Catherine Lisak, « Dramatic Assumption and the Fracture of Certainty in Shakespeare and Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me* (1605) »,
« Theta VIII, Théâtre Tudor », 2009, pp. 161-182
mis en ligne en juillet 2009, <https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta8>.

Theta VIII

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Philippe Vendrix,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

Responsables scientifiques

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Date de création

Juillet 2009

Dramatic Assumption and the Fracture of Certainty in Shakespeare and Samuel Rowley's When You See Me You Know Me *(1605)*

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Playing upon the sight and mind of both islanders and spectators in *The Tempest* (1611) are a succession of conjurer's tricks. Act Three, Scene Three, famously stages an impromptu appearance of "strange shapes" (III.iii.17 SD)[1]—insubstantial spirits that spring up before disappearing all at once and produce a banquet for the King and his search party to feast upon; "with a quaint device", the banquet vanishes soon after, when Ariel, "like a harpy, claps his wings upon the table" (52 SD). This episode of "now you see it, now you don't" works upon the weary men's senses as a mirage. It is perceived as a stage-illusion in the eyes of some that shows up false belief in the mind of others. Express belief and disbelief are thus alternatively voiced, as the trick pairs off the credulous believers, Alonso and Gonzalo (Ferdinand's desperate and increasingly penitent father, and the aged, honest, well-meaning lord), against the sceptical disbelievers, Sebastian and Antonio (the jeering, iniquitous brothers of Alonso and Prospero, respectively). The former stand in marvel—"I cannot too much muse / Such shapes" (36-37)—while the latter scoff at their companion's readiness to believe in what they see:

1 The edition cited is that of Vaughan and Vaughan.

A living drollery! Now I will believe
That there are unicorns; that in Arabia
There is one tree, the phoenix' throne, one phoenix
At this hour reigning there. (21-24)

Faced not only with a seemingly inanimate artefact (puppet or picture) come to life but also with his deluded partners, Sebastian parodies the posture of idolaters over-desirous to believe in an image: "Now I will believe …". His satire of praise addresses the transferential relationship which the desire to believe establishes between the senses and the spirit, between illusion and ultimate certainty. His mock moral conversion, like perceptual appearance and illusion, falls all the more short of belief as the character grounds his faith in fabulous beasts, the unicorn and the phoenix, the latter being mentioned in connection with the "one tree" or palm tree[2]—an analogy to which mainly the classical tradition assented, not Neapolitan search parties.

Notwithstanding his habitual childish impudence, Sebastian's lines seem to disclose an element of resistance to those prevailing powers that would throw dust in his eyes and make him take a leap of faith in some unconquerable force. It is as if Sebastian were unconsciously standing up to the play's internal dramatist and figure of authority by making Prospero's ability to turn others into elements of ridicule defeat the author of the grotesque himself. Sebastian's guffaws bring down to size the speciousness of the sorcerer's artifice in a way that wins over the audience. He focuses on the pleasure of entertainment one experiences when faced with scenic illusion and regards the ephemeral apparitions for what they are: a visual fallacy, a vain and empty semblance designed to deceive—nothing on which to ground one's convictions.

Antonio adds to Sebastian's hyperbolising cynicism by pronouncing a creed that ostensibly redoubles his companion's mock conversion: "I'll believe both" (24). It is once again the believer's frame of mind that comes under fire. The character toys with the claim that a visionary experience makes the seer a warrantor of truth: "And what does else want credit, come to me / And I'll be sworn 'tis true" (25-26). He goes on to deride Gonzalo's bewilderment in front of such dubious entities—"If in Naples / I should report this now, would they believe

2 The "one tree" is referred to as the "sole Arabian tree" in *The Phoenix and Turtle* (l. 2). One recalls the well-known Greek homonymy of Φοῖνιξ, which means both phoenix and palm tree. In Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the phoenix is said to build his pyre in the tree identified as an Holm-oak or Date palm tree: "Uppon a Holmetree or upon a Date tree at the last / He makes him with his talants and his hardened bill a nest" (15.437-38).

me?" (27-28)—by exaggerating the trust he would place in those whose reported sightings cannot be verified—"Travellers ne'er did lie, / Though fools at home do condemn 'em" (26-27)—thus adding an ironic twist to the laconic proverb that "a traveller may lie with authority".[3]

In their reluctance to engage spontaneously in perceptual belief or to lose themselves in awesome wonder, the jeering men change the role that *perception* plays in this scene. From belonging to a search party having so far failed in its quest to find what it was looking for (Ferdinand, Alonso's son), the scoffers become spectators who make us take part in their struggle to take on board whatever it is they do find, as what they see strains belief. All they end up believing is that they are, in fact, seeing things.

So seeing is believing. Or is it? The dubitative question presupposes the certainty it fractures. The episode from *The Tempest* explores this very paradox and this very breakage. The statement would have us give credence to what appears before our eyes—"lo, and behold!"—and regard what we see as a revelation. It would go so far as to make beholder and believer fully overlap, even when these involve two different people. This combined sense of immediacy and communion may partly result from the structure proper of the saying. The copulative verb "is", placed between two gerunds, plays a pivotal role that translates into an unmediated state of being, as it conjoins two subjective states: the state of awareness and recognition (seeing) and that of assent and even faith (believing). Both states imply what David Hume would later call an "immediate impression of the senses"[4] and a feeling of confidence that is enhanced by the assertive verb "is". The copula expresses equivalence and reciprocity (as in the equation A=B), suggesting even the merging of states or the confusion of those who embody those states. It also posits a sense of causality or reliance (A therefore B), which is not grounded upon any rational, defining explanation but upon an "assumption".

Furthermore, whereas the expression, "what you see is what you get", pretends to dig no further than skin-deep, "seeing is believing" urges us to "assume" a role—to get under the skin of the part, and believe that an outward appearance is consonant with reality or substance. However, by appealing to our deep-seated disposition to acquiesce in what we see, it paradoxically instils an uncomfort-

3 No. T476 in Tilley and Dent, as editors point out.

4 To believe is to feel an immediate impression of the senses" (Hume, p. 86). Despite the anachronism, I have chosen to quote Hume's eighteenth-century wording because it clarifies the unmediated relation between sight (and, indeed, all the senses) and thought, which the statement "seeing is believing" implies and the scene from *The Tempest* challenges.

able suspicion ("or is it?") that behind this confident claim lurks a swindle by the confidence game. The would-be assurance it professes sounds simply too good to be true, both for a theatre audience and for the performers (and characters) on stage. The conjurer, who would make his audience receive his legerdemain as genuine, shares in the implicit knowledge that all that happens, within the fictional space of the stage, is but a show. The rabbit is pulled out of the hat, the woman's head is severed from her body, and the spectators' expectations are stimulated—to be either satisfied or denied, depending on their assumption and on the act performed: a clever trick, but a trick nonetheless. Similarly, the actor who cross-dresses, or the character who assumes another role through the technique of disguise, denounces the imposture of the image he projects, while seeking to pass himself off for what he is not. Altered appearances, like magical tricks, are displays that rely upon the impression of the senses and shared assumptions between the performer (or the performed) and the spectator. Though these interactions are reciprocal, they are not necessarily defining or definitive.

The concept of an "assumption" includes the act of giving one's assent, agreeing to something, as a matter of fact, although there is no objective evidence for doing so. When applied to the make-believe world of theatre, such acquiescence occurs when perception ("seeing") and conviction ("believing") momentarily conjoin amongst the audience, onstage and off. The merging of perceptions, sensorial and conceptual, is a vivacious and highly subjective theatrical experience; it represents the partaking in an illusion, through a wilful act and a moment's decision. For this reason, I will choose to refer to this experience as a dramatic *assumption*, rather than a dramatic *illusion*, in order to emphasize the voluntary act of participation involved. As the scene from *The Tempest* reveals, not only does dramatic assumption rest on some ephemeral certainty that lasts only the time it takes for an agent of mediation (the actor, the character, the play) to make the audience reconsider its reception of an episode, a scene, or the play itself; it also requires an act of authoritative appropriation on behalf of the onlooker, so that the idea of an "assumption" surprisingly compounds the impetuous leap of faith and the spontaneous decision to take on responsibility in one's choice of interpretation. This understanding of the reception of tricks and stage-illusions of all sorts does not imply a Coleridgean "voluntary Lending of the Will" to the "suspension of disbelief", whereby "the comparing power is suspended, and without the comparing power, any act of Judgement, whether affirmation or denial, is impossible" (Coleridge, "A Letter to Daniel Stuart, 13 May 1816",

4 [1959]: 641). Dramatic assumption implies the constant operation of comparison and consequently the endless change of focus and displacement of certainty that constitutes a spectator's swaying state of being between delusion and scepticism, each time out of a sense of conviction, and with a split minute's decision. I will demonstrate that early modern drama had more than an intuitive understanding of this theatrical experience. To demonstrate this point, I will first investigate the way dramatic assumption is handled in several plays by Shakespeare, before turning to Samuel Rowley's early Jacobean play, *When you see me, you know me*, whose very title spells out the proposition that "seeing is believing".

I

Simply leaving us to believe in what we see is not the note of certainty on which Shakespeare's comedies end. The plays claim to deliver us from their grasp, even as they enjoin us to work out their chief dramatic complications. In the Epilogue to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594-96), Robin reminds his audience of the delusive nature of all that it has just witnessed while striking a bargain with them—that they may readjust their perception of their own dramatic experience by having a possible say in the orientation of the resolution: "If we shadows have offended / Think but this, and all is mended" (V.i.415). As R. A. Foakes argues, the Puck appeals to our imagination and to our authority and responsibility as viewers.[5] The term "shadows" no longer simply alludes to Oberon, the "king of shadows" (II.ii.347), or to the performers of the play-within-a-play (V.i.210). Its all-inclusive quality and shifting dramatic emphasis make it refer to the personified spirit, as well as to the performing actor[6]—to all those, in fact, who cross the stage in some shape or form, or role. When Robin first pronounces the term in Act Three, Scene Two, he already suggests that errors of judgement are inevitable ("mistook") when we allow ourselves to take for granted what we see, as he has

5 "Shakespeare plays upon our awareness of what he is doing, our ability temporarily to believe anything while knowing it is make-believe, and enable us to enjoy the play as a delightful flight of imagination, and as an artfully constructed masterpiece which gives meaning to the mysterious words Yeats used as an epigraph for *Responsibilities*, 1914: 'In dreams begin responsibility'" (Foakes, ed., pp. 39-40). See also Montrose, "A Kingdom of Shadows", pp. 234-35 and 240, n. 27: "For 'shadow' as 'applied rhetorically … to an actor or a play in contrast to the reality represented', see *OED*, s.v. 'Shadow', sense 1.6.b. The earliest usages cited by are in Lyly, *Euphues*, and Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*".

6

done. His apologetic tone is an avowal of guilt and a refusal to take full responsibility for his mistake in interpretation:

> Believe me, king of shadows, I mistook.
> Did you not tell me I should know the man
> By the Athenian garments he had on? (III.ii.47-49)

By the time Theseus appropriates the term, it has become clear that the ambiguous, and indeed, illusory nature of all human agency onstage may find a possible solution with audience perception, especially when the audience is prepared to enter into a playful, metatheatrical complicity with the characters' and actors' imagination:

> *Theseus.* The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them.
> *Hippolyta.* It must be your imagination, then, and not theirs.
> *Theseus.* If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men. (V.i.210-15)

The play seems to suggest that the responsibility of the audience lies in reaching a compromise both between the players and themselves, and between their impressions that "seeing is believing" and their own moment of hesitation—"or is it?"

The Puck offers a possible compromise at the opening of the Epilogue—the option that, rather than look upon the play as a play, and believe in what we have just seen, we view the play as something dreamt up, thus dismissing our previous certitudes as figments of our imagination: "That you have but slumbered here, / While these visions did appear" (V.i.416-17). For his own comfort, the spectator may reconsider the play as a spell of delirium, a "collective hallucination", "a dream about watching a play about dreams" (Greenblatt, p. 809), though whatever might have seemed self-evident (however unpleasant) is no longer so, because our disposition to believe and our very grasp of make-believe are thrown into disarray. The outcome of this conventional surrender of power may appear comforting, but it may also baffle the audience, for it has become unclear whether the illusion experienced was born from the play or from the audience's imagination (or, indeed, from both). Such suppositions, which toy with our uncertainty, nonetheless heighten our awareness of the aesthetic potential of the play.

In the Prologue to *Supposes* (1566),[7] George Gascoigne defines a "suppose" as "nothing else but a mistaking or imagination of one thing for another, for", he explains, "you shall see the master supposed for the servant, the servant for the master" (Ariosto, p. 92). His definition involves the playing of one role by another character (who assumes that role), with which he associates the dramatic irony that enables doubt to set in amongst the onlookers onstage and the audience. Cecil C. Seronsy reconsiders the meaning of a "suppose" as understood by the early modern world:

> There is no reason to assume that the word "supposes" itself must be limited now or in sixteenth-century usage to mean only "substitutions" of characters for one another in a mere mechanical routine of outward disguise. For Elizabethans it had substantially the same values in meaning as it had for us: "supposition", "expectation", "to believe", "to imagine", "to guess", "to assume". (pp. 15-16)

Seronsy has argued that the idea of the "supposes" acts as the unifying theme in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590-91), because it becomes "a guiding principle of Petruchio's strategy in winning and taming the shrew" (p. 16). It may also be argued that this early comedy investigates the staging of dramatic assumption especially in its Induction—a moment when perception and conviction converge, allowing for a "guess", a "supposition", an "expectation", or a strong "belief" that someone is likely to be a certain person or to behave in a certain way, while instilling elements of doubt within those characters who strive towards such conviction.

Christopher Sly's "assumption of his false lordly role" (Morris, ed., p. 119) is based solely on his desire to believe in what he is not, a desire that is nurtured by the clothes he wears, the privileges he enjoys, and the counterfeiting of roles that takes place all round him: the page in disguise assumes the role of his supposed wife; the actors "join in the Lord's game and imagine that they are not playing before a drunken tinker but before a lord" (Morris, ed., p. 119). In the second scene of the Induction, we observe the way the character is manipulated into believing that he is not the person he thought he was. His initial self-assertiveness—"I am Christophero Sly, call not me 'honour' nor 'lordship'" (Ind.ii.5-6)—is challenged by the Lord's and his servants' yet stronger claim to know who he is. Sly's eroding confidence becomes apparent as he "rehearses certain facts about himself" (Morris, ed., p. 163) in a set of rhetorical questions, spoken in indignation, that belie

7 Gascoigne's translation of Ludovico Ariosto's *I Suppositi*.

his temptation to believe that he is someone else: "What, would you make me mad? Am not I Christopher Sly, old Sly's son of Burton-heath, by birth a pedlar, by education a cardmaker, by transmutation a bear-herd, and now by present profession a tinker?" (17-21). The Lord's and servants' ensuing ruse consists in persuading Sly that he may rely on his senses. They begin by working on his perception of the world and of himself, that he may trust what he sees. In order to convince him that "Thou art a lord, and nothing but a lord" (62), they promise to show him a set of paintings, like that of Io portrayed as a maid "beguiled and surprised, / As lively painted as the deed was done" (56-57). Their praising the virtues of aesthetic verisimilitude leads Sly to be won over not only by what he sees, but by what he believes he will see, though the paintings remain out of sight, no more visible, in fact, than the figure of Cytherea, "all in sedges hid" (52).

For Sly, not only is seeing believing, but believing is also seeing. Perception and conviction converge in this cross-eyed perception of the world. The character has entered a "virtual reality", conceived to disable his judgement and perception: he is unable to discern the substantial from the illusory and even checks himself to see whether he is awake. As he detects no failings of the senses, he cannot view his surroundings with the slightest hint of scepticism: all suspicion of illusion is therefore lost. In his next set of rhetorical questions, he merely seeks confirmation of a belief he now seems eagerly disposed to entertain:

> Am I a lord, And have I such a lady?
> Or do I dream? Or have I dream'd till now?
> I do not sleep. I see, I hear, I speak.
> I smell sweet savours and I feel soft things.
> Upon my life, I am a lord indeed,
> And not a tinker nor Christophero Sly. (69-74)

For Sly, seeing, like smelling, and hearing or feeling, *is* believing, even if he *sees* only by proxy. Of course, the play's twists and turns provoke Sly's failure to recognize the wiles practised upon him; as with the taming of Katherina, the tricking of Sly turns into a game or sport of make-believe. By the end of the Induction, however, as a last element of irony, it falls to Sly to pronounce the conventional, simple caveat, when he sits down to watch a play: that a comedy (or "comonty") is like a "Christmas gambol or a tumbling-trick" (138), in that it plays acrobatic tricks with audience perception.

The play's spectators may have looked upon Sly with distant amusement, though they may also have identified with what they saw in the Induction, espe-

cially as the curtain rose on the play-within-the-play, potentially erasing the illusion. To counteract this dramatic assumption, *The Taming of the Shrew* reminds the audience not to succumb to the propensity for believing in appearances by drawing them towards another perception of the scenic illusion. It fosters our impression that the Lord's tricks have an impact upon Sly's view of the world and himself that is far more disturbing, for instance, than the effect produced on the Lord by the actor who plays the wooer of a gentlewoman: "that part / Was aptly fitted and naturally perform'd" (Ind.i.84-85). For the Lord, at least, verisimilitude remains a matter of aesthetics (however "naturally", the part remains "perform'd").

It remains hard to tell whether the play would have conditioned the audience's own perception of the world around it. There were so many exhortations in the period against giving credit to what was seen that, however much one would like to believe that audiences of the sixteenth century were well equipped to see through appearances, one can only assume that it was something of a problem. Stephen Gosson's *Playes Confuted in five Actions* (1582), among other works, explained that "our eyes" were "muffled", for "in seeing, we see and not perceive" (sig. C5^{v}). His discrimination between sensory sight and intellectual perception was not a message that the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* shied away from, but where Shakespeare's comedy addressed the issue in playful terms, Gosson's pamphlet presented the debate as a moral debate between good and evil. His was the Manichaean vision of a former playwright and actor whose fanatical animosity against plays had finally led him to take orders. This was his way of dropping the blindfolds, as he saw them, which plays and poems impressed on the people's senses. His anti-theatrical tract denounced disguise, cross-dressing, and all stage-business as so many attempts to lead the moral man astray:

> for a meane person to take upon him the title of a Prince with counterfeit porte, and traine, is by outwarde signes to shewe them selves otherwise then they are, and so with in the compasse of a lye. (sig. E5^{r})

The issue was all the more complicated by the fact that the early modern public were directly encouraged to believe what they saw. Elizabethan peers had maces and coats of arms carried in front of them when they travelled, while the sovereign went on spectacular progresses in order to be *seen* for what she "was". Propaganda displayed the Queen's legitimacy through dress and pomp, and the people were portrayed as committed to this manifest legitimacy, which was sup-

posed to act upon their senses as a revelation. Furthermore, sumptuary laws had been repealed by 1604, once Parliament acknowledged the impossibility of enforcing these strictures regulating dress and style. People of significance who dressed lower than their status not only failed to live up to appearances, but were also guilty of a disinvesting of authority and status, as they transgressed "the reliable register of the hierarchies of class and position" (McDonald, p. 232). Investing such attitudes with existential meaning, and combining the commonplace world-as-stage convention with the clothing motif, *King Lear* strips its "unaccommodated" king of the vanity of his "lendings" (*Lr.*, III.iv.105, 106-7), from his crown, which Lear doffs at the beginning of the play, to his boots (IV.vi.171), and the single final button (V.iii.308). Having done away with these "marks of sovereignty" (I.i.229) and unable to distinguish between appearance and reality, Lear questions, as Sly in his own way did before him, his own sensory perceptions: "Does Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?" (I.iv.224). Lear finishes by doubting himself so completely that only "Lear's shadow" (I.iv.228) remains, as his sole criterion of truth. The play stages the fracture of certainty through a systematic shattering of appearances, perceptions and illusions, and by referring characters and audience to another vision of the king—a shadow. From the start, it had been felt that the mask may fall, that illusion need not be sustained, simply displaced, in order to resume, through some other figuration of the self, a mere projection.

II

When, in Act Five, Scene Four, of *As You Like It* (1599-1600), Rosalind returns on stage, no longer in the role of Ganymede (hence, disguised as a boy), but this time playing herself, the other characters are thrown into confusion. The disguise that had, till now, ironically ensured that "seeing was believing" has been cast off behind the scenes; or rather it has been redoubled, as Tracey Salinger suggests: "a boy-actor plays Rosalind, who disguises herself as Ganymede, who then plays 'Rosalind'" (p. 74). Ganymede vanishes as swiftly as Rosalind returns—in ghostly fashion—Ganymede's sole substance and existence on stage being wholly a matter of clothing and impression on the visual senses of the spectators. The effect is a breach of expectation, and the fracture of uncertainty spreads to all the onlookers onstage. Far from having secured some form of reassurance, Rosalind's sudden palingenesis is stage business that underscores the unstable and unpredictable nature of theatre proper. Salinger's reading of the play, from

the point of view of cross-dressing and gender, leads her to conclude similarly that seeing is no longer believing in the eyes of the stage viewer, who

> knows, or will shortly know, that subjective sight and objective shape are anything but true, since their congruence is based on a knowledge that obtains only within the fictional space established by the play. The Epilogue, bringing us out of the play's fiction and into the early modern theatre, reveals that Phebe's sight and Rosalind's shape are not true. (p. 73)

The anaphoric clauses that the Duke and Orlando pronounce, "If there be truth in sight …" (V.iv.113, 114), express in the conditional a ritualised awakening to the traps laid by the relationship of sight to shape. The dramatic assumption that "you are my daughter" and "you are my Rosalind" (113, 114) is not presented as a foregone conclusion, though it does represent recognition, an act of appropriation, and a gain. On the contrary, as Phoebe revises her readiness to give credit to what she sees, she ends on the feeling that only loss (rather than love) lies in the eyes of the beholder: "If sight and shape be true, / Why then my love adieu!" (115-16). Characters thus sway between a sense of bewilderment and wonder, between the mediation of scepticism and the immediacy of incredulity and marvel.

The play's spectators are also put to the test in this episode, with the unaccountable appearance of a figure that emerges from the woods, whom the speech headings identify as the god Hymen. Stephen Orgel is one critic who admits not knowing what to make of this apparition:

> My students always ask me who that is, and I tell them I don't know; we aren't told, and it must be significant that we aren't told—that in the most rationalized of Shakespeare's comedies, the resolution depends on a mystery; there's finally something in Rosalind's plans that we aren't let in on.… Of the experts consulted, however, about two-thirds declare that the figure is some rustic who has been dressed up as Hymen for the occasion, and the rest assumed it was the god himself, and pointed to the analogous appearance of deities in wedding masques. What struck me here was that not a single one of the critics cited acknowledged that we don't know, we aren't told, saw it as a piece of dramaturgy rather than something to be explained away in the plot. (p. 26)

Orgel's comments seem to guard us against any attempt to offer a logical interpretation of Hymen's appearance, as this would minimize the mysterious nature of the vision and the dramatic assumption at work amongst the viewers. The improvised presence of the figure should stir the audience's communal awareness of theatricality, even if, as the editorial glosses reveal, such a sense

of communion and immediacy is broken by the need to fill the growing gap of questioning with answers. Hymen's must remain a dramatic occurrence that deflects the impact of the conditionals, be it only for an instant, in order to give way to a reciprocal inherence of meaning between subject (seeing) and predicate (believing). The saying, "seeing is believing", here operates as a radical appeal to our imagination, reminding us that representation arises out of nothing—out of the empty stage of theatre: Hymen is self-explanatory by his stage presence alone, which spontaneously gives the figure shape, form and dramatic meaning.

Another case in point is when Sebastian re-appears before Viola in *Twelfth Night*. He first denounces the brother that Viola is not, while Viola only half-believes what she sees and assumes she is faced with: Sebastian's ghost. "Seeing is believing" is once again put to the test when a character believes that the shape that appears before him or her—call it magical, ghostly or theatrical—has no substance. Faced with Sebastian, Viola also resorts to the conditional: "If spirits can assume both form and suit, / You come to fright us" (V.i.233-34). To "assume", of course, in this specific context, refers in part to the idea of putting on an article of clothing. Sebastian responds to precisely this meaning of the word when he asserts his existence through the materiality of his clothes, claiming to be a spirit, however "grossly clad" (235). Viola also confirms her own identity by referring to certain garments she had left aside for the sake of disguise: "I am Viola; which to confirm, / I'll bring you to a captain in this town, / Where lies my maiden weeds" (251-53).

However, the idea that a spirit should "assume" a mortal form went beyond the garb it wore. Thus, to "assume" also implies to invest oneself formally ("form and suit") with all that constitutes the identity of the deceased—not just the dress, but the body and what "appeared" to be the very essence of a man, to the point where this counterfeit or simulation blurs the difference between illusion and reality, and places the onlooker in a position of acquiescence, thus ensuring that seeing becomes believing. Editors have often noted the similarity between Viola's line and Hamlet's. Both recall the commonplace debate on the soul of the deceased assuming its mortal form: "If it assume my noble father's person; / I'll speak to it" (*Ham.*, I.ii.244-45). According to Harold Jenkins, "Hamlet alternates between regarding the Ghost as an unknown spirit in his father's shape and as his 'father's spirit' itself" (Jenkins, ed., p. 196). As the critic explains, it is in no way suggested that the figure appears, in Marcellus' eyes, as a mere hallucination, the idea of some delusional fantasy being discarded from the very first lines of his speech. It is Horatio's doubt that is at issue here:

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him,
Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us.
Therefore I have entreated him along
With us to watch the minutes of this night,
That if again this apparition come,
He may approve our eyes and speak to it. (I.i.26-32)

The tension that runs in this speech resides in Marcellus' eagerness to witness Horatio change his attitude towards the vision. By hoping that Horatio will confirm his observation—Johnson glossed "approve our eye" as "Add testimony to that of our eyes"[8]—Marcellus implicitly expects him to go so far as to "corroborate the existence of what [he has] just seen" (Spencer, ed., p. 206), thus sharing his own persuasion that the sighting was invested with an intelligent spirit, and contemplating the idea that beyond "this thing" (I.i.24), he is faced with "this dreaded sight" (28), "this apparition" (31). Marcellus expects Horatio to "approve" not simply his "eye" but the common saw that "seeing is believing" as well.

By his sole presence, Hamlet's Ghost stands before the members of the king's guard as the figure of Sebastian before Viola, in a manner that stirs the onlookers' surprise, thus prevailing upon their good faith and impressing himself vividly upon their senses and their mind—like Ganymede, as if by magic—in a way that ensures a moment's dramatic assumption.

This mode of mediation between a character and his audience had already received more than a conventional definition in the Epilogue to *As You Like It*. There the actor claims, "My way is to conjure you" (Epi.10-11), as he confesses to having played a woman disguised as a man—thus reversing the relationship he himself has entertained with the audience. Though it is standard in an Epilogue for the actor to invite his viewers to take leave of the play's make-believe world, his choice of words does not simply entreat the members of the audience to play along with the codes of dramaturgy. As the editor Alan Brissenden reminds us, "to conjure" signifies both to "make a solemn appeal" and to "affect you by magic" (p. 227, n. 11). As the actor who played Rosalind rounds off the play, his phrase engages the audience through the element of marvel and enchantment, recalling their experience of dramatic assumption (as a leap of faith), before focusing on the fracture of certainty by denouncing the scenic illusions for what

8 As quoted in Furness, ed., vol. 1, p. 7.

they are, then by redirecting the authority and sway the (hopefully appreciative) audience finally holds over a play through a spirit of reciprocal devotion:

> I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of this play as please you. And I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women—as I perceive by your simpering none of you hates them—that between you and the women the play may please. (Epi.11-16)

III

Disguise appeals to the dramatic assumption that "seeing is believing" in several ways. When a character like Viola in *Twelfth Night* changes her appearance in order to go walking freely through the crowds, the truism "seeing is believing" becomes tributary to the rules of perspective and is therefore pregnant with meaning. From where the character stands who is deceived by the disguise, seeing is believing seems implicitly to spell out a mistake in judgement. From where the character in disguise stands, Viola can afford to believe in what she sees, because her disguise, maintained for most of the play, gives the other characters time and ample opportunities to "reveal" themselves for what they are, unaware of who she actually is. Ironically, Viola is in a bind, for, unable to reveal her true self to others, she is held to work out a thorough loss of identity. All reciprocity, in this situation, is temporarily forsaken.

Viola decides to enter the Illyrian society, as Cesario, only once she has been presented with the "picture" in full. She enters into the imbroglios of this foreign land knowingly, with the opportunity to experience them first-hand, rather than through the Captain's narrative or her father's past tales. One might say that she goes in search of something that she already "assumes", "supposes", "expects", "knows" or "guesses": her informed ideas need only take shape and flesh. For this to happen, she needs to wear a disguise that will temporarily impair all recognition of her true identity—for all except the captain, of course, who is the one character in the know:

> Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
> For such disguise as haply shall become
> The form of my intent. (I.ii.53-55)

Her disguise does not simply play upon gender deception. Viola is a young woman of aristocratic birth who has taken on the identity of a page to live and

work amongst the Illyrians. Though she is hardly a ruler, there is something, in this scenario, that recalls the popular king-in-disguise motif, whereby a king mingles incognito with his subjects. Such characters are able to believe in what they see, as their entourage no longer play along with them for the sake of their rank and power but show themselves in their true colours. Such scenarios, in which a ruler deliberately suspends his true identity and roams in disguise through his city, mingling with his subjects, were made popular with comedies like Robert Wilson's *Fair Em* (1591), William Kemp's *A Knack to Know a Knave* (1594), Robert Greene's *George a Greene* (1599) and such history-chronicle plays as George Peele's *Edward the First* (1593), Thomas Heywood's *Edward the Fourth* (1599), Anthony Munday's *Sir John Oldcastle* (1600), and of course Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1598-99). It is, however, to the use of this convention in Samuel Rowley's *When you see me, you know me* (acted 1603, published 1605) that I would now like to turn for my final analysis of dramatic assumption.

In this play, King Henry VIII decides to wander by night through the disreputable quarters of London to secretly observe his people at work (or not). Reports have reached him that the peace of the realm is poorly kept, and he wishes to see for himself whether they are true. Only two men from court, Charles Brandon and Sir William Compton, are privy to his secret:

> I must imploy your aide and secrecie,
> This night we meane in some disguised shape;
> To visit *London*, and to walke the round,
> Passe through their watches, and observe the care
> And special diligence to keep our peace.
> They say night-walkers, hourely passe the streets,
> Committing the[ft], and hated sacriliege:
> And flightly passe unstaied, or unpunished,
> Goe Compton, goe, and get me some disguise,
> This night weele see our Cities government. (sig. D1^{r})

Rowley's title makes explicit the obvious double meaning of the saying, "seeing is believing", referring, primarily, to the audience's recognition of Henry, and secondarily (and ironically), to the onstage audience's failure to recognise him. The title, however, takes on a third meaning, as we move on in the play: the king feels that he will believe what he sees, only if he does not seem to be what he is in the eyes of those he would check up on. To unmask the thoughts of others, the king must mask his own identity. The character thus plays a double game, trick-

ing those who do see him so as to verify the reports, and sees for himself. He can bring himself to believe in what he sees only because he believes his presence (and what he represents) has no bearing on what he observes, as the disguise enables the characters not to see the social barrier between the monarch and his subjects.

During his escapade, the king falls upon night-watchmen who "sleep secure" (sig. D3^{r}). Though the Constable had instructed Prichall the Cobbler, to "be carefull and examine all" (sig. D1^{v}), the guard and his companion are discovered sleeping on the job. The "fond heedlesse men" (sig. D3^{r}) had been debating the existence of the man in the moone, with the first watchman grounding his belief in what he claimed to have seen:

> *2.* Doe yee thinke neighbour, there is a man ethe Moone?
> *1. Wat.* I assure yee in a cleare day, I have seente at midnight.

This light-hearted send-up of the watchmen's poor sense of observation and of the common saying that "seeing is believing" leads to a set of comic situations that investigate the misperception of appearances. When the watchman (a cobbler by trade), taken by surprise, asks the king in disguise to identify himself, challenging him with his sentry's call, "Stand, who goes there?", he ends up formulating the erroneous assumption that "thou must be a Knave, for art neither King nor Queene, (I am sure)" (sig. D2^{v}). The following episode has the disguised king coming across the city's ruling pimp and bully, Black Will. The moment he appears onstage, the braggart confesses his theft and murder, so that all who see him know him for what he is. Unlike the king, or the man in the moon, when you see Will, you know him. He, too, quizzes the king:

> *Blacke Will* Sblood come before me syr: What a Divell art thou?
> *King* A man at least.
> *Black* And art thou valiant?
> *King* I carry a sword and a bucklerye see.
> *Black* A sword and a buckler, and know not me, Not *Blacke Will*?
> *King* No trust mee.
> *Blacke Will* Slave, then thou art neither Traveller, nor Purse-taker: for I tell thee, *Blacke will* is knowne and feared though [*sic*] the seventeene Privunces: theres not a sword and Buckler man in *England* nor *Europe*, but has had a taste of my manhood. I am tole-free in all Citties, & the Subburbs about them: this is my Sconce, my Castle, my Cittadell, and but King *Harry*, God blesse his Maiestie, I feare not the proudest. (sig. D3^{r-v})

In presenting this false image of himself, the king actually betrays what he is not. The king tries to pass himself off as a swashbuckler, but his poor acting—he hardly gets under the skin of the part—and his still poorer choice of outfit hardly fools the king of ruffians, the argument being that no one can claim to be a ruffian in London town without Black Will knowing about it. Black Will is not taken in by what he sees at all, and though he may not know who the character is, he quickly guesses the newcomer is lying about his identity. However, rather than pursue the matter and seek to unveil the stranger's true identity, which he unknowingly pronounces, to the amusement of the audience, Black Will goes looking no further than skin deep. He reverts, instead, to a performance of self-revelation and self-display. During this self-exposure, he shares a confidence about his ill-dealings as a whoremaster and asks for secrecy from the man he has just found out was lying: "May I speake freely, and wilt not tel the king ont?" (sig. $D3^{v}$). It seems odd that a character should willingly expose himself to a stranger whom he has just uncovered as a fake, and turn a blind eye to all elements of suspicion and doubt. But Will's vanity is his blind spot. Flattery gets the better of him, and he is put off his guard.

When it comes to his persona, the commoner abides by the saying that "seeing is believing". "In order to assure thee my valour carryes credite with it" (sig. $D4^{r}$), he shows off his manly prowess when passing the city gates, which he succeeds in doing simply by being recognised by the guards. He is therefore outraged when the king-in-disguise does not seem convinced by what he sees, his leap of faith being purely rhetorical—"Faith, excellent"—but instils an element of doubt as to what Black Will seems:

1. *Watch*	Hoe comes there?
Cob	Come afore the Constable.
Wil	What haue ye forgot me so soone? tis I.
2. *Watch*	O, tis M. Blacke William, God blesse ye sir, God blesse ye.
Black	How likst thou now?
King	Faith excellent: but prethe tell me, doest thou face the world with thy manhood, that thus they feare thee, or art thou truely valiant?
Blacke Will	Sfoote, doest thou doubt of my man-hood? Nay then defend your selfe, ile giue you a try all presently, betake yee to your tooles sir, ile teach ye to stand vpon Intergatories. (sig. $D4^{r}$)

The scene reveals that to believe what you see is to follow a common practice amongst the city people, a tacit understanding that ensures the peace of the realm, after a fashion. The king starts a brawl from the moment he questions this practice. When it comes to Black Will proper, dramatic assumption is altogether done away with: the character expects the reasoning, "what you see is what you get", to be the only viable approach to his person. When Black Will performs, he performs himself, the outward show of "man-hood" and his "truely valiant" self being but one and the same.

IV

This analysis has attempted to explore the pregnant meanings of the proverbial idea that "seeing is believing". Specifically, it has been argued that the positive, cognitive experience born from the immediate reception of the senses—and the apparent conversion provoked by the sole presence of an image—remains a fleeting experience that just as quickly awakens, within the onlooker, onstage or off, a sense of uncertainty and (self-)doubt. Having ensured the viewer's dramatic assumption, the early modern play swiftly takes care to fracture the spectators' certainty by enhancing all awareness of the stage and its artifice, thus unsettling not only the spectator's belief in what he or she sees, but also the ability to locate the source of the illusion, even as that illusion breaks. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* thus leaves its audience with a labyrinth of optional interpretations that may confuse as much as they aim to facilitate the reception of the play.

"Seeing is believing", indeed, reveals just how complex and varied a dramatic character's relationship to appearances can be within early modern drama. Black Will is as much an "appearance", showing himself for what he is through his corporeal eloquence, as are the serving men who, in their counterfeit roles, aim to deceive Sly. Viola's disguise constitutes a change in appearance, that is, not only in what is apparent (her clothes), but also in status, as she becomes a page and enters the service of a Duke. Both dramatic situations which she assumes are in accordance with the etymological meaning of "apparere", which signifies "to show oneself", as well as "to obey and wait upon". Additionally, the dramatic assumption that emerges from the connexion of sensory perception and intuitive conviction is not simply a momentary perception of appearances; it develops a momentum that, as by an epiphany, gives shape and form to apparitions, such as Hymen, who appears for a while as manifestly as the man in the moon does to

Rowley's watchmen. "Seeing is believing" impels us to consider the exceptional immediacy of an experience, especially in theatrical terms, while the intervening agency of actors, performers, props, and the theatre proper conspires to redefine, over and over, dramatic "assumption"—the onlookers' appropriation and taking charge of what it sees and the outcome of a performance. Dramatic assumption, as a compound of theatrical experiences, revolves around the momentum that theatre achieves, and then turns around, to make it function as an incessant "act of the Judgement or Understanding" (Coleridge, 4 [1959]:641), that is, an act of endless discrimination between varying forms of perception.

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