them in his encyclopedic exposé, *The Discouerie of Witchcraft* (1584). Scot reproduces details of "the waie to go inuisible by these three sisters of fairies," a program that takes up to three nights and eventually produces "the ring of invisibilitie, whereby I may go inuisible at my will and pleasure."[27] Unsurprisingly, Scot himself is unconvinced by either the elaborate ceremony or claims of invisibility more generally. It is, he insists, against the laws of physics "to bring the bodie of a man [...] into such a thin airie nature, as that it can neither be seene nor felt, [...] it is verie impossible: for the aire is inconstant [...] this airie creature would soone be carried into another region."[28] For Scot, physical palpability is inextricably tied to visibility. He does not conceive of invisibility as a solid object becoming transparent, the supposition which usually underpins more modern imaginings (think of H. G. Wells's Invisible Man fearing exposure should snow fall on his densely substantial body). Instead, Scot assumes any vanishing from sight involves an evaporation of the flesh into a gaseous form – a process that is obviously "impossible." His less scientific observations are still more convincing: "if *Asmodaie* [the demon associated with granting invisibility] can make them go inuisible [...] should they not liue in all worldlie honor and felicitie?"[29] If anyone had managed the feat of turning invisible, they did not appear to have much to show for it.

Even so, while orthodox understanding of the natural world held that humans could not really become invisible, Christian theology was predicated on faith in an invisible realm. Paul

declared "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1) and repeatedly distinguished faith in God from the apprehension that accompanies sight. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians he asserts, "we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18), later clarifying "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). This extra-visual quality of faith was given renewed emphasis during the ongoing Reformation, when visible and invisible categories within religious belief were reorganized. Roman Catholicism steadfastly declared the Church "a visible companie of people," with a papal structure that must "alwaies bee *visible*" to "bee the light of the world."[30] However, John Calvin's contrary insistence that outward appearance was no guarantee of real faith, and that the true Church was invisible to human eyes, was frequently reiterated by Church of England theologians and polemicists in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In *Synopsis Papismi*, the Calvinist clergyman Andrew Willet firmly differentiated the "papist" view from the reformed understanding of the "true" Church: "the foundation of the Church, which is faith in Christ, is inuisible, therefore the Church is inuisible."[31]

But this emphasis on abstract qualities invisible to human perception was, of course, very different from credulity at the notion of mortals making their physical bodies disappear. Indeed, the practical impossibility of turning a substance invisible was one of the arguments levelled against the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. For example, the Church of Scotland minister Robert Bruce objected that Christ's body could not be really present in the "accidental" properties of the Eucharistic bread: "Christs bodie to bee visible and invisible, locall and not local, at ane time; it is in euerie respect [a] contradiction: and therefore impossible to be true."[32] For Catholic writers such reasoning ignored the miraculous power of Christ's body.[33] Disputing Bruce, the priest William Rainolds went still further:

> if he wil credit Plato he shal fynd, that one Gyges of Lydia in Asia Minor, lived there a long time, as true a man as M[aster] B[ruce] and

> yet when he pleased, *invisible*, by vertue only of a pretious stone […] which whether it be true or no, as I wil not dispute (& yet pretious stones and perfect magicians, and naturalists can do perhaps as great a wonder as this) so hereof may be conceived, that wise and sober men thought not that to be a matter so vnpossible, as now these great sacramentarie Theologes beare vs in hand.[34]

Not everyone saw Gyges in the same self-evidently fictional light as Sidney. However, Rainolds' citation of the invisibility ring is part of a particularized polemical spat rather than a standard Catholic Eucharistic defense. By contrast, his co-religionist, John Abbot, draws on the unlikeliness of human invisibility to mock the Protestants' invisible Church. His poem, *Iesus Praefigured*, ventriloquizes a divine voice: "Had I made man inuisible to goe, / I would haue likewise built my temple soe."[35]

While there were official confessional disagreements about what was and was not invisible in religious practice, the more significant issue is that every form of Christianity believed in a divine realm invisible to mortal eyes. In this theological schema, sight was valuable only at one remove. The ophthalmologist Richard Banister celebrated his professional enthusiasm for vision in religious terms: "Sight hath a sence of blessednesse, in seeing the Workes of God." More importantly, what was seen gave epistemological access to what was unseen: "Inuisible things may be knowne by visible."[36] Living human beings saw only a small portion of the Christian universe; the essential part was invisible. Even so, Reginald Scot insisted that the two realms were phenomenologically distinct, so that while human bodies are "visible, sensitiue, and passiue," any scriptural example of "a spirit or diuell is to be understood spirituallie, and is neither a corporall nor a visible thing."[37] Just as a human being could not turn invisible, neither could a spirit take on a fleshy form. By Scot's logic, readers needed no supernatural fear of what they could see, because anything visible was mortal; likewise, they needed no supernatural fear of what they could not see, since spirits were substantively separate from earthly reality. However,

Christian belief in the numinous made it difficult to keep this careful taxonomy. The devil proved especially challenging because of his deceitful ability to confound categories of the visible and the invisible. Cautioning against believing what you see, George Hakewill contended that:

> for the divels subtiltie in deceiving the sight, tis a matter agreed on all hands that hee hath the power (*Vertumnus* or *Proteus* like) to turne himself into any shape, or (Chameleon like) into any colour: nay which is more, wheras the Chameleon cannot change himselfe into white; yet can the Divell transforme himselfe into an Angell of light: and not only himselfe, but other things in such sorte, that sometimes hee makes them seeme to bee present when they are not, and *sometimes not to seeme when they are*, and at other times againe, to appeare in another shape and fashion than they are indeed, & in their owne nature [my emphasis].[38]

In attempting to pinpoint the devil's rampantly slippery deceit, Hakewill's list conflates different tricks. Not only can the devil disguise a physical substance, but he can also disappear it. Thus Hakewill's text indicates that not all Protestant writers maintained the same straightforward separation of the physically visible and the spiritually invisible insisted upon by witchcraft sceptics such as Scot, or sacramental theologians such as Bruce. For Hakewill, breaches in the visual order were possible but devilish; invisibility could only be achieved through demonic means. He raises the story of "Gyges his going invisible, by vertue of turning his ring": "if it were true, I certainely beleeue it to haue been, the working of the divell, not of the ring."[39] Hakewill might be reluctant to credit this story of invisibility, but in detecting possible devilry, he is nevertheless unable to discredit it entirely. In fact, he is rather more credulous than storytellers like Sidney and Marston. Given the immorality conventionally associated with invisibility, it is not surprising that Hakewill should attribute invisible action to the devil. But his cautious acceptance that a story of invisibility might be "true" also reveals the way religious faith opens up numinous possibilities in vision, not always tidily arranged by confessional doctrine. While the

notion that human beings could turn invisible was widely accepted as the stuff of stories, those stories took some of their power from a lingering sense that the boundaries between the visible and the invisible were sometimes porous.

A Special Effect?

Early modern drama works through varied cultural attitudes to invisibility. In *The Puritaine* (c. 1606), Thomas Middleton stages a jest about failed invisibility that works similarly to Reginald Scot's barb about the naked fool. The play features a scholar called Pieboard who pretends to be a conjurer – a con that is, naturally, more remunerative than academic work – and an impoverished Captain who feigns an ability to tell fortunes. For a "litle sport," they convince the foolish Edmond that the Captain has turned him invisible. The trick is performed easily: "why, looke you sir tis no more but this and thus and agen and now yar inuisible!"[40] Inevitably, Edmond's immediate instinct is to behave badly: he pinches Pieboard on the nose and then slaps his uncle in the face – proving Plato's point about the civilizing necessity of visibility.[41] But the moment also reveals how staged invisibility might have worked. The "this-ing," "thus-ing" and "agen" of the fake conjurer's charm give an actor plenty of scope for comic action as he persuades Edmond that he is becoming invisible. Primarily, though, the humor of the situation derives from the fact that nothing real is happening and that Edmond is idiotic for believing that it is; he is demonstrably visible. And yet would the Captain's trick have been substantially different from other theatrical acts of "going invisible"?

Modern camera tricks and computer generated imagery (CGI) condition viewers to expect "realistic" representations of invisibility in film and television. In the 2001 film Harry Potter put on a shimmery invisibility cloak that made his body transparent and his head appear to float in the air; even in 1940, in *The Invisible Man Returns*, the eponymous protagonist took on a foggy insubstantiality. However, familiarity with such special effects blinds us to how easy it is, without technology, to trick the eye into not seeing something that is present if a "real" sense of

invisibility is the goal. It is a point made unnervingly clear in a Transport for London (TfL) road safety advertisement of 2008.[42] Featuring two basketball teams – one clad in black, the other in white – playing with two balls, the minute-long film asks viewers to count the number of passes made by the team in white. Any satisfaction gleaned from accurately counting thirteen passes in the complex choreography is undermined by the question: "but did you see the moonwalking bear?" Sure enough, play the clip again, and a man in a bear suit appears, slinking around the players, but oddly invisible to a viewer looking out for something else. The only "special effect" used here is to direct the eye to focus on a different action. Psychologists call this phenomenon "inattentional blindness," deriving from the "disparity between the richness of our experience and the details of our representation" and our lack of "conscious perception without attention."[43] Such research indicates how little we "look" when we see things; we focus on what we think matters and our brains guess everything else.

While there was no early modern theory of "inattentional blindness," conjurers demonstrated awareness of how visual distraction and aural misinformation can prevent people from seeing what is in front of their eyes. Samuel Rid counselled would-be "iuglers" to use "strange words […] to leade away the eie from espying the manner of your conuayance."[44] And the anonymous *Hocus Pocus Iunior* explained the distracting gestures needed "*to make a stone seeme to vanish out of your hand*":

> Open your hand then tossing it up, and blow a blast, and look up, saying, Do you see it is gone. Your looking up will make them to looke up, in which time you may take the stone againe in the other hande, and slip it into your pocket.[45]

As Evelyn Tribble has suggested, if theatrical companies wanted audiences to share the characters' amazement at the supernatural vanishing of *Macbeth*'s witches or the Ghost of Hamlet's father, they could easily create a diversion in a different part of the stage and consolidate the effect with manipulatively astounded dialogue.[46] Furthermore, Philip Butterworth

argues that medieval and Renaissance theatre made use of similar technology to contemporary conjurers to produce special effects. Stage directions in *The Wasp* (1630) indicate use of a rotating table: the banquet on "A Table ffurnisht" is replaced by "snakes toads & newtes" when "the table turns & such things apear."[47] Butterworth speculates that a similar prop may have been the "quaint device" by which Ariel (appearing as a harpy) conjures away a banquet in *The Tempest*; the clap of the harpy's wings providing distraction from the mechanical business (3.3.52.3). Similarly, Barbara Palmer contends that, even before professional playhouses arrived, medieval theatre had plenty of technology to vanish something from view: "Winches pulleys, traps, heavens, wires, other hoisting devices, and concealing devices, particularly clouds: documentation of their fabrication and use in performance is plentiful, particularly in Continental records."[48] Should early modern actors wish their characters to vanish, they had various techniques and devices to enable them to do so.

Given the availability of such techniques, it is perhaps surprising that so many Renaissance plays also demand something importantly different from an act of vanishing: the staging of an invisible character. A vanishing figure is a figure who, one way or another, exits the stage; an invisible character remains on the stage. To say that someone is invisible is to make a statement about presence: you might not be able to see him or her, but the point is that s/he is still there. And scrutiny of the plays in which invisible characters appear reveals that it is not necessary, or even desirable, for invisible characters to be actually invisible to the audience. Instead, the basic requirement is that viewers interpret what they see as "invisibility." Indeed, as Alan C. Dessen notes, even stage vanishings were not necessarily "verisimilar" actions that involved an actor actually disappearing suddenly from view. The same meaning could be communicated imaginatively: viewers could see an actor while understanding that the character had disappeared from the scene, and that his visible departure from the stage was to be interpreted as an abrupt vanishing in the fictional world.[49] Briefly associating this effect with the staging possibilities of invisible characters, Dessen argues that imaginative viewing makes the

spectator "a more active participant."[50] If vanishing characters might sometimes enlist more "active" spectatorship, invisible characters required it. In focusing on the widespread but specialized phenomenon of the invisible character, this essay pursues the consequences of such active participation.[51] What does it mean for a spectator to see one thing but to read it as something else?[52] How might viewers see and un-see at the same time? Why is this somewhat odd demand to "*Enter invisible*" an apparently easy convention?

Part of the pleasure of invisible characters in Renaissance theatre is derived from seeing something happen. In George Peele's *The Old Wiues Tale* (1595), a stage direction reads: "*Enter* Iack *inuisible, and taketh off* Sacrapants *wreath from his head, and his sword out of his hand*."[53] At this moment, the evil sorcerer Sacrapant loses his power. For the scene to make sense to the audience they need to see an action; they need to see the invisible. Sacrapant is confused about what is happening: "What hand inuades the head of *Sacrapant*?" ([E4v]). His disorientation gives the audience an indication of their omniscience (though not all staged invisibility shares this connotation). But if the invisible Jack were not visible to the audience, nothing dramatic would have happened. Staging the invisible involves making the audience understand that what they see is not visible, while also making sure that they see that invisible action. Invisible characters have to be seen to be unseen.

The activities of such characters provide clues as to what Henslowe's intriguing "robe for to goo invisibell" might have looked like. This costume, whatever its appearance, was a visible sign of the invisible. Dessen and Thomson report that theatrical "robes" tended to be ceremonial or associated with the supernatural.[54] The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that robes were often "long loose outer garment[s]" and sometimes "denote[d] a person's rank, office, profession."[55] Following consultation with the textile historians Maria Hayward and Santina Levey, Barbara Palmer lists five materials possibly used in Henslowe's robe: cloth of silver or cloth of gold (shimmery, but relatively stiff); tinseled satins (advantageously light weight); black velvet or the lighter-weight black satin; a shot fabric (offering changeable effects); or a light-

weight linen or silk decorated with painting or staining.[56] Palmer herself ventures that the garment would most likely have been black, and take the form of a learned man's robe, "the intent being to blend in rather than stand out."[57] However, this conclusion is problematic. Henslowe's description of this robe as being for the purpose of going invisible suggests that it must have looked different from other costumes in stock. If a learned man's robes would do, why buy a special item for invisibility? Moreover, study of invisible characters themselves reveals that they do not blend into the background. While other characters do not see them, invisible characters are often the focus of the audience's attention: viewers are directed to look at them, as when a devil "*commeth and changeth the Popes bottles*" despite the "spetiall care" of the bottle-man (*The Devil's Charter*); or a spirit claws at a character to inflame her lust, or bites others to send them mad (*The Two Noble Ladies*); or when a fairy king drugs a sleeping fairy queen regardless of the presence of her watchful retinue (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*).[58] The flexible, shimmery tinseled fabric or stained textiles that Palmer dismisses as too showy are workable possibilities.

While Henslowe must have bought the robe to be used, it is revealing that no extant play refers to it: theatrical invisibility does not require a purpose-bought costume. In fact, no particularly "special" effect is necessary. It may be difficult to turn invisible in real life, but on the stage it is extremely easy, as is evident in the 1604 quarto of *Doctor Faustus* (A-Text). Faustus instructs Mephistopheles: "charme me that I may be inuisible, to do what I please vnseene of any whilst I stay in Rome." The devil readily complies: "So Faustus, now do what thou wilt, thou shalt not be discerned."[59] In the 1616 quarto (B-Text) Mephistopheles puts considerably more effort into the same trick. Waving a "Magicke wand" and enlisting "The Planets seuen" as well as "Hell and the Furies," the B-Text devil enacts a ten-line ritual in which Faustus must kneel and put on a "girdle."[60] However, the A-Text's single line works just as well. Stage business may have reinforced the words, but any signal to let the audience know that they are supposed to interpret the character as invisible is enough. As with any instance of staged invisibility, this could be as little as other characters reacting as if they cannot see the person in question. In fact, it is exactly

the same process as in *The Puritaine* when Edmond was fooled into thinking he was invisible. On the Renaissance stage, successful and failed invisibility look the same. Audiences accept the visible Faustus as invisible, but understand that the similarly charmed Edmond is not. These theatrically invisible characters do not actually disappear; judged by the standards of verisimilitude, it is a particularly poor effect. Yet the visual weakness of this trick is precisely what gives it such a powerful theatrical impact.

Theatrical Seeing

The contradictory dynamics of visualizing invisibility are especially acute in *The Two Merry Milkmaids* (1620). This Red Bull comedy plays with the paradox of inviting spectators to see and not see, in an effect that is visibly weak but theatrically convincing. Featuring a scholarly magician, it draws on *Doctor Faustus*, but cautiously contains the dangers unleashed by Marlowe's occult tragedy. Somewhat coyly, the comedy plays with the notion of magic as both a theatrical trick and a real force. In the first scene, the young student Bernard, like Faustus before him, sits in a study and believes he has summoned a demon. It soon transpires that this "demon" is merely his disguised tutor Landoff. Yet having shown how easy it is to feign supernatural activity, the play then invites the audience to believe in it, when Landoff himself "really" summons spirits and does magic. These different levels of supernatural performance – in which magic is both a ruse and a "reality" – give the plot some credibility. The play acknowledges that it is possible to fake magical action, but insists that such illusions do not invalidate real supernatural power. At the same time, in counterpointing gauche Bernard with wise Landoff, the play safeguards supernatural risks. Landoff responsibly keeps his magical knowledge occult, not sharing his dangerous skills with anyone else. The representational splintering produced by staged invisibility is entirely appropriate to a play that takes an ambivalent position on magic. Just as the supernatural is staged as both an illusion and a reality, so too are its invisible characters representationally true and false.

Both the printer's preface and the prologue stress that the play's pleasures are primarily visual. The printer explains that "It was made more for the Eye, then the Eare" and the Prologue warns the audience not to "expect" the Red Bull's usual battery of sound effects: there will be "no noyse of Guns, Trumpets, nor Drum, / Nor Sword and Target." And even the spectacles lack explosive "Squibs and Crackers."[61] Instead, invisibility is trailed early in the play as a desirable power and theatrical treat: Bernard is excited at the prospect of a demon that "*maketh a man inuisible*" (B2r). The brilliantly convoluted plot contrives, by means of a ring of invisibility, to satisfy these expectations and turns multiple characters invisible at different moments in the story.

The comedy stretches to breaking point a joke about the fundamental contradiction in the staging of invisible characters: the fact that they are entirely visible. In the play's first invisible transformation, groping confusion produces broad physical comedy:

> *Landoff:* Put on this Ring,
>
> Now tell me Bernard where is Dorilus?
>
> *Bernard:* Into aire vanished, or suncke into the earth,
>
> For I protest I see no Dorilus.
>
> *Landoff:* Call to him, try if he heare thee.
>
> *Bernard:* Dorilus, Dorilus.
>
> *Dorilus:* Why here man, I am here.
>
> *Bernard:* Here; where?
>
> *Dorilus:* Why here, close by thee, now I touch thee.
>
> *Bernard:* This is thy hand?
>
> *Dorilus:* Yes.
>
> *Bernard:* It may be foote for any thing that I know, but that
>
> Now I feele the fingers (I2r-v).

From the audience's perspective, a very visible Dorilus waves and prods at an "unseeing" Bernard, while Bernard grabs "any thing" in Dorilus's body (an invitation for bawdy grasping?). The humor depends upon viewers seeing in two ways at once: audiences must accept that Bernard cannot see Dorilus, but at the same time, the disjunction between this imaginative truth and the unavoidable reality of Dorilus's visual presence is what makes the moment funny.[62] The lack of special effect makes the drama more effective.[63]

Invisibility creates especially self-conscious theatrical moments.[64] While Dorilus's disappearing act might be rather silly, it nevertheless reveals something fundamental about the powers and possibilities of theatrical spectatorship itself. Invisible characters always introduce different levels of representation into the drama. Sometimes plays invite viewers simply to accept the visual signifier of invisibility: in *The Old Wives Tale* when Jack enters "*inuisible*" and takes Sacrapant's crown spectators only need to buy into the notion that Sacrapant cannot see an action that is nevertheless taking place. But at the other extreme, some drama revels in theatre's inability to make a character actually invisible. In the case of *The Puritaine*, where Edmond is conned into believing he is unseen, the fiction is entirely dissolved: the way that theatre visually stages invisibility is openly mocked as the kind of thing that would gull a fool. Yet all instances of staged invisibility – that is, moments when drama *shows* us a supposedly invisible character – create a tension between the power of our imaginative acceptance of the convention and the feebleness of the representation. Such moments are among the least mimetic parts of a theatrical performance, and yet also emphasize how elastic representational tricks can be. When we see an invisible character we necessarily suspend our disbelief, but at the same time, we are also meta-theatrically aware that s/he is merely a representation. Different plays may place different emphasis on one or other part of that equation, but both are necessary.[65] The invisible character reveals the central crux of theatricality, showing viewers the fiction and the reality at the same time. Curiously, the pleasure produced by such spectacle is that of recognizing how theatre works and how close it is to collapse.

In this respect, invisible characters reveal that theatrical spectatorship could function quite differently from the process outlined by Renaissance anti-theatricalists, who assumed that viewers lost their rational faculties in the face of stage spectacle. Stephen Gosson admonished:

> Shall wee that vaunte of the law, of the Prophets, of the Gospel,
> so looke, so gaze, so gape upon plaies, that as men that stare on the
> head of Maedusa and are turned into stones, wee freeze unto
> ease in our own follies?[66]

As Jennifer Waldron comments, "Gosson's verbs for the act of seeing degenerate from an innocent 'look' to an indulgent 'gaze,' culminating finally in an idiotic 'gape.'"[67] Similarly, Marguerite A. Tassi notes, "Gosson conveys a sense of the destructive passivity in the theatrical viewing that results in sensual ease and the paralysis of reason."[68] This fear that viewing could lose all its cognitive discernment when theatrical illusions were presented before the eyes is central to anti-theatrical arguments. However, the example of staged invisibility makes it clear that theatrical spectatorship was an active process, requiring an imaginative interpretation of things seen. A mindlessly gawping spectator would see only a visible actor, not an invisible character. Visualizing invisibility requires an act of looking in which the viewer's credulity and disbelief are both enlisted, and, oddly, strengthen one another.

Yet this same tension drives any theatrical viewing, just not so explicitly. Even wonder at how "real" a theatrical performance seems takes its force from awareness that it is not. Anthony Dawson identifies the particular Renaissance features of this dynamic in era's the "wide open" playhouses. The endless extra-fictional distractions (such as misbehaving audience members) create a "heterogeneity of looking" that actors and playwrights managed by acknowledging. Thus by having Lear desperately call attention to the "dead" Cordelia's lips in the hopes of finding breath, spectators are asked to see a corpse in the breathing actor, and fix on the very tension that could break the illusion. According to Dawson, Shakespeare here stimulates "some kind of meta-theatrical consciousness which at the same time leads paradoxically to engagement."[69] We

might note that the meta-theatrical "distraction" Dawson describes, much like the all too visible "invisible" character, exposes the weakness of theatrical illusion. Theatrical viewing swivels continuously between acceptance and disbelief, a sense of an effect's sophistication and its flaws. Theatricality constantly teeters on the brink of failure, and the pleasure of theatrical spectatorship involves seeing that risk negotiated.[70] All theatrical performance is constituted by the act of being seen; it is contingent upon the viewer's interpretation – an interpretation that understands a relationship between signs and meanings that is (to varying degrees) different from that practiced in "real" life. As the Chorus in *Henry V* emphasizes, theatre is not simply produced by the actions of performers, but through the (usually unspoken) contract by which viewers agree to exert an interpretive effort to read those actions in a certain way. Audiences know to recognize a semiotic distinction between onstage and offstage; they know that a character speaking "aside" is heard by them but not by other characters; they know that a character walking onstage from the tiring house doors cannot necessarily see or hear (or be seen or heard by) characters exiting the stage.[71] They know all this in the same way that they know a visible actor can be an invisible character. Drawing attention to the need to make this interpretive effort can ease that same strain. Making spectators aware of the work they are putting in keeps them interpretively alert.

The Seeing Subject

In revealing the active interpretation required in theatrical viewing, staged invisibility tells us something about how the processes of seeing and being seen constitutes subjects. John Berger affirms, "We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves."[72] What the eye sees – and the way the eye sees – helps constitute the "I"; but then, the nature of that "I" also determines what and how the eye sees. Furthermore, seeing is partly cultural: what we pay attention to and the way we interpret it is socially conditioned.[73] Theatre, *theatrum* – a place for viewing – frames a mode of spectatorship where interpretation is slightly different from in real life. Shared agreement about the theatrical meaning of signs is

needed for plays to function. Working at the birth of professional theatre, Renaissance dramatists endlessly tested, stretched and bent the representational rules that underpinned theatrical viewing and the process by which audiences understood what they saw. The prevalence of incidents of failed theatrical spectatorship in Renaissance plays testifies to a heightened awareness of the complex viewing demands in this relatively novel professional medium. Drama features onstage audiences who cannot distinguish player and part ("You lie, you are not he") and fictional actors who explain away their performance ("I *Piramus* am not *Piramus*, but *Bottome* the Weauer").[74] Such comic catastrophe might reveal an anxiety about spectators' ability to understand representation. But as Kendall L. Walton has convincingly argued the basic premise of theatre is no more difficult to grasp than a child's game of "make-believe."[75] And given that these scenes of theatrical mishap are often entangled in meta-theatrical frames that rely on an audience's interpretive proficiency, it seems more likely that these moments are, ironically, celebratory. There is an incredulous joy at how theatrical representation is easy to grasp but becomes oddly complex when explained. Somehow playwrights *can* count on spectators putting in the interpretive work necessary to transform an actor into a character, a signifier into a broadly agreed signification.

In this last section of the essay I would like to suggest that this representational mechanism can also embed cultural attitudes into the fictional framework. Because it so obviously requires both active and shared interpretation, staged invisibility is a particularly useful phenomenon for analyzing the ways of looking demanded by plays and their ideological structures. The construction of subject positions becomes clear in scenes that revolve around an interplay between the visible and the invisible.

A number of Renaissance plays use invisible characters to draw ideological distinctions between different people. Massinger's and Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr* (1622) stages "invisible" spectacle to distinguish between pagan "blindness" and Christian perspicuity. Dorothea, the titular virgin, is given visual support during her martyrdom by an angel who is invisible to her

pagan tormenters. Her miraculous endurance is framed in visionary terms that exclude the executioners. As she focuses on "Angelo *in the Angels habit*," Antoninus exclaims "what obiect / Is her eye fixed on?" Macrinus can only reply "I see nothing."[76] The special vision that enables Dorothea to see the invisible character identifies her saintly subjectivity; since audience members also see the ostentatiously costumed Angelo, the dramaturgy validates this perspective and shapes a Christian vision. The play's conclusion replays this dynamic, as the converted Theophilus likewise suffers martyrdom, and remains "confirm'd" in his new belief by a "Most glorious vision" that is seen only by him and the audience: "*Enter Dorothea in a white robe, crownes vpon her robe, a Crowne vpon her head, lead in by the Angell, Antoninus, Caliste and Christeta following all in white, but lesse glorious, the Angell with a Crowne for him*" (Mr). Playhouse spectators necessarily see things from a miraculously Christian point of view; this perspective is all the more insistent because pagan characters are blind to what is emphatically visible.[77]

Herod and Antipater (1622), uses vision to reveal its protagonists' moral dimensions. The dying Pheroas sees his "Fear and a guilty Conscience" in a vision that is visible to no one else, not even the audience.[78] His description of seeing himself as Marriam's false accuser creates an image that is part memory, part allegory, part psychological projection and part supernatural visitation. Since the vision is not staged and remains fully invisible to all but Pheroas, it fosters a sense of his interiority, which remains removed from the audience. But similar visions are "invisibly" staged later in the play. On his deathbed, a remorseful Herod is visited by the ghosts of his victims; their invisible status is emphasized by the presence of Augustus who maintains "here appeares / Nothing that's strange about vs" (Lr). To complicate matters further, Antipater shares the scene, in a different part of the stage and a different fictional space. He too is visited by the offended ghosts. The same scene thus presents various figures as differently "unseen." Herod and Antipater do not see one another because representational convention puts an invisible screen between their separate locations; no one but Herod and Antipater see the ghosts because the play's moral and supernatural logic renders them invisible. At the same time, the

invisible ghosts move freely between the different fictional spaces occupied by Herod and Antipater, in a way that the visible characters, chained to "realistic" representational standards, cannot. These surprisingly complex visual demands not only shape Herod and Antipater's tragic subjectivity, but also interpellate the viewers as subjects of the play's moral schema. The invisible ghosts embody the protagonists' guilt. In Renaissance terms, they are simultaneously psychological projections and actual apparitions since the "Conscience" (L2r) Antipater willfully ignores is both a facet of his individual interiority and a tool wielded by God. The audience's omnipotence subjects them to a moral vision in which even the hidden hearts of great rulers are exposed. By seeing invisible characters, viewers are reminded that no one escapes God's gaze.

However, it is not only God's vision that shapes subjects: being seen by other people helps to constitute an individual's identity. This much is evident in *The Two Merry Milkmaids* when Frederick, having put on the magic ring, unwittingly turns invisible and loses his sense of status:

> Am I mad or drunke or the people, both: and blind too I thinke.
> For let me come vp to them neuer so neere, talke neuer so loud,
> gripe them neuer so hard, they see mee not stare and gape, as if
> I were in the aire, and aske, where are you. If wee were out of
> fauour, I should neuer wonder at it, but being Restord, and in
> greater grace then euer, it somewhat troubles mee (K3r).[79]

The comic trauma of not being visible unsettles Frederick's ideas about himself, so that he cannot be certain if he is "mad or drunke." Still more significantly, becoming invisible reveals Frederick's social anxiety: he mistakes literal invisibility for the social invisibility of having fallen out of courtly favor, as if the two are equivalent. It is the eyes of others that fix subjects' identities and place in society, not the subjects themselves.

Yet seeing, at least in human terms, is conceived of as a reciprocal act. This hardwired assumption is one reason why young children believe that covering their eyes or hiding under a blanket makes them invisible to other people. For many decades, modern psychologists followed

Piaget's theory that this behavior marks children's egocentrism.[80] However, recent research by Henrike Moll and Allie Khalulyan finds that children also claim not to be able to see adults with covered eyes who sit directly in front of them. Far from being "egocentric," children consider "mutual recognition" to be essential to the act of seeing.[81] Perhaps it is a lingering intuition that vision normally involves the reciprocity of seeing-and-being-seen that gives invisibility its uneasy appeal as something different: becoming invisible interferes with the two-way process. While not being seen might obscure a person's identity, being able to see others while invisible is also potentially empowering. Early modern writers who re-told the myth of Gyges' ring often stressed that its power derived not merely from making the wearer invisible, but from the fact that the unseen person remained able to see others. Thus Thomas Elyot clarified that when Gyges "tourned the broder parte of the ring towarde the palme of his hande, he was seene of no man, but *he mought see all thinges*" and Thomas Morton likewise specified that being invisible meant "*seeing any*, & [being] seene of none" (my emphasis).[82] The advantages of breaking free of the reciprocal exchange underpinning vision are not lost on Smirke in *The Two Merry Milkmaids*. A Clown but no fool, Smirke declines to hand over the ring of invisibility to the Duke:

> *Duke:* I do command thee let me see the Ring.
> By which thou walkst inuisible.
> *Smirke:* I do command thee not to command me that,
> For from my inuisible Ring I will not part […]
> For being inuisible, I am a Prince (O2v-O3r).

While Frederick lost his sense of self with his visibility, Smirke recognizes that disappearing from society's view frees him from its structures: now he is a "Prince" who might "command" a Duke. Indeed, Smirke values invisibility for the same reason Frederick finds it frightening: it eliminates the reciprocity of viewing that fixes individuals in a social position. Being able to see without being seen affords tremendous power, a point Smirke gives a lightly satirical tone. The practical power conferred by invisibility – the ability to do what one likes without the

interference of witnesses – is here associated with the political power wielded by a "Prince." The logic of Smirke's comical self-aggrandizement hints that ethical vision might not be fully reciprocal across political hierarchies.

Conclusion

A representational paradox, the visibly invisible character could too easily be dismissed as a theatrical quirk. The demands it places on viewers take the form of a specific contradiction: to see and not see at the same time. However, in demonstrating that what is seen (something visible) can be readily understood as its opposite (something invisible), these conventional moments indicate the full elasticity of theatrical interpretation, which always involves a representational transformation. Invisible characters also reveal that one pleasure of theatricality lies in the work of theatrical viewing: a (sometimes conscious) process of translating a sign into its signification and back again. Furthermore, staged invisibility – with its obvious insistence on a shared, constructed vision – can help adumbrate the cultural values that condition a play's way of looking at things.

By way of conclusion, I want to test out how staged invisibility might consolidate a play's broader vision and provide insights into its meaning. In the brutally spectacular *Macbeth*, a weird collection of supernatural phenomena is made visually available to the protagonist and his audience, including witches, a ghost, and a satanic dumb show. But other images remain as what Andrew Sofer terms "dark matter," that is, fully invisible or unseen elements of the play that nevertheless structure its action.[83] These range from the bedlam of battle, to the "spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts," to the regicide at the heart of the play.[84] Marguerite A. Tassi compellingly argues that the pervasive quality of these "invisible elements" (literally unseen content as distinct from the staged invisibility I have concentrated on in this essay) produces "unease, dread, and horror" as they fascinate both Macbeth and the watching audience.[85] I would

like to widen this observation by considering some of the specific ways of seeing invoked by *Macbeth* in its concern with the unseen *and* the staging of invisibility.

Macbeth makes the social and subjective implications of visibility central to its tragic vision. In particular, its protagonist, who craves invisibility, is literally haunted by a sense of being looked at. When Macbeth develops criminal intentions, after learning that the first part of the Witches' prophecy has come true, he longs to be obscured from view:

> Stars hide your fires,
>
> Let not light see my black and deep desires.
>
> The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
>
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see (1.4.50-53).

It is not only murderous action that Macbeth wants concealed, but also his intentions, to the extent that he wishes to hide even from himself ("The eye wink at the hand") and urges stars to veil themselves. Martin Wiggins points out that Macbeth's conscience is theatrically unusual: earlier staged villains, such as Richard III, are tormented by their bad deeds after the fact, but Macbeth struggles with guilt as he merely contemplates murder.[86] This sense of conscience is visually defined: it is Macbeth's eye. Macbeth's guilty dread of looking at his own intentions keeps his language imprecise: the "it" he wants "done" is unspecific (and the impersonal pronoun remains his preferred method of referring to Duncan's murder even once the plan is forged). Granting "light" the power of sight perhaps also suggests a dread of divine witness, a thought too horrible to clarify. In a parallel scene, moments later, Lady Macbeth implores more explicitly:

> Come thick night,
>
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
>
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
>
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
>
> To cry, "Hold, hold." (1.5.50-54)

Once again, the pragmatic desire to keep criminal behavior safely out of sight is coupled with a guilty impulse to shut the eye of conscience: the murderous act (here, only a metaphor for some plot that has not yet been hatched) is itself blind and heaven is prevented from "peep[ing]" and interfering. Macbeth's refusal to see his criminality is again manifest after the murder of Duncan when he finds himself unable to return to deal with the crime scene: "Look on't again, I dare not" (2.2.53). To see is to contemplate the conscience.

Macbeth's guilt produces a mental disorder that is registered visually just prior to the murder too. Famously hallucinating a dagger, Macbeth wonders if he sees a "false creation / Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain" (2.1.38-9). In many productions, as was presumably the case on Shakespeare's stage, the dagger remains fully invisible to the audience, so that spectators gain a sense of the graphic dimensions of Macbeth's mind: the invisible dagger provides an insight into Macbeth's subjectivity. But accessible to the spectators only through words, the dagger also stresses his separation from "us," from people who do not see things which are not present.[87] Regicide isolates Macbeth in a way that brutal violence performed on behalf of his king (reported at the start of the play) does not. The "fatal vision" (2.1.36) marks Macbeth's tragic alienation from his society, a point intensified when the audience do not share his perspective.

The murder of his friend Banquo prompts still more revealing visual interactions. Once again, Macbeth wants the murder shrouded into invisibility, urging "seeling night" to "Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day" and use a "bloody and invisible hand" (3.2.47-9). But in the event darkness instead thwarts Macbeth's plans and leaves the murderers in squabbling confusion:

> *3 Murderer:* Who did strike out the light?
>
> *1 Murderer:* Was't not the way?
>
> *3 Murderer:* There's but one down: the son is fled. (3.3.18-19)

While Fleance escapes, Macbeth is unable to avoid a sense of being seen. His celebratory banquet is gate-crashed by Banquo's ghost, a vision the stage direction insists is visible to the

audience: "*Enter the Ghost of Banquo, and sits in Macbeth's place*" (3.4.35).[88] It takes another ten lines for Macbeth to notice the ghost who is invisible to the other banqueters, so that audience members have an omniscient anticipation of the uproar to follow. Macbeth's terror springs not only from seeing a ghost, but from the horrifying way the ghost seems to see him too: "Thou canst not say I did it: never shake / Thy gory locks at me" (3.4.47-8). Despite his desperate denial, Macbeth is forced to confront a manifestation of his own conscience that insistently looks at him. His panicky attempts to shrug off the ghost's power simultaneously pinpoint what makes it so disturbing: "Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too" (3.4.67). This ghost does not need to speak; it is being seen by it that torments Macbeth. And the nature of the ghost's vision is uncanny: "Thou hast no speculation in those eyes / Which thou dost glare with" (3.4.83-4). In *The English Expositor* (1616), Richard Bullokar defined "*Speculation*" as "The inward knowledge, or beholding of a thing."[89] Highlighting the aberrant nature of eyes that look without perceiving, Macbeth both tries to reject the significance of the ghost's gaze and also exposes the barest form of his fear: the actual look itself.

The agonistic upheaval of the tragedy is registered in the visual dynamics of the ghost scene, which requires the audience to negotiate various different perspectives at once. Viewers both understand that Macbeth's guilt makes him see a ghost, but also recognize that the same ghost is invisible to the other characters on stage: Macbeth's violation of the social order places him outside its scope. At the same time, while the banqueting lords cannot see the ghost, they also have to pretend not to see their new king's wild behavior. The only acknowledgement of the situation is Ross's cautious four-word question: "What sights, my lord?" (3.4.114). Under Macbeth's tyrannical rule, subjects might not see what their king sees, but they also have to avoid seeing what is evident. Nevertheless, this moment fulfils a real fear for Macbeth: he is unable to avoid the accusatory gaze of his victim, and, though he does not realize it, he exposes himself to the eyes of his lords. The tragedy seems to insist that it is impossible for human beings to be fully concealed, to be invisible: Macbeth is seen. The representational demands of the invisible

ghost mean that the audience must negotiate the play's visual structures, which are conditioned by social and spiritual imperatives. Ultimately, the disorder of Macbeth's violent usurpation and "watchful tyranny" (5.9.33) is corrected by the coronation of Malcolm. It is significant that when the future king is first persuaded to return home, he is told: "your eye in Scotland / Would create soldiers, make our women fight / To doff their dire distresses" (4.3.187-9). At a literal level, the point is that Malcolm needs to be seen to inspire a revolt, but the image of the "eye" also reinstates a healthier visual economy, in which people see and are seen.

This necessarily brief glance at the visual dynamics of *Macbeth* exemplifies some of the interpretive possibilities of exploring what the implications of staged invisibility reveal about theatrical viewing. Not all Renaissance plays share *Macbeth*'s visual focus. But my point is not to suggest one schematic vision for Renaissance drama, but rather to encourage awareness of how the specific ways of seeing invited by individual plays are central to their meaning. The staging of invisibility is important because it highlights how theatrical representation requires active visual interpretation on the part of spectators, enforcing a shared understanding of signs between players and viewers. Furthermore, as Plato made clear, seeing is bound up with ethics, with how humans interact with one another, and with the kind of agency individuals have and feel free to exercise. In disrupting the normal dynamics of seeing, invisibility helps to illuminate the social assumptions underpinning ethical behavior. The phenomenon of staged invisibility not only produces theatrical pleasure (the thrill of being in on the device), but also provides key moments for seeing how the representational organization of a play enlists the spectators in its ideological interests. Exposing the terms of theatrical viewing equips us to scrutinize the perspectives to which spectators are subjected and makes Gyges visible once more.

Endnotes

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[1] R. A. Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary, 2nd Edition* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 325. This list was seen by Edmond Malone, but the manuscript papers on which it appears are now lost.

[2] Foakes, *Henslowe's Diary,* 325.

[3] See also discussion in Barbara D. Palmer, "Staging Invisibility in English Early Modern Drama," *Early Theatre* 11, no. 2 (2008): 121. As will later become clear, my interpretation of this "robe" differs from that of Palmer.

[4] Foakes, *Henslowe's Diary*, 325.

[5] George Peele, *The Old Wiues Tale* (London, 1595), [E4v]; Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, *The Late Lancashire Witches* (London, 1634), [D4r]. See Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 121.

[6] This essay explores the implications of the instructions given in early modern texts, but does not therefore assume that every early modern production strictly adhered to them.

[7] Tragedies featuring invisible characters include: *Doctor Faustus* (1604 and 1616), *The Devil's Charter* (1606), *Macbeth* (1606) and *Herod and Antipater* (1622); comedies include: *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), *The Old Wives Tale* (1595), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600), and *The Two Merry Milkmaids* (1620). Invisibility is also staged in the manuscript play *The Two Noble Ladies* (1622), the tragicomic *Witch of Edmonton* (1621), and the miraculous *The Virgin Martyr* (1622) and *Saint Patrick for Ireland* (1640).

[8] On the visual roots of "theatre," see Marguerite A. Tassi, *The Scandal of Images* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005), 16; Mary Thomas Crane, "Optics," in *Early Modern*

Theatricality, ed. Henry S. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 250; and Henry S. Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 81.

[9] Richard Banister, *Certaine Aphorismes*, in *A Treatise of One Hundred and Thirteene Diseases of the Eyes, and Eye-Liddes* (London, 1622), [a12v].

[10] Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.

[11] Richard Brathwaite, *Essaies vpon the Five Senses* (London, 1620), 3-4.

[12] Brathwaite, 3.

[13] Clark, 2.

[14] Clark, 15.

[15] Clark, 20. See also, Marcus Nordlund, *The Dark Lantern* (Göborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1994), iii-xliii.

[16] George Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eye* (London, 1608), 49-51.

[17] Clark's monograph (cited above) provides an excellent overview of the different issues shaping early modern visual knowledge.

[18] Philip Ball points out that while twenty-first-century science is preoccupied with techniques of producing invisibility, what had mattered since antiquity was motive; *Invisible* (London: The Bodley Head, 2014), 1.

[19] Barnabe Barnes, *Foure Bookes of Offices* (London, 1606), 108.

[20] John Jewel, *An Apologie, or Aunswer in Defence of the Church of England* (London, 1562), B.iii.v.

[21] Henry Burton, *The Baiting of the Popes Bull* (London, 1627), [¶4v]-¶¶r.

[22] Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie* (London, 1595), B3r.

[23] John Marston, "Satyre 1" in, *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image* (London, 1598), C3r.

[24] See Ioannis Marathakis, "From the Ring of Gyges to the Black Cat Bone: A Historical Survey of the Invisibility Spells," http://www.hermetics.org/Invisibilitas.html [accessed July 26, 2018].

[25] Jean François Le Petit, *A Generall Historie of the Netherlands* (London, 1608), 799. See also, Hakewill, 64-5; and R.W., *Martine Mar-Sixtus* (London, 1591), E2r.

[26] Reginald Scot, *The Discouerie of Witchcraft* (n.p., 1584), 432.

[27] Scot, 408-10.

[28] Scot, 98.

[29] Scot, 396-7.

[30] Laurence Vaux, *A Catechisme* ([Rouen], 1590), [A6v]; and John Fisher, *A Treatise of Faith* (St. Omer, 1605), 52-3.

[31] Andrew Willet, *Synopsis Papismi* (London, 1592).

[32] Robert Bruce, *Sermons vpon the Sacrament of the Lords Supper* (Edinburgh, 1591), [L8v].

[33] See, for example, Robert Parsons, *A Review of Ten Publike Disputations* ([St. Omer], 1604), 213, 219, and 224.

[34] William Rainolds, *A Treatise Conteyning the True Catholike and Apostolike Faith of the Holy Sacrifice and Sacrament Ordeyned by Christ at his Last Supper* (Antwerp, 1593), 345-6.

[35] John Abbot, *Iesus Praefigured* ([Antwerp], 1623), 60.

[36] Banister, [a12v].

[37] Scot, 98, 510.

[38] Hakewill, 58.

[39] Hakewill, 64.

[40] [Thomas Middleton], *The Puritaine* (London, 1607), G3v.

[41] More brutally, in James Shirley's *Saint Patrick for Ireland* (London, 1640), a pagan magician gives a prince an invisibility bracelet to facilitate rape; D3v, E2v-[E4v]. A comic servant shows up his social "superior" by preventing rape when he has the bracelet; Hv-H2r.

[42] The film is available at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB_lTKZm1Ts [accessed on July 26, 2018].

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[43] Daniel J. Simons and Christopher F. Chabris, "Gorillas in our Midst: Sustained Inattentional Blindness for Dynamic Events," *Perception* 28 (1999): 1059, 1071. This research is the basis of the TfL advertisement. See also discussion in Evelyn Tribble, "Sight and Spectacle," in *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, ed. Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 247-8.

[44] Samuel Rid, *The Art of Iugling or Legerdemaine* (London, 1612), B3v.

[45] *Hocus Pocus Iunior* (London, 1634), C2v.

[46] Tribble, 249.

[47] Philip Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 83. See also Alan Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 261, n. 1; and Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642: Third Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 180-87.

[48] Palmer, 117.

[49] Dessen, 196-215.

[50] Dessen, 211.

[51] By contrast, Barbara Palmer usefully explores a range of invisible effects in drama spanning the medieval period into the early seventeenth century, but does not recognize the invisible character's particular popularity in professional Renaissance drama. Chloe Porter does note how Renaissance drama makes "a point of staging invisibility," arguing that where "Divine, 'miraculous' invisibility requires no explanation" in medieval drama and could be performed "realistically," the later prohibition against staging the divine means invisibility can have "no direct referent" on the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century stage. Porter suggests the "materiality of the invisible character" marks the "dramatists' deference to God as invisible maker, and their engagement with modes of spectatorship which replicate divine omniscience;" *Making and Unmaking in Early Modern English Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press,

2013), 155, 158, 163. This interesting reading is complicated by the fact that although the materiality of the actor playing the invisible character is necessarily a common denominator, the phenomenological status of invisible Renaissance characters ranges through ghosts and mortals, demons and angels, damned and buffoonish humans, adept and inept conjurers.

[52] There is, perhaps, a semiotic parallel with transubstantiation, since in both cases the sign (a visible actor/bread) is an interpretive leap away from its signification (an invisible character/Christ's body). However, structural coincidence is not necessarily ideological congruence. Forcing an analogy with any one confessional outlook risks obscuring complicating differences between theatrical and sacramental viewing, and overlooking how individual plays resonate with the slippery conditions of the ongoing Reformation in diverse ways. Over the last thirty years, scholarly interest in theatre's relationship with religion has been productive, with critics arguing that plays were profoundly influenced by (varying forms of) Protestantism, Catholicism, and hybridized faith. I contend that the innovative and interrogative medium of the newly professionalised playhouse, populated as it was by various writers, players and audiences, was capacious enough to play with different ideas. Invisible characters expose the ways individual plays can require spectators to share a perspective, as players and viewers necessarily agree on the significance of theatrical signs for the drama to function. In this sense, it is not the viewing mechanism itself which takes on an ideological identity, but rather the point of view which it directs. Path-breaking scholarship on the alternatively Protestant and Catholic impulses within post-Reformation theatre includes: Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Afterlives of Saints* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Recent criticism that indicates how drama engages with the hybrid theological context includes: Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe* (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 2002); Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Arden, 2010); Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Gillian Woods, *Shakespeare's Unreformed Fictions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[53] Peele, [E4v].

[54] Dessen and Thomson, 183.

[55] 'Robe, n. 1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/Entry/166595?rskey=On75Mv&result=1 [accessed August 15, 2017].

[56] Palmer, 123-4.

[57] Palmer, 124.

[58] Barnabe Barnes, *The Divils Charter* (London, 1607), Lr.

[59] Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragicall History of D. Faustus* (London, 1604), D2r.

[60] Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (London, 1616), [D4r].

[61] I.C., *A Pleasant Comedie, Called The Two Merry Milke-Maids* (London, 1620), [A2r-v]; all subsequent references are to this edition.

[62] For an alternative, theologically inflected, reading of the play that also briefly touches on seeing "two visual plains," see Porter, 155-82.

[63] The Folger Library's incomplete quarto of *The Two Merry Milkmaids* appears to have been annotated for performance. Leslie Thomson's illuminating analysis of it discusses how bookkeepers responded to the staging demands of play-texts. While conventions such as soliloquy required backstage attention, invisibility seems to have posed no special challenge; "A Quarto 'Marked for Performance': Evidence of What?," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 8 (1996): 196-7.

[64] Increasingly sophisticated theatrical viewing might explain Henslowe's purchase of an invisibility robe in 1598. Andrew Gurr argues that the Lord Admiral's Men's "most creative period" fell between 1594 and 1600, when the company had confidence the audience could appreciate "metatheatrical games;" *Shakespeare's Opposites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52. A costume that required a contradictory visual interpretation fits trends within this inventive repertory.

[65] The convention is surprisingly flexible: visible "invisibility" does not necessarily conform to a generic pattern. Faustus and Mephistopheles' slapstick taunting of the Pope might steer tragically towards damnation, but the immediate effect is comical. However, in another tragedy, Gertrude's inability to see Old Hamlet's ghost – visible to Hamlet and the audience – ratchets up desperate division. Equally, generically similar "invisibility" signifies as both comically "real" (*The Two Merry Milkmaids*) and fake (*The Puritaine*).

[66] Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Acts* (London, 1582), E7v; as cited in Jennifer Waldron, "Gaping upon Plays: Shakespeare, Gosson, and the Reformation of Vision," *Critical Matrix* (2001), 12, no. 1-2: 48.

[67] Waldron, 48.

[68] Tassi, *Scandal of Images*, 18.

[69] Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 96-7.

[70] Nicholas Ridout's observation about post-industrial theatre is relevant here: "Theatre's failure, when theatre fails, is not anomalous, but somehow, perhaps constitutive;" *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

[71] On entering and exiting characters (not) hearing dialogue, see Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 85-6 and 89-90.

[72] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972), 9.

[73] I am not concerned here with different optical theories of "direct" or "indirect" vision, but rather with the interpretation of what is seen. My remarks on the culturally inflected nature of viewing are influenced by Maaike Bleeker's discussion of "visuality" as historically and culturally specific; *Visuality in the Theatre* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

[74] William Shakespeare, *Love's Labor's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* (London, 1623), 141, 151.

[75] Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[76] Philip Massinger and Thomas Dekker, *The Virgin Martyr* (London, 1622), Kv-K2r; all references are to this edition.

[77] Compare Palmer's point about Towneley Pageant, 26, "Resurrection," where "Only Christ and the audience are able to see – and perceive – the entire play: to varying degrees, all of the human actors are blind;" 115.

[78] Gervase Markham and William Sampson, *The True Tragedy of Herod and Antipater* (London, 1622), H3v; all references are to this edition.

[79] Curiously, Frederick here seems to embody the 'airy' invisibility discredited by Scot.

[80] Thomas Kesselring and Ulrich Müller, "The Concept of Egocentrism in the Context of Piaget's Theory," *New Ideas in Psychology* 29, no. 3 (2011): 327-45.

[81] Henrike Moll and Allie Khalulyan, "'Not See, Not Hear, Not Speak': Preschoolers Think they Cannot Perceive or Address Others Without Reciprocity," *Journal of Cognition and Development* 18, no. 1 (2017): 152-62.

[82] Thomas Elyot, *Bibliotheca Eliotae* (London, 1542), [O6v]; Thomas Morton, *A Full Satisfaction Concerning a Double Romish Iniquitie* (London, 1606), L2v.

[83] Andrew Sofer, *Dark Matter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[84] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (London: Arden, 2014), 1.5.40-41; all references are to this edition.

[85] Marguerite A. Tassi, "Rapture and Horror: A Phenomenology of Theatrical Invisibility in *Macbeth*," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 44, no. 1 (2018): 5.

[86] Martin Wiggins, "*Macbeth* and Premeditation," in *The Arts, Literature and Society*, ed. Arthur Marwick (London: Routledge, 1990), 23-47.

[87] Contextualizing Macbeth's preoccupation with illusions in early modern debates about apparitions, Stuart Clark observes that he is associated with "the weak, the sick, the guilty;" 257.

[88] Modern productions sometimes rework this scene's visual structure. Rupert Goold's 2007/8 RSC production featured a visibly "invisible" ghost in the opening of the banquet scene, only to disappear it from the stage after the interval; see Tassi, "Rapture and Horror," 1-3.

[89] Richard Bullokar, *The English Expositor* (London, 1616), Or.