CONFESSING SUBJECTIVITY: POWER AND PERFORMATIVE AGENCY IN EARLY MODERN DRAMA

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This project is dedicated to my grandmother, Evelyn Wanninger, has been a champion of continuing education all my life, and a champion of me in ways I cannot begin to deserve.

It is also for my mom, Patty Dwyer Wanninger, my first and best intellectual interlocutor, and the Big Edie to my Little. I wish there was more Hieronimo in here for her!

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Editorial Note:

Though I have, in many cases, preserved the original spellings in quotes from sixteenth and seventeenth century sources, I have silently modernized words throughout the text to aid reader comprehension. For example, i/j, u/v, and the long s have been updated in most places, and I omit ligatures and swash letters. Unless I note otherwise, early modern materials are available in facsimile form through the Early English Books Online digital archive.

CHAPTER I

NOTES TOWARD A THEORY OF CONFESSIONAL PERFORMATIVITY

This dissertation explores confession as a social, performative, and theatrical phenomenon in English dramatic texts and non-fiction accounts from the early modern period. Long established in formal religious and legal practice, by the late sixteenth century, the discourse of confession had developed a diffuse and complex social currency. It was simultaneously associated with unparalleled subjective authenticity, as well as with a range of the prescriptions and performative expectations that help organize it as a social ritual. Confession conventionally refers to the verbalized disclosure of something that one's interlocutor would recognize to be shameful, wrong, or guilt-worthy. Accordingly, confession is predicated on a violation of expected or acceptable behaviors, and each implies a set of assumptions about the values, stakes, and power relationships governing the exchange. Michel Foucault gestures to the structuring logic of confession to show how power produced subjects, and this project explores the implications of that presupposition as they play out in the confessional discourse of the early modern period. I argue that confession is by its very nature an insistently social terrain wherein subjects constitute themselves and are constituted relative to prevailing standards of morality, law, or expected behavior. Drawing on interrelated theories of performativity, subjectivity, and power informed by scholars like Foucault, Judith Butler, and Shoshana Felman, I explore confessional speech as a mode of social subject formation characterized by an oftentimes unpredictable *dynamic* of performative agency.

Focusing in particular on plays such as Heywood and Bromes' *The Late Lancashire Witches*, Rowley, Dekker and Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton,* and Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore*, I show how representations of confession tend to expose the fissures in and dislocations of the discourses of power that animate them.

Confessional speech can signify on a number of discursive registers: while the conventional definition referenced above is especially suggestive of the formal confessions associated with religion and law, social confessions operate in a multitude of rhetorical modes and intersubjective contexts. My discussion of the performative dimensions of confession proceeds from the concept of the speech act, rooted in J. L. Austin's contention that certain utterances "do things" in the process of being said.[1] Austin's work is largely devoted to exploring the rules by which certain speeches have inherent and efficacious force (what he calls illocutionary force). In this dissertation, I use the term confessional speech to underscore my focus on the active modes of speaking subjectivity associated with confession—dependent on the formative dynamics of social context—not on just on the scenes of confessions they produce. In making this distinction, I draw on Butler's suggestion, building on Austin, that the power speech acts is never limited to the moment on their addressed. Instead, utterances signify in terms of a "condensed historicity" wherein the discursive structures that give the statements their weight, and the role of statements in those structures can be imagined to converge in the performative itself.[2]

Though Austin posits its effects in more normatively chronological terms than

[1] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).
[2] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1997), 3.

Butler does, he allows for an inevitable, and more nebulous, dimension of the speech act, through its "perlocutionary" effects, whose limits are hard, if not impossible to define: "Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons."[3] In the confessional speeches that pervade early modern drama, I observe a self-reflexive sense of the inherent intersubjective power invested in the term and idea of confession. Operating alongside that, I read a sustained interest in the ways in which the power of this discursive structure might be mobilized, as well as in the unpredictable effects of that power. This range—this capacity of confessional speech to signify differently—is at the heart of this dissertation.[4] In this introductory chapter, I explore the cultural and historical conventions that inform the legibility of confession as an early modern cultural construct, tracing it both in terms of its role in the constitution of subjectivity through discourses of power in light of its evolving institutional and social role in post-Reformation England. These conventions help establish the configurations of power that underlie individual instances of confession, making them intelligible as such in a normative symbolic structure. The early modern pamphlets and plays that I examine in this chapter and beyond reveal the sustained interest in the early modern period in the power of confessional speech, as well anxiety and excitement about the questions of subjective knowledge and intersubjective control that confession provokes, especially outside of institutional contexts. Through these representations, I suggest that the

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[3] Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 101.

[4] Peter Brooks, in his insightful and influential work on confession in literature and contemporary American law, also makes use of this phrase, and I am certainly inspired by him in deploying it. He does not speech explicitly to the logic behind the phrase, but my use seems largely consonant with his. Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law & Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

subjective effects of confession can be multiple and simultaneous, showing how one subject can occupy multiple social subjectivities at one time, and revealing palimpsest of configurations and reconfigurations of discursive power at work amidst the normative structures that delineate it as a social ritual.

A "Shrill and Unexpected Out-Cry": Spontaneous Confession in the Playhouse

A key moment in Thomas Heywood's 1612 essay, *An Apology for Actors* illustrates the early modern appeal of confession as spectacle while functioning as a historicized example of the cultural work it is imagined to do. In the essay, Heywood makes his case for the moral utility of the theater, a cause in which he, as an actor and playwright, has a vested interest.[5] It is particularly notable, then, that when he moves to offer specific examples of the theater's culturally salubrious effects, he invokes the cultural discourse of confession. Contemporary early modern critics of the theater, often associated with the Puritan cause, tended to raise concerns that audience members would be driven to imitate sinful behaviors associated with the plot or performance of dramas. In his defense of tragedy, Heywood twists, rather than refutes, this assumption by arguing that the depiction of sin can awaken the moral consciences of spectators.[6] In other words,

[5] Heywood's essay marked a minor foray into a controversy surrounding the theater in early modern England driven in large part by Puritan rhetoric. Divided into three parts focusing on the antiquity, dignity, and quality of acting, the document has proved valuable to scholars in part for the details it offers about early modern theater. This is in addition to its interest as a compelling exploration of the relationship between audience and staged performances that is in dialogue with but contests claims made by the anti-theatricalist polemics: famous examples of these anti-theatricalist texts include Phillip Stubbes' *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) and William Prynne's later *Histrio-Mastix* (1633).

[6] Heywood argues that since tragedy includes the "fatall and abortive ends of such as commit notorious murders" it has a deterrant effect on the audience, terrifying them from

he reframes the expected nature of the mimetic relationship between performer and audience, and offers confession as the mode through which the internal effects of dramas on their audiences become culturally productive spectacles of their own.

Heywood describes a startling event that disrupted a theatrical production in Norfolk: an admission of mariticide made by a female audience member who was, he reports, previously unsuspected of the crime.[7] The dramatic revelation of guilt that Heywood recounts illustrates the constitutive forces and intersubjective stakes of confessional speech as I trace it throughout the dissertation. Per Heywood's lively description, "as [the play] was acted, a towne's-woman (till then of good estimation and report) finding her conscience (at this presentment) extremely troubled, suddenly skritched and cryd out, Oh! My husband, my husband! I see the ghost of my husband fiercely threatening and menacing me!" Her outburst is directly prompted, Heywood suggests, by the play being performed, which showcases a similar crime and the subsequent haunting of the guilty woman by her victim; in other words, the spectacle has the power to conscript its audience in unpredictable ways.[8] The theatrical spectacle of guilt that mirrors her own compels a dramatic outburst through in which she is induced to publicly narrativize her own guilt: she confesses before her fellow audience members and the actors onstage to having murdered her own husband some seven years previously. At

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the "abhorred practice… and attaching the consciences of the spectators, finding themselves toucht in presenting the vices of others" (F3v).

[7] Heywood is alluding to a lost domestic tragedy called the *Tragedy of Feyer Francis*, which was performed in Norfolk by the Earl of Sussex's players. "Feyer" has been glossed both as "Fair" and "Friar," but it seems that no definitive case has been made in support of either.

[8] This implies a collapse of the distancing effect described by Bertolt Brecht—the woman is not a passive spectator, instead she perceives herself in terms of the drama, perceiving her own interpellation into it. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Macmillan, 1964).

this point, Heywood explains, "the murdresse was apprehended, before the Justices further examined, & by her voluntary confession after condemned."[9]

Heywood's words suggest that the woman's confession has meaningful and irreversible effects for her social identity: the confessant, otherwise anonymous, shifts from "townes-woman" to "murdresse" as a direct result not of her actions—for she did confess to murder—but instead as a result of the moment of her speech.[10] It is suggestive, though, of the capacity of performative utterances like confession to change social identities and intersubjective landscapes; Heywood's language indicates that this form of personal narrative rendered in a public context irrevocably reshapes the woman's subjective role. He implies, however, that the woman's private sense of guilt was long-standing, but previously unknown to anyone around her. In other words, while she socially and officially becomes a "murdresse" through confessing—Heywood draws a direct line from her confession to conviction—her guilt preexisted this public transformation. Underlying the moral benefits that Heywood attributes to this kind of confession is the uncomfortable fact that in exposing a previously unsuspected guilt, this confession is a reminder of the epistemological instability that undermines the organization of social subjects. Heywood emphasizes the spontaneity of the confession to support its truth, but, but the complexities underlying the situation of utterance remind us that this confession is produced through an intersection of agential forces that cannot be

[9] All quotations from this story come from Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors*, Early English Books Online (London : Printed by Nicholas Okes, 1612), Book III, G2r–G2v.

[10] Throughout, I use "confessant" to refer to the subject delivering their confession, and "confessor" to refer to their auditor—though the latter term can imply the speaker her/self in certain contexts, I maintain this terminological distinction for clarity's sake. Also, those these terms are often associated specifically with religious practice, I treat them in a more flexible way.

completely controlled.[11]

As this story helps illustrate, the cultural concept of confession both bespeaks a dynamic of *intra*subjectivity dependent on a sense of private or secret guilt *along with* the speaking and revealing of that guilt in an intersubjective context. The concept of confessional subjectivity, predicated as it is on the verbalized publication of inner thoughts, is consubstantial with a *sense* of an inner self operating in relation to the world—a thematic interest that animates much early modern drama.[12] As Sarah Beckwith explains of confession, by its very nature, it "must be *performed*; it is not something that takes place inside the mind."[13] The cultural imperative that the confession be addressed

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[11] Heywood's remark, for example, that the woman's immediate audience respond (quite understandably) to her initial "shrill and uexpected out-cry" by "inquir[ing] the reason of her clamour," helps surface the implicit power of the auditor of confession to shape an emotional reaction into a damning intelligible narrative.

[12] Though some critics, notable among them Catherine Belsey, have argued that the conception of a sense of personal or individuated selfhood only developed in and after the early modern period, the trend of more recent scholarship, including that of Katharine Eisaman Maus and Elizabeth Hanson, has been to push back against that assertion. Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Routledge, 1991); Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). In her influential 1995 book, Maus argues that an internalized sense of subjectivity—often exemplified in critical debate in Hamlet—was not an anachronistic concept but rather an available subject of tension and concern in the early modern period (2-29). In her more recent work, Hanson builds on Maus, citing changing juridical convention as well as the ideological underpinnings of the role of confession following the Council of Trent (1551) to support the case that the late 16th and early 17th centuries saw a definitive shift in the cultural conception of subjectivity, but one which is continuous with and building upon a medieval discourse of subjectivity. Though this critical tendency to posit the medieval period as a contrasting precursor to an early modern period that ushered in meaningful subjectivity has often been a feature of debates about the emergence of subjectivity, both literature from the period and the confessional discourse that developed concurrently suggest a more complicated and historically continuous genealogy of subjectivity.

[13] Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 105. Beckwith further suggests that this structure builds a sense

outward carries with the presupposition that the confessant have some kind of subjective space from which to speak. As this instance shows, however, the boundaries between and distribution of narrative authority among speaker(s) and audience are flexible and dynamic.[14] The performative power of the confessional utterance has ramifications for auditors as well as speakers. As Roland Barthes indicates, "listening is a psychological act," one that is implicated in an internalized phenomenology of the socially situated self.[15] The woman's confession generates a decentered spectacle in the play-house, and conscious audition implicates the audience in the exchange. Her former peers—fellow audience members—and actors alike become eye- and ear-witnesses to the embodied spectacle of the woman's confession[16] This transformation happens in lockstep with her speech: what could, we might imagine, have begun as mere disruption takes on new meaning insofar as it becomes legible as the start of a confession.

The audience, important though it is, is (like the woman confessing) anonymous in Heywood's retelling, a suggestive quality given the intersubjective dynamics of the exchange: it suggests that to some extent, the *idea* of their audition, even more than its verifiable fact, anchors the exchange. Harry Berger has explored how, within

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of personal responsibility into our understanding of what it means to confess. Adopting the first person, she reason that as opposed to say, feeling sorry, "contrition keeps the reality of the harm I have done before me, whereas I can be worry for a million and one things that do not involve my own personal responsibility."

[14] Not only does the play help elicit the confession, but Heywood also advertises to the wealth of direct witnesses still living to guarantee the authenticity of the confession.

[15] Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Howard, Richard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 250.

[16] I am indebted in my use of the portmanteau "earwitnessing" to Keith M. Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses: Rumor and Early Modern Masculinity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Here, I am using it somewhat loosely, not in terms of his specific paradigm.

Renaissance drama, "every interlocutionary act is partly a soliloquy in which the speaker constitutes himself as the theater audience he shares confidences with or tries to persuade, affect, deceive."[17] I would like to expand the scope of Berger's compelling assessment of the dynamics of onstage theatrical speeches to suggest that it resonates in the self-reflectively performative space of confession as it is explored in this dissertation. The anonymity characterizing *The Apology for Actors'* representations of confession underlies its exemplary portability, while in other instances, confessional utterance acts of interlocution are constituted in terms of very particular intersubjective situations of utterance. The centrality of the speaker's *conception* of an auditor to confession as a subjective category, however, inevitably frames and shapes the performance.

This anecdote is a useful critical commonplace for scholars assessing the ideological workings of the Renaissance stage, illustrating the charged relationships among concepts of power, performance, and subjectivity that it tends to represent.[18]

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[17] Harry Berger, Jr., *Imaginary Audition: Shakespeare on Stage and Page* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 45. Berger's argument stems from an effort to reconcile two competing strands of early modern scholarship of the late 80's, one that focused on closed reading, and another that privileged performance studies. I return to it in more detail in particular in chapter four.

[18] Frances Dolan provides a now well-established analysis of its power when she posits that "Heywood employs the figure of the murderous wife as a representative of the social disorder that the theater can correct by exposing" (Frances Elizabeth Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 20. Another line of criticism traces the implications for *how* that corrective power operates, assessing what Paul Yachnin has called "the invasive power of spectacle" to shape audience members (Paul Yachnin, "Magical Properties," in *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 118. Leonore Lieblein uses Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (1612) as a touchstone to explore the phenomenology of acting as a tension between identification (of both actor and audiences with the "'person personated'" on stage [100]) and the corporeal histories of actors and audiences. See Lieblein, Leanore, "Embodied Intersubjectivity and the Creation of Early Modern Character," in *Shakespeare and*

Interesting as it is for what its confession says about the theater, this narrative is also compelling for what it suggests about early modern discourses of confession. The placement of an account of confession at the climax of an essay aimed at elucidating the moral utility of the theater suggests that her public confession itself has inherent social value, both for the audience that witnessed in the theater and those who encounter it through Heywood's text.[19] It implies that the confessional process is socially and morally beneficial in and of itself, regardless of personal investment on the part of the audience; as the woman's very reaction to the play suggests, however, the moral homogeneity of an audience can never be completely taken for granted. This privileging of confession is striking partly because of what it does *not* do: Heywood presumably could have

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Character: Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons, ed. Paul Edward Yachnin and Jessica Slights (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 117–135. If the spectacle itself can produce confessors and authenticating listeners in the audience, then the theater could, in Heywood's formulation, become a recuperative arena for inculcating a performance of guilt that would secure an appropriate confession.

[19] A subsequent story in *An Apology for Actors* aimed at proving that comedy, like tragedy, can have redemptive social value tellingly hinges on a very similar narrative of confession. Heywood describes the experience of a group of English comedians touring Holland, perform a play in which an industrious laborer has a nail driven into his skull by townspeople whose livelihoods had suffered due to his extreme work ethic. As this piece was performed, Heywood writes, "the audience might on a sodaine understand an out-cry, and loud shrike in a remote gallery; and pressing about the place, they might perceive a woman of great gravity strangely amazed, who with a distracted and troubled braine oft sighed out these words: "Oh, my husband, my husband!" The plays goes on, but days later the discovery of an old skull with a nail driven into it leads the still-agitated woman to confess that years ago, she murdered her husband with a nail to the skull (G2v). The speculative tone of this version is peculiar, and distances the reader from the action (and attenuates its sense of truth-value) relative to the previous example. The personal revelation of guilt is, for Heywood, an important social ritual, one that not only exemplifies the capacity of theater to touch in very meaningful ways the consciences of spectators, but also one that, given his authorial goals, reinforces moral good. He concludes his second narrative of impromptu audience confession with the following: "this being publickly confest, she was arraigned, condemned, adjudged, and burned" (G2v). This phrasing is in line with conventions popular in accounts of crime and confession, and it draws a tidy arc from confession through condemnation to justified punishment.

described the power of an exemplary theatrical representation to, for example, *prevent* a sin or crime. In this case, the murder has already happened and cannot be undone, only exposed, confessed, and reacted to. In other words, Heywood focuses on the moral value of a cultural formation that presumes and is predicated on immoral acts; in doing so, he reflects a popular early modern conception of confession as a privileged semi-ritualized public spectacle and mode of inevitable revelation.

Confession is both climactic center and concluding raison d'être of this passage in *Apology for Actors.* This richly suggestive anecdote models the complexities of intersubjectivity that characterize the lively presence of the discourse of confession in the early modern cultural imaginary. Its resonance in terms of a discussion of dramatic texts is compounded by its literary context: this incident would have been familiar to readers also aware of the anonymously authored 1599 play *A Warning for Fair Women*, which features the same story Heywood uses to makes his point.[20] The history of cultural

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[20] As a group of characters marvel at the seemingly miraculous recovery of a dying man to accuse his attacker before finally dying, they take turns recounting stories of murderers revealed. One, Master James, tells the following tale:
". . Ile tell you (sir) one more to quite your tale,
A woman that had made away her husband,
And sitting to behold a tragedy,
At Linne a towne in Norffolke,
Acted by Players trauelling that way,
Wherein a woman that had murtherd hers
Was euer haunted with her husbands ghost:
The passion written by a feeling pen,
And acted by a good Tragedian,
She was so mooued with the sight thereof,
As she cryed out, the Play was made by her,
And openly confesst her husbands murder." (H2)
Other characters in the scene describe the other examples provided in that section of *An Apology for Actors*; this connection has led to conjecture over the years that Heywood could be the author of the play. Charles Dale Cannon, *A Warning for Fair Women: A Critical Edition* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1975), 28–39. It could also be the case that

circulation for this parable of confession is at odds with Heywood's insistence on its immediacy and truthfulness: he reader that the woman's confession is "un-urged" and "voluntary." This tension reflects a broader facet of confessional truth when it is viewed in narrative terms—both the familiar and the current converge in the creation of a convincing air of truth. Heywood's negotiation of this interplay is in accordance with the conventions of contemporary popular confession accounts. It demonstrates a feature common to many of the pamphlet confessions that this dissertation will discuss—their authors nearly always emphasize the truth of the accounts, heralding first person details and often advertising the presence of witnesses able to vouch for their retelling.[21] This narrative tendency betrays a conventional association between confession and truth that seems inevitably dogged by anxiety, and written reports of confessional speech they contain, virtually always mediated by editorial third parties, help illuminate the complexities inherent to configurations of confessional agency.[22]

The pamphlets illuminate the conventions both of sin/crime and of popular confession, while exposing the often tense interplay of authorial forces that converge in

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Heywood lifted these examples from the play, or that both authors took them from a third source.

[21] A 1616 confession pamphlet, for example, reasons that the accused murderer, having made "free confession needed no Jewry, her owne tonge proved a sufficient evidence." Anon., *A Pittilesse Mother: That Most Unnaturally at One Time, Murthered Two of Her Owne Children at Acton*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1013:02 (London: Printed [by G. Eld] for J. Trundle, and sold by J. Wright, 1616), B2.

[22] An interesting exception to my observation that the form of narrative pamphlet confession I trace tends to involve obvious (often heralded) editorial mediation comes in the confession of Francis Cartwright, whose published confession is completely in the first person. Cartwright announces in the introductory remarks: "So uncleane, so despicable shall I remaybe, till I publish and proclaime my uncleaness." The self-reflexivity of this construction reinforces the sense and stakes of *personal* agency associated with the dissemination of his confession. Francis Cartwright, *The Life, Confession, and Heartie Repentance of Francis Cartwright, Gentleman* (London: Printed [by W. Stansby] for Nathaniell Butter, 1621).

any given representation of confession.[23] The theatrical confessions I take up tend to explore this same terrain, albeit in the different context of embodied representations of speaking subjectivity. The dramatic medium is of course characterized by, as Carla Mazzio puts it, "communal situations of interaction of and interlocution," and accordingly, it invites investigation into the intersections of speech and embodiment in the production of cultural meaning.[24] These situations of interaction implicate layers of speakers and listeners onstage—characters who hear, overhear, and try to hear the secrets of others—and the audience, privy to all that unfolds before them and occasionally implicated from the stage itself. Dramatic renditions of confession expose and expand the role of the audience in the formative space of the interpersonal exchange. As Subha Mukherji argues by way of illuminating the connections between the early modern courtroom and stage, a consciousness of these connections produces a theatrical audience that operates in terms of an "alternate framework of judgment," informing a level of confessional audition in the dynamic among viewers/listeners and the play.[25] The viewer of a play has a range of modes of knowing about the various forms of truth (in terms of character and plot) within the stories they see—they hear what characters say and see what they do, they are presented with the comprehensive spectacle of the speaking actor,

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[23] Frances Dolan takes these documents as "evidence of the processes of cultural formation and transformation in which they participated," while seeking to address the disparities among them as modes of representation. I follow in her footsteps, bringing in own interest in the self-reflexive circulations of tropes and modes of address among and between these forms. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 3.

[24] Carla Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 2. Mazzio reframes the obvious role of speech in dramatic literature to explore the signification of *inarticulate* forms of speech and expression.

[25] Mukherji's project traces the rhetorical, formal, and epistemological interplay of theater and law in the early modern people. Subha Mukherji, *Law and Representation in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.

even as the plots that they follow require that audiences incorporate imagined offstage action into their conception of the reality of the play. Confessional speech acts onstage signify on multiple interrelated levels: they operate in terms of confession within the social and epistemological paradigms invited by their plots, and they function as literary and theoretical speech acts on a metadietic level.[26] Drama, in other words, is situated to replicate both the physical and linguistic dynamics of confession while offering a space in which its boundaries can be interrogated and explored outside institutionally sanctioned performative spaces.

A Warning for Fair Women is a part of a rich archive of early modern plays in which one can clearly see a persistent interest in the methods and means of revealing personal secrets and in staging the tropes of performative guilt. The play uses its multiple confessions—to law officials, prison chaplains, and among the characters that conspire in and carry out adultery and murder—as plot devices, in the words of Anthony Wayne Lilly, taking "full advantage of confession's inherent dramatic tension."[27] This dramatic tension derives from the epistemological instability associated with deferred or competing confessions, and is enhanced by the generic association of confession (illustrated in the anecdote above) with both social virtue and dramatic entertainment. I explore the confessions in these texts as moments laden with genuine moral and epistemological stakes associated with the cultural definition of confession itself. I also

[26] Scenes of audition are not, however, medium specific; early modern poetry and prose both work to probe the dynamics among the auditors and speakers they conjure. I emphasize, however, the important ways in which a medium that combines what can be seen with what can be heard/recognized in language invites exploration of audition in new ways.

[27] Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England" (Tufts University, 2007), 251.

show, however, how within the framework of conventional efficaciousness that frames their dramatic use of confessional speech, these texts explore the agential ramifications of the ways in which this mode of speech might be fabricated, exploited, or manipulated.

Producing Truth, Performing Ideology

The tensions embedded within the discourse of confession to which I alluded above make it a powerful site for the exploration of questions of power, performance, and subject formation in the early modern period. The interplay of these concepts and questions around confession is indebted to a vein of philosophical inquiry that extends well beyond that chronological delineation; Peter Brooks has undertaken one of the most the most nuanced and comprehensive explorations of confession as a cultural discourse in recent years, and the questions he illuminates, of crucial importance to this project, attempt to encompass confession as a phenomenon from the medieval period through the present day.[28] In foregrounding the common conceptual threads of confession through time, he identifies the importance of confession as a ritual broadly "considered fundamental to morality because it constitutes a verbal act of self-recognition as

[28] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*. Brooks is talking about confessions from an explicitly contemporary viewpoint, interrogating tensions surrounding the ritual as articulated in, for example, Supreme Court cases from the past fifty years. He also takes Rousseau's *Confessions* as a formative touchstone for a historically situated analysis of the concept more generally; this understanding of the "modern" (that is to say, post "early modern") confession involves developments that post-date the works that are the focus of this project. An exploration focused on an earlier era in the [genealogy] of confession demonstrates, however, that the various institutionally grounded forms of confessional speech have long tended to involve and invoke one another, tied as they are to larger questions of guilt, responsibility, agency, and penitence. Brooks emphasizes that reading confessions—including literary confessions—trans-generically is a valuable means of exposing the cultural work done (or purported to be done) by confession.

wrongdoer and hence provides the basis of rehabilitation."[29] Brooks' assessment of the assumptions subtending the cultural privileging of confession generally bears out in early modern representations. The rehabilitation that he refers to is tied to the religiously inflected notion of reconciliation, a concept that, as Beckwith argues, was also exported to secular theatrical settings. Both are linked to catharsis—a form of figurative cleansing which is conventionally seen as a productive telos of tragedy. The act of confessing is associated with relief for the confessant from the anxiety associated with guilt, the ideal of which ultimately outweighs the specter of the social and material consequences associated with the revelation of bad acts.[30]

Insofar as confession can be seen as a discursive technology historically deployed for the joint processes of discipline and consolation, Brooks suggests that it has played a central cultural role as "one of the large exercises of power on the individual by those seeking to order and control individuals within the social structure."[31] He situates this claim in relation to the work of Michel Foucault, one of the most influential modern theorists of confession. Foucault has described the narrative of individual subjectivity associated with it as "a truth which the very form of confession holds out like a shimmering mirage."[32] This quotation speaks both to the essential unattainability of that

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[29] Ibid., 2.
[30] See O. B. Hardison, "Three Types of Renaissance Catharsis," in *Poetics and Praxis, Understanding and Imagination: The Collected Essays of O.B. Hardison, Jr*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 78 ff. Hardison explores the relationships among the numerous early modern theories of catharsis, paying special attention to significance of their role as effects of tragedy. He refers to the narrative described here as "moral catharsis" and associates it specifically with the confession contained in the Heywood essay.
[31] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 82–3.
[32] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin Group, 2008), 59. Foucault was particularly influential in his exploration of the

truth as well as to its centrality to conceptions of selfhood. A ritual conventionally understood as simultaneously a verbal act of self-authorship associated *a priori* with authenticity, *and* inexorably tied to standardized cultural mores and religious and secular laws, confession in its orthodox forms plays a central role in the Foucauldian model of discursive sites linked to the production and perpetuation of internalized moral discipline.[33] His exploration of confessional subjectivity emerges most explicitly in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, in which he explores how the "institutional incitement to speak" that which seems secret or taboo is integral to the workings of discursive power.[34] Confession is, he argues, "a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement;" this production of the subject as such is, he notes, an effect of power, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it."[35] Confession is an effect of power, and its efficacy as a regulatory ritual is dependent on the invisibility of the taxonomies of morality and obligation through which it functions.

Confession is not just, as Brooks suggests above, an operation of power on individuals; it is a mode through which power produces and organizes subjects in its

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expansion of religious confessional tropes into the secular realm, a study which ultimately reinforces the disciplinary function of confessional speech in its original context. Brooks argues, for example, that this disciplining function adheres even when words are uttered in the confidential zone of the confessional; the performative function of confessional speech acts means that guilt is produced in the act of its articulation, and furthermore, to operate as a confessant is to acknowledged an order which one has violated. Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 3.

[33] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House Digital, Inc., 2012), 1–80.

[34] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 18.

[35] Ibid., 61.

terms. When Foucault refers to the authority that demands confession, he gestures to a mode of ideological subjection that Louis Althusser termed "interpellation," in which subjects are produced as such through being hailed in the name of ideological power.[36] The subject presumed to have something to confess is always already (to use Althusser's formulation) imbricated in the ideological structures of power and knowledge through which confession operates. The confessional subject is, by extension, always already guilty, but as Judith Butler argues in her reading of Althusser's model, the very concept of social subjectivity presupposes guilt. The logic of interpellation reveals, she says, that, "to become a "subject" is, thus, to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent.[37] Foucault is primarily interested in the exercise of regulatory authority that proceeds in terms of the cultural demand. The interlocutor charged with channeling discursive authority has a range of options for dealing with confessions: they might, he, notes, "judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile."[38] Confessional subjectivity, as Foucault articulates it, is essentially susceptible to ideological control over morality and tied to a ritual that both creates and subjugates it in the service of the discourse of

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[36]Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 174.Althusser suggests that invisible and pervasive operations of ideological power and the systems through it functions (termed "Ideological State Apparatuses") renders it essentially inescapable, designed to reproduce itself. "In other words," he argues, "the school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its 'practice'" [emphasis his]. Ibid., 133; see 128–169.

[37] Judith Butler, "'Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All'," *Yale French Studies* 88 (1995): 16. Butler interrogates the threads of psychoanalytic thought in Althusser's argument, emphasizing that, "for Althusser, the efficacy of ideology consists in part on the formation of *conscience.* (13; emphasis hers)

[38] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 61–62. Foucault does not focus on differentiating between or expanding on the tension among these responses; this is suggestive of his prioritization of pervasiveness of the exercise of regulatory authority over specific forms and stakes of those modes.

catharsis and regulatory discipline.

Though confession relies on a powerful metanarrative of comfort and control, the tensions embedded within that narrative mean that it is insistently plagued by, as Brooks indicates, "uncertainties and ambivalences."[39] Brooks, like Foucault, has noted that confessional encounters are associated with a variety of potential normative regulatory acts and social effects. He phrases them rather differently, implicitly highlighting the resonance of its nebulous constellation of subjective outcomes for *all* parties involved when he notes that confession can produce "cleansing, amelioration, conversion, counseling, as well as conviction."[40] This shift of focus from the actions of the confessor to the intersubjective experience helps illuminate the extent to which confessional exchanges shape their various constitutive participants in divergent and sometimes unpredictable ways. The effects of individual confessions for their participants and for the systems against and through which subjects are constituted cannot always be controlled in advance. In making this point, I draw attention to the insistent multiplicity of subjective positions enabled, and even required, in this social ritual, even while I recognize that to function as such, it must operate *in relation to* a paradigm of normative efficaciousness. In fact, the *notion* of a performance of confession that is effective *both* from the standpoint of the confessing subject and in terms of the ideological system that the confession is purported to serve has the effect of making the challenges to that narrative which can appear in individual representations of confession more intelligible.

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[39] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*.

[40] Ibid., 87. Brooks makes this point in order to emphasize the extent to which these outcomes can be at odds with one another, even beyond the extent to which those different outcomes are associated with different institutional modes of the ritual. For Brooks, the opposing potential subjective outcomes associated with the performance of confession makes the pervasive demand for it a current legal and ethical dilemma.

Through focusing on the instabilities that animate inhabitations of confessional subjectivity, I work amidst a field of literary critics in recent decades who have inherited and expanded upon the New Historicist paradigms relating subjects to culture in terms of power. This progression has been spurred in part through a rethinking of the interrelations among strains of formalist and textual criticism and historicist heuristics, a goal that I share. Among the more influential critical models associated with New Historicism is that of subversion and containment, first elucidated by Stephen Greenblatt when he argued that "subversive voices are produced by and within the affirmations of order; they are powerfully registered, but they do not undermine that order."[41] In other words, certain practices that seemingly subvert social order are, through the manner in which they are contained, actually techniques of hegemonic control. Confession, both as Foucault describes it and as it evolves in the medieval and early modern cultural imaginary, seems to be an example *par excellence* of this: subjective anxiety and external coercion converge to elicit narratives of transgression that, in being spoken, expose disorder in an official context. In doing so, however, they allow reassertions of institutional ideological power over the subjects making the confessions. This model of confession, as well as this theoretical paradigm for approaching it, have proven extraordinarily useful and influential in recent decades, but I follow scholars like Brooks in striving to complicate the all-encompassing model of ideological power upon which it relies. In doing so, I trouble the tautological logic that drives the Foucauldian model of confession that continues to animate scholarly conversations about confession in

[41] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England (The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 52.

literature. The questions at the heart of this inquiry—How do confessional utterances produce particular kinds of subjective agency? How is that agency constructed in terms of discourses of power and performance?—necessitate an effort to throw into sharper relief the texture and tension that inevitably and already complicate early modern representations of confession.

Though Foucault emphasizes the exercise of disciplinary authority in the construction of the speaking subject, this process of truth production also relies on the participation of a speaker culturally imbued with secrets waiting to be told.[42] If confession is an effect of power, power is likewise an effect of discourse, and as such is liable to, as Susan David Bernstein argues, "be located through the presumption of narrative authority."[43] Confession, as Bernstein notes, necessarily evokes the possibility of narrative authority in the confessant, and accordingly, opens up a space for discursive agency, even if it is bounded by the conventional power structures that instantiate the confessional subject position.[44] Foucault's later work on the subject reflects the evolution of his thinking on confession toward the subjective implications of confession as a mode of truth production; as he comes to argue, "verbal act of confession is the proof, is the

[42] See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 62. Elizabeth Hanson observes a consonant phenomenon in early modern literature culture, which developed at the time, she says, a "tendency to construe other people in terms of secrets awaiting discovery." Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England*, 2.
[43] Susan David Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2.
[44] For a reflection on these dynamics in terms of Victorian prose, see Susan David Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects: Revelations of Gender and Power in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 1997), 33.

manifestation, of truth."[45] In Butler's terms, Foucault's later work suggests "that confession compels a 'manifestation' of the self that does not have to correspond to some putative inner truth, and whose constitutive appearance is *not* to be construed as mere illusion."[46] This more flexible relationship among "truth," articulation, confession, and subjectivity enlivens a basic Foucauldian presupposition that while confession reveals the omnipresence of systems of power, that power is (as Foucault suggests power *always is*) accompanied by resistance. The distance this formulation creates between the self as inaccessible referent and the "proof" manifested in their self-publication offers a space from within which subjects can manifest themselves socially and in language in strategic and agential ways. Butler's work to extend Foucault's analysis of power offers a critical formulation that subtends a point I wish to emphasize: the very omnipresence of the modes of power that demand confession also strains the limits of confession's capacity to contain the subjects it helps produce.[47] Butler emphasizes the ramifications of the proliferation of sites of disciplinary control that is suggested in its omnipresence—her argument is anchored in the body presumed and produced through the operation of power as a site of regulation. Confession produces the speaking subject in a similar way, and is marked by the "*unforeseeable*" effects Butler locates as an opportunity for resistance rooted in the pervasiveness of regulatory control.[48] The broad range of possible

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[45] Michel Foucault and Jeremy R. Carrette, *Religion and Culture* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1999), 178.
[46] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham Univ Press, 2005), 112, emphasis in original.
[47] For Foucault, Butler notes, the repression hypothesis delimits its own efficacy because "repression generates the very pleasures and desires it seeks to regulate." Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 58.
[48] See ibid., 58–62.

regulatory responses to confession betrays tensions inherent to the power dynamics produced through its discursive structures. As a ritual, it is rooted in a pervasive system of ideological organization, but these roots foster possibilities for multi-variant exercises of subjective agency that emerge in individual instances of the inhabitation of confessional roles.[49]

Institutionalized Confession and the Cultural Imaginary

The modes of confessional speech and audition that I explore in early modern literature are intelligible in part because of their roots in the institutionalized auricular confession of the Catholic Church; the trajectory of this project proceeds with an eye toward the shifting theological understanding of confessional power and agency. This attention to role of institutional confession and confessors is not, however, intended to privilege their primacy in the performative terrain of confessional speech; self-reflexive inhabitations of its confessional mode are not limited to that institution. Both before and after the Reformation, the symbolic structures of power and speech innovated in this formal mode proved readily appropriable in other forms and contests. In exploring the theatrical confessional utterance, I explore the inter- and intrasubjective effects of this discursive migration.[50] The range of associated outcomes of confession to which Foucault

[49] Kathryn Schwarz traces this dynamic of subjectivity as it pertains to the constraints around and opportunities within the discourse of early modern feminine will. Referencing Joan Scott, she points out that "when discursive systems constitute subjects, they also create agents: [citing Scott] 'They are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through the status conferred on them.'" Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 4.

[50] An account of the full complexity of confession as a social and historical practice in early modern is beyond the scope of this project, but my focus on literary representations

and Brooks allude are rooted in the ritual's evolving institutional roles, and the power dynamics cultivated in auricular confession inform the way these speech acts appear in other areas of the cultural landscape. Early modern playwrights demonstrate a sustained interest in the potential of discourses of confession to work differently—beyond the scripts suggested by the ritual's institutional roots—that is realized in exhaustive attempts to explore its multiform constitutive possibilities and unpredictable and occasionally contradictory teleological ends on stage. As we will continue to see, dramatic confessions tend to explore a wide array of agential and epistemological configurations of confessional roles, but the legibility of those roles as such, and the power dynamics and efficaciousness of those scenes of utterance are all shaped by their relationship to the normative precepts of confession in circulation at the time.

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 made the sacrament of confession a mandatory annual practice for the Catholics, decreeing, "all the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priests at least once a year."[51] Lateran IV simultaneously

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of confessional speech is informed by this context. As Brooks makes clear, one of the most indelible legacies of this discursive migration is the psychoanalytic tradition, which Bernstein has called the "secular version of auricular confession." Robert Miola reiterates the resonance between the language of institutionalized confession and psychoanalysis while insisting on an important area of difference: "*consciousness* of sin, not *repressed* wish, causes the disturbance; confession, not psychoanalysis is the cure." As the spontaneous admission we saw in Heywood's *Apology* suggests, this distinction does not always hold up in early modern explorations of performative confession. Bernstein, *Confessional Subjects*, 21; Robert Miola, "Two Jesuits in Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 31.

[51] Katherine C. Little, *Confession And Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 51. While, as Thomas Tentler has argued, this decree was not the first act to highlight the necessity of confession, its effects on the social and institutional role of confession were enormous

established an inquisition to tamp down heresy, and in doing so sparked a formalization of the role of individual testimony in the regulation of the faithful/unfaithful. Confession was clearly intended to regulate the subjects required to perform it, but it was also associated with absolution and catharsis for the confessant for whom it was a prerequisite to both full participation in earthly and spiritual community.[52] In his seminal history of ecclesiastical ritual, Thomas Tentler describes the use of Latin verse to remind people of the sixteen characteristics of "the good, complete confession"; though they were required to narrate their personal sins, people were expected to do it in a ritualized way.[53] Lateran IV rendered confession explicitly performative and gave it form and script; a mandated expression of inwardness that required an interlocutor in order to be effective.

The religious doctrine of auricular confession depends on the presupposition that

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and far-reaching. Tentler, Thomas N., *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1977), 52. Tentler's work on confession is a religious and social context is invaluable reading for scholars invested in the relationship between confession and the Reformation.

[52] Priests' texts from the dawn of the sixteenth century indicate that confession was generally understood to soothe tensions within communities in addition to in individuals. See Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England*, 13. Thomas Tentler observes a tendency that Foucault also more generally expresses: that rituals of confession were as much about producing anxiety in the confessant as relief—in manipulating the relationship between the two, those in power could reinforce existing ideological hierarchies. Though submission to a priest *was* intended to be comforting, it was as a function of one's submission to the disciplinary function of confession. See Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 9–12.

[53] Tentler, Thomas N., *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, 106. Though they are generally commonplace sentiments (confession should be "humble" and "ashamed"), efforts to establish and reiterate these attributes suggest that there was interest in and anxiety over what conditions had to be satisfied for a confession to be "good." It's worth noting that contemporary accounts of religious confession from the late medieval period suggest that people were not necessarily very "good" at confessing according to official church standards. Nonetheless, Penitential handbooks and scripts were developed, and women in particular began to be associated with a kind of professional penitence.

certain forms of speech have meaningful and definite effects. Brooks cites medieval Catholic philosopher-theologian Duns Scotus, who proffers a functional definition of penance through the ritual of confession dating to the decades following Lateran IV: "Penance is the absolution of a penitent man, done by certain words that are pronounced with proper intention by a priest having jurisdiction, efficaciously signifying by divine institution the absolution of the soul from sin."[54] This definition is consonant with, and even seems to anticipate, the language of the speech act first advanced by Austin in his seminal study of performative language *How to Do Things with Words.* Austin begins his elucidation of the speech act through the premise that a performative utterance is itself a form of action in which "*by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something."[55] He defines the performative in terms of its efficaciousness, or "felicity" rather than its truth value.[56] Austin ties the conditions for the success of an utterance to the authorization of the speaker, along with their sincerity and proper intent; the circumstances themselves must be recognizable and appropriate for the speech act to "work."[57] This utterance of this narrative within the institutional conventions of confession is meant to enact a

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[54] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 88.
[55] Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 12.
[56] He differentiates it from what he calls the constative utterance, statements that report or describe and can thereby be distinguished as true or false, rather than as having happened or not. In the spirit of Austin, I can offer an illustrative example. If I say, "I ate three cookies for dinner," it is a truth claim that could be upheld or disproved, but the truth/falsity of the statement "I confess, I ate three cookies for dinner." I could be lying or mistaken (which would make it infelicitous), but I have still "confessed." The affective and ancillary effects of this confession (my guilt at having eaten the cookies, for example, or my glee) fall under the realm of the perlocutionary, which I will discuss more fully in the next section. Ibid., 3–6. In her analysis of Austin's theories, Shoshana Felman points out that by the end of his investigation, Austin has dislocated the distinction he initially establishes between these two concepts, leading to "a general theory of speech acts as such." Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, Or Seduction in Two Languages* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 8.
[57] Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 8–24.

performance of supplication and penitence that carries with a demand (either implicit or explicit) for absolution. The quotation from Duns Scotus indicates that absolution built into the ritual of confession likewise has a truly performative dimension: the pronouncement of "certain words" with "proper intention" by a figure with proper "jurisdiction" produces absolution. Both parties, then, exercise performative agency in the exchange, since the ritual is necessarily interpersonal: a private feeling of guilt or sorrow, even expressed by the penitent to God in prayer, was insufficient according to Catholic doctrine. Austin further distinguishes the illocutionary speech act as one that performs its action, or "takes effect" in its being uttered.[58] Auricular confession, by virtue of church doctrine, depends on this kind of speech capacity, as does the other part of the confessional performative exchange, in which the priest's first-person response, "I forgive you," works because of the institutional power invested in him to make such a claim.[59]

Though Church doctrine held that performance of the ritual was consubstantial with spiritual benefits, in practice, there was no way of knowing if the penitence a confessant professed was real or feigned. This, along with the symbolic power that this sacramental office conferred on priests, proved suspicious to Protestant reformers: as John Calvin argued of Catholics, "their fiction of the sacrament of penance… was falsehood and imposture."[60] Accordingly, the Reformation brought with it a decisive shift in the institutional role of penance and the confessional. In England, private auricular

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[58] Ibid., 116.
[59] See Matthew Matthew Senior, *In the Grip of Minos: Confessional Discourse in Dante, Corneille, and Racine* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 35. Senior notes that this phrasing replaced an earlier version, "may God forgive you" which did not similarly emphasize the performative efficacy of the priest.
[60] Miola, "Two Jesuits in Shakespeare," 31.

confession went from being a prerequisite to salvation to a controversial relic of a Popish past, replaced by private reflection and the public recitation of a confessional speech.[61] The *Ten Articles* of 1536, which began to establish the doctrines of the new Anglican church, maintained confession in addition to other traditionally Catholic elements of religious practice including the intercession of the saints and emphasis on the importance of contrition and penance, but by 1548, the Order of Communion contained in the English *Book of Common Prayer* called specifically for communal confession, rather than officially mandated individual confession, and it offered a general script to be performed by the congregation.[62] Private confession to a minister remained permissible, but its role was dramatically minimized and decentralized, and in this institutional context, its performative dimension—the sense that the verbalization of confession itself

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[61] Tentler's book provides a comprehensive exploration of this transition. Lilly also explores the evolution of sacramental confession, and he does so with an eye toward the implications of these changes for the exercise of Foucauldian power in a literary context.

[62] The text provided in the 1548 prayer book is as follows: "ALMIGHTY God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men; We knowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and be heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burthen of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, to the honour and glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord." Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England*, Early English Books Online ([England? : s.n., 15--?], 1500). Paul D. Stegner has explored the practical and symbolic complexities of the "doctrinal simultaneity" he observes in the dramatic literature of the early modern period. He argues, "confession continued to have a socially performative dimension because it depended on an individual's participation in common worship and reception ofthe Eucharist. The required ritual and social performance of confession in the Church of England reveals continuity between traditional and reformed penitential practices. Stegner, Paul D., "'Try What Repentance Can': Hamlet, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority," in *Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Susan Zimmerman, Garrett Sullivan, and Linda Neiberg (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 2007), 113.

accomplished something—was largely abandoned.[63] This Protestant mode of confession depends on internalized discipline to the extent that it elides the specific enumeration of one's sins in favor of a mass performance that exaggerates the generic qualities of confession that had already emerged during centuries of the ritual's institutionalization.[64] The potential personal power of the priest indicated in the practice of confession in Catholic Church was particularly controversial in the view of Protestant leaders, who suggested that the priest, rather than simply acting as a placeholder for the exercise of heavenly (and, of course, institutional religious) power, could be suspected of shaping the exchange or using the knowledge gleaned within it for their own aggrandizement. This anxiety/critique implicitly highlights the intrasubjective workings of agency in the confessional space, and speaks to the individual agency that attaches to the ritual even in highly regulated circumstances. The critique of priestly power, which separated it from the model of intrinsic performative authority suggested in Catholic doctrine, could be seen as manifesting a larger migration of the language of confession, and its attendant

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[63] Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 53–54.

[64] An early 17th century anti-Catholic pamphlet that advertises itself as having been produced with the approval of the Church of England hints that the expectation that confession capture a complete personal performance of guilt was always unreasonable, a fact that helps justify the shift: "To confess all sinnes, and that one after another with all circumstances unto a Priest, as it is unpossible: so it is never enjoyned by God, nor have ever bin practiced by any of God and his Saints." The pamphlet illustrates the sentiment behind the Church of England's attitude toward auricular confession more generally, proposing that "Penance is no Sacrament." It goes on to note that in the case of confession, "the blasphemies are outrageous, and the errors many, and monstrous comprised in this doctrine of the Popish Penance…Their Contrition is against the truth. For no man is, or can be, sifficiently contrite for his sins." Thomas Rogers, *The Faith, Doctrine, and Religion, Professed, & Protected in the Realme of England, and Dominions of the Same Expressed in 39 Articles... Perused, and by the Lawfull Authoritie of the Church of England, Allowed to Be Publique.*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1254:07 (Cambridge: Printed by Iohn Legatt, printer to the Universitie of Cambridge, 1607), 153.

configurations of power, into a broader social landscape in which its normative scripts, though still legible as such, are far less predictable.

Auricular confession was essentially eliminated from official Anglican Church practice after 1558,[65] but this did not mean it disappeared from the cultural landscape. In fact, the ideas behind and languages of confession seem to diffuse through a dramatic range of literary and historical texts in the post-Reformation period. The dramatic spiritual shift England experienced in the 16th century frames the treatment of the ritual on the Renaissance stage, but this process of cultural diffusion was also to some degree consubstantial with the overall evolution of confession. Its central role in religious life in the Middle Ages tied it to community life more broadly, and over time, narratives of confession and conventional roles for penitents and those in the position to absolve them developed and diffused beyond prayer books, recognizable as forms of social confession because of the tropes they maintained that are associated with the ritual.[66] The specific language of reconciliation and atonement associated with spiritual confession maintain key roles in the intrasubjective mode of address. In the centuries following Lateran IV, narratives associated with confession accrued increased legitimacy in the realm of social epistemology; from the medieval period onward into the Renaissance, ritualized and even coerced confession emerged as the ultimate paradigm of truth, referred to for centuries as

[65] Though confession in its older form was eliminated early on, the language surrounding it evolved as the doctrine of the Church of England developed in the latter part of the sixteenth century.

[66] Deathbed confession was one of the earliest types of private, social confession to emerge. Tentler notes that its function was "reconciliation with the self and with those social norms that the penitent has internalized" (13); Lilly notes that insofar as they relied on inner regret, the efficacy and validity of the deathbed confession was a subject of debate in the medieval period (36).

regina probationum ("queen of proofs").[67] This colloquial expression for confession anticipates Foucault's construction of nature of confessional self-manifestations, but it also suggests that in practice, those performances can, taken literally as proof, have binding effects. Confession tended to remain associated with authenticity even as its *pro forma* aspects coalesced, and an exchange in Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's 1622 play *The Changeling* illustrates the persistence of this confessional trope well into the seventeenth century. Near the end of the play, Vermandero announces that he has "suspicion near as proof itself"—based on amassed circumstantial evidence—of the identity of his prospective son-in-law's killer. Alsemero, having just extracted a confession from his wife and her accomplice, inverts Vermandero's formulation, announcing that he has "proof / Beyond suspicion" of the killers' identity (5.3.124-6). The verbal narrative itself, understood in light of a paradigm of confession that, not incidentally, reinforces Alsemero's own sense of agency as confessor, constitutes the consummate form of evidence; this formulation attributes to words a solidity and transparency that dramatic treatments of confession repeatedly invoke and trouble.

The joint association of confessional speech with moral evaluation and truth/authenticity informs the pivotal role it came to play in the judicial arena: the confessional subjectivity that emerged in a medieval religious context evolved in tandem with the changing English legal system. The reference to "proof" in conjunction with

[67] See Brooks, 93 - 96. The privileging of confession as the ultimate means of establishing narratives of guilt is closely bound up in the history of interrogational torture. See Edward Peters, *Torture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 41–50. Despite this conventional association, critical voices called into question the tendency to equate confession with truth. Michel de Montaigne, for example, urged skepticism, describing witch trials to bolster his case. Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 109.

confession in *The Changeling* demonstrates the currency of the performative mode in that context. As Lorna Hutson has persuasively argued, medieval confession underpins early modern common law, and as ecclesiastical and secular courts continued to shift in relation to one another (with the latter taking on increasing power), the blurry line between sin and crime was accompanied by a blurry distinction between investigation and subjective assessment in both religious and legal contexts.[68] The function of confession in a criminal interrogation bears some similarity to its role in a Catholic setting—it is a means of publishing in words, within a particular power structure, something that the dictates of that power structure prohibits.[69] The responses provoked by confession in these different contexts diverge: it works in one case to secure the salvation and reconciliation of the penitent, and in another to secure the conviction and condemnation of the confessant. They overlap, however, in the social and moral value—for participants, institutions, and communities—that both ascribe to this form of revelation.

As a social linguistic ritual, confession maintained both its association with truth and its popular caché; the language of confession pervades literary and dramatic texts in

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[68] Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 22. Hutson points out, for example, that jurors in thirteenth century homicide cases borrowed phrases from penitential manuals to establish the finer points of intentionality in assessing legal responsibility (Hutson 21). Brooks also describes how the modern religious and legal models of confession emerged during the same historical moment, a shared history which helps explain why, as he argues, the two continue "to coexist with a certain accepted cultural blurring of the distinctions between them." Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 3.

[69] Example? Could allude to rhetoric from pamphlets? example ------ Bromley, the magistrate in the case Pott's records, urges the condemned witches, who have already confessed in a legal context, to follow it with a religious confession to save their souls; both forms play a role in the successful resolution of the case, and the rhetoric surrounding efforts to secure confession suggests that the impetus to one could be used to draw out the other.

the years following the Reformation in England, and the popularity of images and accounts of gallows confessions suggests that they also served an important social function signaling on a generic level—but perhaps not in actually producing—the appropriate and satisfying end to transgression. Within dramatic representations, confession often plays an integral role on the level of plot; the teleological drives associated with confession along with its promise of the exposure of secret truths give it an integral role in the staging of sin, crime, deception, and intrigue.[70] Anthony Wayne Lilly describes the widespread "traces of auricular confession" in plays from the period that exist in spite of, but also in reaction to, the waning of the ritual in English institutions.[71] Scenes of confession figure in many dramas to stage the social hierarchies that shape the plot and as literary techniques through which information can be distributed (or withheld) and the conjured subjectivities of characters published and explored.

Early modern theater provides a near-endless array of confessions and confessional utterances, but, in my estimation, only one self-reflexive confession to a priest appears in extant drama from the period, in *The White Devil,* by John Webster (1612). In a sort of bait and switch that reflects the tensions inherent in the treatment of Catholic ritual in the period, it markedly takes place *outside* the context of formal

[70] The oft-cited convention that "truth is the daughter of time," commonly attributed to Francis Bacon, helps encapsulate this point. A popular sentiment with Protestant writers, it also announces itself as the thematic center of Robert Greene's *Pandosto,* the prose narrative that is also the primary inspiration for Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale.* See Alex Davis, *Renaissance Historical Fiction: Sidney, Deloney, Nashe* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2011), 86–7.

[71] Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England," 220–221. Wayne indicates that though playwrights from the period betray an uneasy relationship with auricular confession in light of the institutional and cultural shifts, it is still often treated respectfully as a social ritual.

auricular confession. It is delivered to Monticelso, who first appears in the play as a Cardinal, and then, by the time he hears his confession, as Pope; his frequent insistence on the power he embodies along with his self-righteous duplicity reflect the anti-Catholic sentiments of the day.[72] When Monticelso questions Ludovico, a revenge-seeking nobleman, about the nature of a questionable pardon he has received, the latter delivers an answer qualified in terms of Monticelso's office:

> I'll not tell you;
> And yet I care not greatly if I do.
> Marry, with this preparation: Holy Father
> I come not to you as an intelligencer
> But as a penitent sinner; what I utter
> Is in confession merely, which you know
> Must never be revealed. (4.3.104-110).[73]

Ludovico invokes the rules of auricular confession, but not to participate in it formally but rather in order to benefit from the expectation of silence. Monticelso's answering rebuke sparks a temporary reconsideration in the revenger, but Ludovico's subsequent admission that he assumed the Pope would support his plan (as well as the ease with which he is convinced to resume his plot) undermines the rhetorical gesture through which he establishes his "penitence." This exchange highlights the importance of formal confession for establishing an intelligible symbolic structure while implying that the spiritual work of the ritual has been evacuated. Its social and procedural rules, however, still have the power to shape intersubjective relations: in differentiating conspiracy,

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[72] The figure of the Cardinal was often the locus of anti-Catholic sentiment in early modern plays in Italianate settings; Webster features another malevolent Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi. The White Devil* offers up an especially intriguing confession subject in the figure of its primary female character, Vittoria. Lilly undertakes a very interesting discussion of her gendered characterization through confessional rhetoric, particularly in Webster's staging of her trial for the murder of her husband. Ibid., 348–357.

[73] John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. J. R. Mulryne (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1969).

associated with the "intelligencer," from confession and by explicitly framing his auricular confession in relation to other forms of disclosure, Ludovico exerts a powerful intrasubjective demand on his powerful auditor. Monticelso's institutional role, which produces his social capital in the play, also limits him in this context, through Ludovico's illumination of the rules of the exchange. Ludovico announces the rules of his speech frame in order to, in effect, choose his auditor: for strategic reasons, he wants a confessor, rather than a judge, ruler, or spymaster (other roles Monticelso plays). This rhetorical maneuver signals the capacity of confessional speech to inaugurate, reveal, and reshape intersubjective relationships through its contextualized use. Webster's version of auricular confession helps illustrate the broader role of confession on the Renaissance stage—it is characterized by dynamic configurations of agency that emerge through and against the patterns that define its role. Its association with a powerful, but multifaceted, efficacy informs its deployment on the early modern stage. As the fourth chapter of this dissertation makes clear, drama of the period manifests an interest in the institutional and supernatural/spiritual efficacy of confession, but in terms that prompt a post-structuralist understanding of historical experience and development: the theological origins associated with confession are insistently inaccessible, leaving a surfeit of supplements and effects that displace and dismantle a religiously inflected form of confessional efficacy.

Performative Inhabitation in Scenes of Confession

On a basic level, performative speech, in its various permutations and infelicitous forms, is marked by its capacity for intra- and intersubjective effects, and accordingly, it

helps illuminate conversations about agency and power. In tying my discussion of confession to the philosophical language of performativity, I build on the work of other contemporary literary critics to complicate the questions of power and agency associated with the use of language. Scholars including Lynne Magnusson, David Schalkwyk, Carla Mazzio, Madhavi Menon, and Sarah Beckwith have generated complex theories of subjects as they are embodied and shaped in language and in a variety of ways demonstrate that the workings of power are often obscure and multi-directional.[74] In particular, scholars like Schalkwyk and Magnusson have worked in recent years to incorporate speech act theory into the critical field in service of larger questions involving questions involving the interrelations of subjectivity, agency, and drama. In participating in this conversation, I take up Lynne Magnusson's call for a "closer look at how language is organized as interaction, how dialogue and other verbal exchanges can be shaped by the social scene of context as much as by the individual speakers."[75] As interpreters of Austin's theories performativity have shown, the agency of the speaking subject is a contingent product of power and context, always to some extent unpredictable, and sometimes volatile. Confessional speech is dependent on interaction, and inhabitations of confessional relationships offer up a dynamic space of

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[74] See, for example: David Schalkwyk, *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*; Madhavi Menon, *Wanton Words: Rhetoric and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*.

[75] Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, 1. This critical goal is consonant with the one expressed by Schalkwyk in his work *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays*, in which he "aims to link close linguistic analysis with questions of power and society" (2).

sociolinguistic subjective formation that exposes the slippages and dislocations within the discourses of power through which they operate.

Given the discursive migration amidst which I read these scenes of confession, it seems worthwhile to start with a basic question prompted by the terms of speech act theory as Austin originally sets them out. If, as the title of his book suggests, speech acts allow speakers to "do things with words," what kinds of things does that include? And how do we assess the effects of these speech acts? After all, as murderous wife Alice Arden observes in *Arden of Faversham* (1592), "Oaths are words, and words is wind, / And wind is mutable" (1.436-437).[76] J. Hillis Miller observes that insofar as the title of Austin's book reads like that of an instruction manual, while Austin offers an exhaustive taxonomy of performative actions (the "how"), the capaciousness of the "do things" part evades classification.[77] The concept of felicity, referenced above, is central to Austin's theory; the felicitous speech act, one that could be said to "work" properly, relies on the authorization of its participants and the conventions delineating its content and effects.[78] Austin allows that speech acts are liable to be carried off "under duress, or by accident, … or otherwise unintentionally" and challenge the boundaries of felicity as he defines it.[79] As Shoshana Felman has suggested, however, Austin's emphasis on the

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[76] Anonymous, *The Lamentable and True Tragedie of M. Arden of Feversham*, Early English Books Online (London: [By E. Allde] for Edward White, 1592).
[77] J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 1st ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 7.
[78] And oft-cited example is that of marriage: for utterance like "I do" and "I know pronounce you man and wife" to constitute a felicitous marriage ceremony, a number of conditions must be met: the officiant must be authorized by church or state; the parties must intend to wed each other; currently in Tennessee, for example, they must not be of the same legal sex, and so on.
[79] Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 21. Austin suggests that the latter types of utterances can be set aside because of the diminished agential capacity with which they

propriety/impropriety of speech act conditions is significant precisely because in his work, the abnormal is *"constitutive of normal,"* and thus liable to "undo or explore the very criterion of normality."[80] Confessions that are misdirected, fabricated, manipulated, or refuted, in other words, invite us to expand our sense of the subjective work that confession can be imagined to do. What, for example, of the confession that matches the expectations and demands of the interlocutor, but is to its speaker a lie? What if an individual confesses to their sins or crimes, but feigns the feeling behind it? Or refuses to express the necessary remorse for the ritual to take place? What if a genuinely felt confession is delivered to an unauthorized auditor? By what means are acts like forgiveness authorized, and how to they shape their speaker and object?

Readers of Austin's theories, such as Butler, Felman, and José Medina have worked to nuance the questions of agency, autonomy, and intent prompted by his work. Austin's theories tend to foreground the autonomous subject capable of speaking with intent, but even as Austin lays them out, the effects of speech are liable to evade intent. As Medina argues, "The uncontrollability and unownability of speech acts is a *structural*

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are associated. Austin repeatedly uses the phrase "go wrong" to describe various infelicities, a phrase which emphasizes the moral satisfaction he implicitly attributes to the successful speech act, and demonstrates his privileging (relative to Derrida) of the successful speech act as the most important exemplar. As Miller points out, however, the uncontrollable power of speech that Austin tends to shy away from in the main thread of his argument comes into play in his examples of performative misfire and abuse, which betray anxiety about the challenges constantly being imagined or made to the hierarchies that organizes performative speech and the social order in which it operates. He describes, for example, monkeys marrying humans and lowly people christening ships to delineate normal performative conditions. Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 50–52.

[80] Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 102. José Medina cites Austin as, along with Cavell and Butler, a scholar working on what he calls *The New Austin,* a philosophical endeavor to complicate the over-simplied picture of Austin as purely focused on the fixity and stability of language situations. José Medina, *Speaking from Elsewhere: A New Contextualist Perspective on Meaning, Identity, and Discursive Agency* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), 146.

feature of our agency."[81] Popular attitudes toward theatricality and performance in the Renaissance pick up on this, suggesting that the theater was well established as a site for interrogating the potentially uncontrollable effects of the speaking body both onstage and off. Heywood's rebuttal to critics of the theater in *Apology for Actors* indicates the implicit belief in anti-theatricalist writers and defenders of the stage alike in the porous and negotiable boundaries between characters, actors, and audience.[82] Questions of intent are particularly vexed when it comes to the relationship between character and agency in literary works. Schalkwyk asserts that on a basic level, the performativity of a character requires that it be a "figure capable of generating a speech act and bearing the consequences of such an act."[83] The interior states that are the fodder of confession are imputed to, rather than inherent in, characters; drama, as a result, facilitates *experimental inhabitations* of interiorized subjectivity that stage conflicts of discursive authority.[84]

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[81] Medina, *Speaking from Elsewhere*, 132.

[82] Invective in Phillip Stubbes' *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) forcefully condemns theater in part for its apparent power to condition the behavior of spectators: an audience member, he suggests, is liable to leave a play with cross-dressed male performers and in "secret conclaves [covertly]... play the sodomite or worse" (1583: L8v). Stubbes was one of many voices in an anti-theatrical discourse which condemned the theater using arguments which implicitly endorsed its transformative power. Heywood also invokes the power of the public stage as he defends it in *Apology,* building a case for the positive (i.e. conservative) pedagogical function of dramatized transgressions. He argues that plays are actively intended "to teach the subjects obedience to their King, to shew the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections" (1612: Book III, F3v).

[83] David Schalkwyk, "Shakespeare's Speech," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40, no. 2 (March 20, 2010): 375, doi:10.1215/10829636-2009-027.

[84] The infamous mousetrap scene in *Hamlet* offers a meta-theatrical rendition of this, relying on the power of the spectacle of guilt animated in the anecdote from Heywood, but also presenting *onstage* the imputation of subjective interiority to another, and attempting to assess that spectacle of guilt with confessorial authority. See, for example, when Hamlet tells Horatio; "Observe my uncle. If his occulted guilt / Do not itself unkernal in one speech, It is a damned ghost we have seen." (3.2.75-77). William

To be effective, performative speeches are always, to some degree, acts of authority, but the dynamics and configurations of that authority are often open to misreading and negotiation within the exchange. A socially normative confession would involve a speaker and addressee who both understand and exhibit an understanding of their relative roles in broader social taxonomy, and occupy those roles in terms of the conventions of the exchange. As an instance of unwitting confession from Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* helps demonstrate, however, awareness and intent do not precondition the reception of a speech.[85] Vindice, the revenger of the play's title moves through the play driven by his own code for personal vengeance. His revenge plot is driven by a teleological goal that is directly at odds with the state's power; in the early modern period, secular law explicitly forbade personal revenge.[86] At the end of the play, Vindice has achieved his aims against all the members of the royal house that wronged him before and during the course of the play and has successfully evaded detection in his machinations. He cannot, however, resist confiding in Antonio, who was likewise opposed to the former Duke for personal reasons, and in the Duke's death has assumed the role. Vindice discloses, "We may be bold/ To speak it now… 'Twas we who murdered him!" (5.3.99-101). This admission is made just as it becomes clear that

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Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Susanne L. Wofford, First Edition (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1993).

[85] This 1607 play, published anonymously was for centuries generally attributed to Cyril Tourneur. I follow more recent academic opinion in assigning authorship to Thomas Middleton.

[86] Heather Hirschfeld indicates that because of this moral bifurcation at the inception of a revenge plot, "within the paradigm of revenge tragedy, the "possibility of atonement has been severely jeopardized if not altogether lost." Hirschfeld, Heather, "The Revenger's Tragedy: Original Sin and the Allures of Vengeance," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Smith, Emma (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53.

Vindice has not and would not otherwise be exposed—as Vindice subsequently reflects, "This murder might have slept in tongueless brass / But for ourselves" (5.3.112-113). His spontaneous speech reflects a common structural and thematic principle underlying Renaissance confessions—that the truth is inevitably exposed. Vindice does not intend his speech as confession in terms of the normative ideological underpinnings of that mode of speech; he is not penitent, rather, he wants credit for his role in the killings, and furthermore, he implicates Antonio in the killings by suggesting that they were done in part on his behalf.[87] In other words, he speaks to interpellate Antonio into his plot, to verbally reinforce their likeness, not to expose his guilt to Antonio's power and judgment. The grave miscalculation of his revelation lies in its failure to recognize the longer-term stakes of violating the ideological order of the state. Having been transformed as a result of Vindice's murders into a ruler, Antontio inevitably sees a confession of regicide as a threat to his power. Despite the fact that it was not intended as one, Vindice's revelation has the performative effects of an official confession, as Antonio immediately orders that Vindice be arrested and killed for his crimes. Antonio's response is itself a significant speech act: in citing his power to judge and condemn as ruler, he produces and legitimizes it within the play. This recitation of normative authority, however, is compelled because of the intrusion of the "abnormal" authority Vindice cites when he confesses his acts.

This confessional scene manifests a persistent pattern in staged iterations: insofar as it "works," it does so in ways that necessitate a rethinking of what "to work" means in

[87] The Duke's step-son, also a casualty of the revenge plot, raped Antonio's wife, leading Vindice to assume that he has been an agent of revenge on Antonio's behalf in addition to his own.

the first place. Vindice's utterance is not merely transactional; it carries an affective charge. Stanley Cavell has offered a useful elaboration of Austin's notion of the perlocutionary that takes into account these intersubjective dynamics of certain encounters of speaking subjectivity.[88] The concept derives from the fact that perlocutionary effects depend on the affective responses of another—Cavell argues that the passionate utterance has a performative power, but one manifested specifically in terms of its intersubjective context.[89] This mode of power leaves the speaker exposed to the unpredictable terrain of the other's subjective response. Whereas, he suggests, performative utterances as Austin describes them imply "participation in the order of law," Cavell indicates that "a passionate utterance is an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire."[90] This example from *The Revenger's Tragedy* illustrates both. Though he does so perhaps unwittingly, Vindice leaves himself open to the law's inscription in his words, but the speech itself also signifies in the register of the passionate utterance, implying a mode of intersubjective desire. In this case, it is not the mode of desire that Brooks ascribes to the self-consciously guilty for acceptance in a community they have wronged; Vindice evinces no guilt for his actions.[91] Instead,

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[88] In response to Austin's ruling out the performative dimensions of perlocutionary with he explanation that "*any*, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing, with or without calculation, of any utterance whatsoever," Cavell writes, "*Any? Almost? Liable?* Why is this roughly the end of a story rather than the (new) beginning of one?" Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 110; Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 172.

[89] As opposed to a speech act that function by way of institutional authority, for example, as in the authorized performance of marriage.

[90] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 182.

[91] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 111. Brooks, throughout the book, incorporates issues of desire that allow him to synthesize a Foucauldian analysis of the power of confession with some of the terms and underlying precepts of psychoanalysis.

Vindice's words reflect an implicit faith in the affective rules of the scene of address. This faith, though, is inflected by the desire for performative efficacy and corresponding predictable intersubjective recognition. As Cavell makes clear of the passionate utterance, however, "refusal may become part of the performance."[92] The potential for refusal—in the auditor, as Cavell suggests, or as I show in the following chapter, in a supposed speaker—animates dynamic interplay of desire and affect that is at work in confessional speech.

Cavell's conception of the passionate utterance helps illuminate the efficacy of social confessions, or confessional speech, insofar as it makes clear the power of an intrasubjective context that is never wholly knowable, and accordingly, never completely predictable, even when, as is the case of confession, these contexts are the product of legible discourses of power that while potentially flexible, as Judith Butler has shown, operate on a different scale of strategic inhabitation. To return to a question I posed earlier in this section, the difficulties of assessing the "success" or "failure" of a confessional speech act hinge on the inevitable conflicts of desire and will that shape the participation of the multiple participants. In Butler's words, the subject, "positioned as both addressed and addressing, taking its bearings within that crossed vector of power" is constituted in linguistic exchange in terms of both power and vulnerability. The dialogic speech act itself shapes and is shaped by the subjectivity of its participants; and it is negotiated *in* the process of the exchange. This is a crucial modification of Austin's theory that Butler has in particular advanced; whereas he separates out the instantaneous illocutionary speech act from it subsequent perlocutionary effects, Butler explains that

[92] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 183.

that "the 'moment' in ritual is condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions."[93] This condensed historicity enables us to think differently about transformations that can occur through citations of normative speech modes.

Looking Ahead

Linked as it is to an intersubjective system whereby secrets might be processed and judged, the language of confession is suffused with the tantalizing promise of access to otherwise unstable narratives of inwardness, which can, in being articulated, be contained. However, the highly prescribed and typically self-consciously performative frame within which confession becomes a means of publishing one's secrets, errors, beliefs, and thoughts limits the extent to which it can be seen either as an immediate and wholly personal act of self-representation or as a technology of complete subjective control.[94] With the increasing diffusion of confessional language and practice into representations outside the realm of the church or the court in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the extent to which subjects could view themselves and others in terms of their capacity for revelation creates the stakes of social interaction. It also infuses dramatic representations, organizing and explaining the means by which characters expose their own figured interiority and shaping plots based on performances of guilt. These dramatic representations form the backbone of three chapters to follow, in which I pursue and expand on the claims I have made here.

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[93] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 3.

[94] Hanson identities as a source of anxiety in the Renaissance the "usually fearful, even paranoid recognition that interiority can give the subject leverage against his world" (16). She references Maus in describing the manifold ways in which anxieties about the regulation of this relationship can be seen in the early modern textual record in examples ranging from drama to tracts to conduct manuals.

The second chapter is entitled "'Repeated foule crimes' and Paradoxes of Authenticity in Early Modern Witchcraft and *The Late Lancashire Witches*." As Butler reminds us, "although the referent institutes reality rather than describing it, the referent always institutes reality within an already constituted field."[95] This mutually constitutive relationship between the situational dynamics that frame a performances and the efficacy of those performances informs my reading of the early modern witchcraft confession. It takes as its background the confluence of historical and cultural tropes of witchcraft that produce a generic structure capable of shaping both accusations and confessions of confession in a manner that highlights the inevitable slippages in prescripted forms of guilt. Early modern witchcraft is constructed around the legal regulation and social normalization of a practice inherently seen as fantastical and supernatural. The narratological and epistemological qualities of narrative of witchcraft, then, become particularly fraught cultural sites. I draw on historical situated readings of archival witchcraft confessions in order to trace the relationships between the paradox of authenticity associated with a vein of confession particularly subject to generic and subjective prescription. I read these texts in relation to Heywood and Brome's 1634 play *The Late Lancashire Witches* in order to argue that the "successful" confession is often determined relative to socially contingent generic and narrative expectations. Furthermore, as the confessions I describe in this chapter make clear, the substance and stakes of confessions are shaped throughout by multiple agents: the confessing speaker, their interlocutor, and the presumed expectations of the audience. In situating and analyzing these particular confessions, I address the question how social conventions and

[95] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 122.

the demands of genre condition the performance of confession, exploring the relationship between these forms and the intended—and unexpected—ends of the confession for various participants.

While the previous chapter uses the lens of a particular genre of social transgression to animate a discussion of confessional dynamics, chapter three, "'Harms Lamented, Not Redressed:' *The Witch of Edmonton* and Fictions of Closure" turns to the social construction of a public form of confessional subjectivity. I pick up on the previous chapter's interest in the way witchcraft functions as a mode of self-reflexively intelligible prescription that shapes sociolinguistic subjectivity through my reading of Elizabeth Sawyer, eponymous witch of the 1621 Rowley, Dekker, and Ford play. She operates in relation to, but in contrast, with the play's other primary figure, Frank Thorney, whose bigamy and murder put him on a tragic arc that structurally parallels that of the witch, but whose concept of confessional agency is constituted in terms of the social network that elicits and responds to their confessions. The chapter is framed by its focus on the two characters' final gallows speeches, a form of confession that is associated, both by characters in the play and by the generic cultural logic of the gallows repentance, with a cathartic restoration of social norms. My reading of the play, however, suggests that these confessions are sought and delivered in terms of the desire for closure on a personal, social, and narrative level that is always to some degree deferred. The two gallows speeches achieve, or are met with, dramatically different perlocutionary effects. In parsing them, I suggest that performative inhabitations of these intracommunal modes of confession rely on legible configurations of subjective power while opening a space for the strategic appropriation and manipulation of the subjective categories through which

that power operates.

The final chapter, "Riddling Shrift: Auricular Agency and the Confessing Body" turns the discussion of confession inward. Through my discussion of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, that inward focus takes two forms that converge in Ford's late-period play. In this chapter, I trace anxieties of auricular confession as they emerge on the early modern stage—friars and religious figures appear, but not as agents of efficacious shrift. The knowledge of secrets implies a kind of power, and as these texts show, the exercise of that power does not always flow according to normative hierarchies. The play helps us approach a question that insistently shadows confessional speech: what happens to agency when *no one* is "authorized" to forgive? How might confessing signify differently in terms of the intersubjective relationships it names and produces? Friar Laurence, for example, becomes through his privileged role as a confessor, a chief agent of tragedy; at the end of the play, the friar is compelled to confess publically before the court—enacting the transforming role of the friar while reinforcing the power of confessional speech. As these plays illuminate the capacity of confession to transform the social identity and personal affiliations of subjects are not limited to the confessor; or rather, as waning epistemological power and confessional efficacy of the friar figure helps stage a contest for authority that plays out in terms of other—in these plays heterosexual and patriarchal—hierarchies of confessorial agency. The contest for control over secrets, of one's own, and of others, plays out on a speaking body that is figuratively linked to an authentic embodiment that evades speech, and yet can only signify textually. The readings in this chapter build on previous chapter to suggest that visceral, manipulative, and institutionally authorized attempts to extract the

secrets of other in full only serve to reveal an irreducible, and unspeakable register of confessional autonomy.

CHAPTER II

"REPEATED FOULE CRIMES" AND PARADOXES OF AUTHENTICITY IN EARLY MODERN WITHCRAFT AND *THE LATE LANCASHIRE WITCHES*

In 1633, in an English village in Lancashire, a ten-year-old boy named Edmund Robinson made a detailed accusation of witchcraft that resulted in the prosecution of twenty local individuals for the crime. Just 21 years earlier, that same village had been the site of a dramatic spate of witch trials, so the resurgence would have brought with it a familiar array of potential threats and ready suspicions. Though almost all were convicted at trial in the 1633 case, the officials were slow to pass sentence, in part, perhaps, because doubts about the legitimacy of the specific case were beginning to emerge. The case was referred to higher courts, and by the command of King Charles, the involved parties were brought to London in May of 1634.[1] Subject to this further scrutiny, inconsistencies in testimony emerged and the case fell apart; in July of 1634, Robinson admitted under interrogation that he had fabricated his testimony. In the words of a contemporary report, he revealed, "the tale is false and feigned, and has no truth at all, but only as he has heard tales and reports made by women, so he framed the tale out of his own invention."[2] He

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[1] The official intervention is reminiscent of the earlier intercession into the Darrell case, and as in that instance, intervention into local cases of witchcraft was tied to a broader political and religious context. The politics at the top of the religious hierarchy continued to evolve, and the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, was skeptical of Puritanism, which shaped his skepticism of the witchcraft accusations. See Alison Findlay, "Sexual and Spiritual Politics in the Events of 1633-34 and 'The Late Lancashire Witches'," in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. Robert Poole (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 159.

[2] See James J. A. Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 164.

told investigators that he made up the story to avoid getting in trouble for playing when he was not supposed to; contextual evidence suggests that the boy's family supported his accusations in an effort to exploit their potential commercial possibilities.[3]

By the time the boy confessed that he had fabricated his accusations, however, the story he had told had taken on a life of its own. 60-year-old Margaret Johnson, a woman from the village who was not named in the original indictment, confessed to witchcraft. Johnson fit the stereotypical mold for a witch, and her testimony was peppered with details that corresponded to Robinson's story and included additional details that amplified the scale and scope of the purported witchcraft. She claimed to have at her disposal a familiar called Mamillion and said she used witchcraft to harm other people, control the weather, and transport people from place to place. The circumstances surrounding this confession are unclear, and contextual clues suggest investigative coercion, mental instability, and/or, as Alison Findlay suggests, "having internalized the folklore surrounding witchcraft as a means of (albeit temporary) empowerment" may have played a role in it.[4] Though Johnson's freely tendered confession was marked by a number of suspicious inconsistencies and may not have been taken at face value, her personal declaration of guilt irrevocably tainted all the defendants. Despite the weakness

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[3] This is not the only case in which real investigations stemmed from fictionalized charges: James Sharpe has written extensively on the case of Anne Gunter, who was interrogated in the Star Chamber for feigning possession in 1604. She confessed that she patterned her symptoms on those she found described in a 1593 pamphlet describing the case of three convicted witches in Warboys. This pamphlet was influential and seems to have been in relatively broad circulation; Gunter not only mimicked possession as it was described in the pamphlet, but she also used its descriptions of the witches and their familiars to bolster her accusation (See Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter*). The pamphlet in question is called *The most strange and admirable discoverie ofthe three Witches of Warboys arraigned, convicted, and executed at the last Assizes at Huntingdon.*

[4] Findlay, "Sexual and Spiritual Politics in the Events of 1633-34 and 'The Late Lancashire Witches'," 148.

of the evidence and Robinson's confession that he fabricated the charges, the pardoned witches who had not already died in jail were, the historical record suggests, still imprisoned in 1637, and there is no evidence that they were ever released.[5] Despite the controversy associated with the specific case, the story spun by Robinson and Johnson had lasting literary impact: in 1634, Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome wrote a dramatic version of the case entitled *The Late Lancashire Witches*, which mines village witchcraft for its humorous potential while suggesting that within the play itself, witchcraft is real as a subjective category and crime.[6]

Witchcraft confessions, either in popular pamphlets adapting real cases or as they are explored on stage, are especially powerful insofar as they are narratives of crimes that are inherently fantastic and rooted simultaneously in the conventions of folklore and law. Accordingly, they function as discursive sites in which the limits of plausibility and truthfulness are particularly apt to operate in a reciprocal relationship with what might at any given time be considered generically satisfying. The chain of events described above opens up a number of questions that drive the following chapter: How do the commonplace features of witchcraft, which was by that point "part of the fabric of everyday life" in the words of one historian, coalesce into an understood genre?[7] What do those generic expectations suggest about the shaping of confessions to that crime? How

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[5] Ibid., 151.

[6] All citations from this play are from Laird Barber's 1979 edition, (New York: Garland, 1979). Barber's edition includes a copy of the quarto version housed in the Huntington Library and numbers the lines throughout the whole text rather than by act. This play is occasionally (as in Gabriel Egan's edition) referred to by the title *The Witches of Lancashire*, which is the run-on title from the initial quarto publication, but the critical commonplace to is retain the conventional title, *The Late Lancashire Witches.*

[7] J. A. Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A Horrible and True Story of Deception, Witchcraft, Murder, and the King of England* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 86.

does the transformative capacity of confessional performances relate to witchcraft as it is understood both as a crime and a subjective category? These questions provoke consideration of Judith Butler's point that the "conditions of intelligibility are themselves formulated in and by power."[8] "Power," however, is particularly loaded in this context given the nature of witchcraft as a cultural phenomenon: Johnson is induced to "confess" to extraordinary and threatening agency in a regulatory context that depends on her confession, seeking to neutralize that which in its content threatens the regulatory apparatus. This confession, however, proves to have an uncontrollable power of its own, with echoing, unpredictable social and political effects that underscore how a confession, once made, can never be wholly retracted.[9]

The period witnessed a relative concentration of witchcraft trials that coincided with the expansion of popular print literature, which often capitalized on the fantastical nature of the crime. In the case recounted above, both accusation and confession are unstable narratives that are inextricable from the dramatic history of witchcraft in the district. Furthermore, the play that followed it demonstrates how real stories and fictional representations circulate in dynamic fashion. As scholars of witchcraft and drama alike have emphasized, magic and witchcraft appear in the drama of the early modern period to a staggering degree.[10] The topic's popularity in terms of theme, plot, and the frequency with which it appears in more passing allusions indicates that by 1634, the playwrights could safely assume their audiences would be aware of and interested in these issues.

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[8] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 134.
[9] Peter Brooks has posed a related question: "what is it about confessional speech that appears to make it the vehicle of the most authentic truth, yet capable of the most damaging, sometimes self-destructive untruth?" Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 9.
[10] See Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 43; Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 210–211.

Indeed, while magic generally shows up in a range of literary types, witches specifically play significant roles in a number of Jacobean plays, including Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606), Marston's *Sophonisba* (1607), Middleton's *The Witch* (~1619), and Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621).[11] A moment early in *The Late Lancashire Witches* offers a rather self-referential example of the legibility and dramatic currency of theatrical witchcraft. A bewitched young character, Winny, complains that her mother, Joan, looks like looks "like one o' the Scottish wayward sisters" (447). She alludes to some of the most famous theatrical witches—those in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Winny's reference—an insult to her mother that is tied to the magically-inspired inversion of their household—demonstrates that within the world of the play and for the audience, the tropes of witchcraft, including those innovated in its literary incarnations, are in circulation. [12] Her remark also underscores the contrast between witchcraft in this play and in a play like *Macbeth*, in which the trio of weird sisters occupy a liminal space that refutes a clear understanding of the boundaries of reality both for characters in the play and for the audience viewing it.[13]

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[11] Witchcraft also figures more indirectly in a number of plays from the period. See for example the use of magical trickery in Green's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1589), the depiction of the village cunning woman in Lyly's *Mother Bombie* (1594), and Ford's Perkin Warbeck (1634), in which efforts to make the titular character confess and condemn himself are linked to witchcraft. The language of witchcraft (and even suggestions of actual witchcraft) is frequently deployed to characterize problematic females and their claims for agency, as can be seen, for example, in Shakespeare's renderings of Cleopatra and Joan of Arc.

[12] More subtly, the allusion also casts the Seely women as potential witches themselves (though Winny addresses her mother, the fact that witchcraft was thought to run in families implicates her as well).

[13] See William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, ed. Nicholas Brooke (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.1; 1.3; 3.5; 4.1. Contemporary critics now tend to emphasize the likeness between the witchcraft scenes in this play and those in

In the fictional universe created by Heywood and Brome, however, witchcraft is unequivocally real and plays a role across village life. This dynamic is simultaneously facilitated by and in tension with the play's status as "dramatic journalism"—a fictional work that also depicts a ripped-from-the-headlines case.[14] Theirs is not the only witchcraft play to have such antecedents: the aforementioned *The Witch of Edmonton* is also based on real events, drawn in large part from a 1621 pamphlet by Henry Goodcole. Pamphlets like Goodcole's, which covered the legal trials of witches and detailed their titillating confessions, were in popular circulation throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and as I will demonstrate in the next section, they were instrumental in the development of the recognizable network of tropes against which the validity and authenticity associated with witchcraft confessions could be judged. The third section explores the social and civil status of witchcraft confessions in terms of both its legal codification and the narrative frames used by writers who capitalized on the crime. This investigation frames readings of some specific examples of witchcraft confessions as they appear in pamphlet narratives to argue that subjective spaces associated both with witchcraft and with confession can be shaped by multiple forces produced through operant paradigms within which they are presented. In the final section of this chapter, I trace this quality through *The Late Lancashire Witches* and the story with which this chapter began to show how confessional performances—or the lack thereof—can work amidst and against the conventions with which they are associated.

Middleton's earlier work *The Witch,* proceeding from the assumption that these scenes were augmented or added by Middleton.

[14] A.M. Clark (1931, p 120).

Troping Witchcraft

Recent decades have brought numerous and thorough additions to the study of early modern witchcraft; works such as James Sharpe's *Instruments of Darkness*, Stuart Clark's collection *Languages of Witchcraft,* and Marion Gibson's *Early Modern Witches* have shed new light on the complex sociopolitical dynamics of English witchcraft while bringing new attention to the way the practice and its purported practitioners were represented in textual and narrative modes.[15] The late medieval and early modern period saw a concentration of witchcraft persecutions that has been referred to as the European "witch-craze."[16] Given the historical context of English witchcraft, this particular term is somewhat hyperbolic, as accusations and prosecutions appear only in fits and starts and

[15] Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*; Marion Gibson, *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000); Stuart Clark, ed., "Introduction," in *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 1–16. These works are among a number of very useful studies of early modern witchcraft that informed this project. Marion Gibson's recent works have traced the textual history of early modern witchcraft to understand the relationship between fact and fiction in the way individual stories were produced and received. Brian Levack and Barbara Rosen have, along with Sharpe, produced some of the most thorough and erudite general histories of the topic. Frances Dolan and Deborah Willis have traced the topic in terms of gender and drama through the lens of feminist literary critique. See Marion Gibson, *Witchcraft And Society in England And America, 1550-1750* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006); Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (London: Routledge, 1999); Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1995); Rosen, Barbara, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1969); Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*.

[16] For texts that highlight this term, see for example, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witchhunts* by Anne Llewellyn Barstow and *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* by Lyndal Roper. A number of other scholarly texts also invoke the term, but many do move to qualify its implications. The term "craze" is misleading not simply because it tends to overstate the scale and scope of witchcraft persecution during the period, but because it obscures the extent to which concerns about witchcraft were woven into the fabric of legal thought and social life.

in scattered locations during an era that roughly spans the years 1450-1750. Witchcraft, however, was very much a part of English cultural life throughout this period: in Sharpe's magisterial history of the subject, he emphasizes that by the fourteenth century, "beliefs about magic, sorcery, and witchcraft… were firmly embedded in all social levels" in England.[17] Through the late sixteenth and into (and indeed, beyond) the seventeenth centuries, older beliefs and superstitions persisted in an era complicated by dramatic religious change and rapid population growth.[18] Interest in witchcraft could be seen across social groups and classes, and even for skeptics it was a subject worthy of study and debate. This widespread interest persisted throughout the early modern period, until it was, in the words of C. R. Unsworth, "essentially blotted from social reality by a revised conception of the possible."[19]

The familiarity of the tropes of witchcraft is significant for the purposes of this argument: the generic qualities associated with early modern witchcraft facilitate the performative situations and subjectivities that inheres in the textual record of confessional speeches. As Judith Butler puts it, "if a performative provisionally succeeds… [it is] because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through*

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[17] Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 164.

[18] For the citizens of a country rocked by religious upheaval and undergoing dramatic socioeconomic transformations, "theirs was an insecure world in which diseases or accidents that today would be diagnosed or accounted for in other terms, or misfortunes that might simply be attributed to bad luck, were explained by witchcraft" (Sharpe 64).

[19] Unsworth 75-6. James Sharpe reports that despite reports that millions of people were executed for witchcraft, "the real total for the who of Europe [between 1450 and 1750] was probably less than 50,000, about half the number of deaths caused by the Civil Wars that racked Britain from 1642 (*Instruments* 5). Brian Levack has estimated that the number of executions that took place in England may have been as little (relatively speaking) as 1,000 (21). The term also suggests an atmosphere of manic zeal accompanying persecutions that may not jibe with reality—with some exceptions, such as the mass witch-hunts that occured in East Anglia in the 1640's, which are somewhat beyond the temporal scope of this investigation.

the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices."[20] Butler insists, however, that the success of a performative is always provisional, a quality that leaves open a space for resistance. The discourse of confession, in which supplication, truth-telling, and transgressive boast can co-mingle, demonstrates how that resistance occurs in relation to the citation of a powerful network of narrative tropes. Insofar as the conventions governing witchcraft confessions are everyday manifestations of ideology, the normative and/or normalizing social structures such as those discussed in this section are significant for their capacity to generate patterns that tend to determine what subjects assume about themselves, others, and their agency relative to those assumptions.[21] As Pierre Bourdieu has established, the anticipated conditions of reception shape discourse production; accordingly, the dissemination of the conventions associated with this ideological network ultimately frame the confessions it necessitates and elicits.[22] Moving forward from the underlying assumption that the individual performative agency of suspected witches and their accusers are imbricated in this network of larger structural forces, I argue that the subject positions enabled in these exchanges are formed in part relative to their correspondence to narrative tropes of truth and reliability.

In her exploration of the profusion of possible historical causes attributed to this era in the history of witchcraft, Robin Briggs notes that "witchcraft is itself a reification, an imposed category whose boundaries are anything but clear."[23] As a category it is

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[20] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 51 (emphasis hers).
[21] Defined by Althusser as the as the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, 109.
[22] See Pierre Bourdieu and John B. Thompson, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 76.
[23] Briggs, Robin, "'Many Reasons Why': Witchcraft and the Problem of Multiple Explanations," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed.

perhaps best understood as a network of tropes that are shaped by interrelated discourses of legal code and popular folklore and molded by the weight of superstition and convention. Certain general truisms of English witchcraft are clear: the image of the witch that emerged in the Renaissance proved to be pervasive and durable: a withered crone, simultaneously grotesque and pitiful, antisocial and dependent on community support.[24] As Stuart Clark has emphasized, the types of people most likely to be accused of witchcraft tended to represent a disruption to the ideals of the hegemonic patriarchal order by way of socioeconomic status, gender/sexuality, marital/family status, or physical deformity.[25] Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane have advanced a persuasive anthropological reading of early modern maleficium, or the causing of harm to another through magic, suggesting that it stems from charity denied, a model that likewise presupposes that the purported witch is often an individual already on the fringes of

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Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 53. Diane Purkiss and Marion Gibson alsoboth argue that the designation of "witch" is societal, and not an objective one defined by any innate qualities; see, for example Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996); Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*. In Gibson's words, the definition of witchcraft depends "in part on stereotypes rather than individual 'realities'" (Reading, 5). Gibson in particular has worked extensively in contextualizing and interpreting witchcraft pamphlets, and I follow her in establishing my operating understanding of the "truth," both of pamphlets and the events they record. She suggests that for critics, truth or accuracy generally implies "closeness to events," including "the speaking of curses or incantations, arrests, begging, illness, and neighbourly quarrels [which] happened tangibly in early modern England" (ibid).

[24] Subsequent study supports the basis of this observation: in their groundbreaking anthropological work on English witchcraft, Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane argue that witchcraft accusations stem from interpersonal tensions at lower socioeconomic strata. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 660–667.

[25] Stuart Clark has contended that texts dissecting the problem of witchcraft bear many similarities, in vocabulary and tone, to texts treating other forms of misrule. See "Inversion, Misrule, and the Meaning of Witchcraft." *Past and Present* vol. 87 1980.

society: usually a woman, and generally poor and uneducated.[26] She begs charitable assistance of another, and when that aid is refused, she resorts to maleficium, often in the form of the mysterious wasting of people, animals, or crops, to exact her revenge.

The contemporary legibility of such conventions of witchcraft is reflected in popular pamphlet accounts. However, the narratives, in animating these conventions, demonstrate the slippages they inevitably contain. The first English trial-based witchcraft pamphlet was published in 1566, and in the decades that followed, scores of publications traced the phenomenon.[27] As a popular discourse framed by the intersecting issues of crime, religion, latent regional, gender, and class stereotypes, and the supernatural, witchcraft, and in particular, stories and confessions of specific witches, became an appealing, albeit controversial, subject for a subgenre of the murder pamphlet. Gibson has argued for the centrality of pamphlet narratives for the study of witchcraft because

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[26] For an extended look at the Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*. In her study of the role of gender in early modern witchcraft, Willis argues that dynamics in which women were often systematically disempowered led to the gendered construction of witchcraft. Frances Dolan has also explored the gender dynamics of witchcraft, reading it in relation to other kinds of domestic crime. She argues that tensions among communities could be negotiated through the discourse of magic and maleficium (doing harm to another) just as they could through other narratives of transgression and subversion. Dolan identifies the threat posed by witches as emerging in their "capacity for agency… construed as wholly negative," suggesting that the witchcraft accusation entailed the recognition of female power which justified the persecution of the women who held it Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 16.

[27] The genre eventually tapers off in the opening decades of the 17th century, though prosecutions do not cease. Gibson suggests that growing controversy around the subject during the reign of James I put a damper on the publication of these works, and the resulting diminution of popular narratives of witchcraft led to a corresponding decrease in popular attention to or belief in the practice. Gibson, *Reading,* 186-187. Later pamphlets, including Henry Goodcole's 1621 pamphlet about Elizabeth Sawyer, demonstrate anxiety about the controversial nature of the subject. Because supposed acts of witchcraft that resulted in physical or personal harm were especially apt to be prosecuted, they are especially visible in the historical and literary record. This is in contrast to other forms of magical activity, including alchemical experiments.

they offer a perspective on the phenomenon from legal, literary, and cultural perspectives, and because they were often based on first hand information and/or pretrial documents, they offer a compelling look at the legal treatment of witchcraft at the time.[28] Though the pamphlets themselves tend to trumpet their own transparency and truthfulness, they are texts mediated by the literary goals of their authors and produced with an eye toward audience reception and the popular conceptions of the crime. Accordingly, they often misreport or distort elements from the legal cases they cover.[29]

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[28] She builds on contemporary scholarship in both witchcraft historiography and the early modern popular press to make this claim. In his introduction to a 2001 collection of essays on witchcraft historiography, Stuart Clark identifies "one of the topics central to the re-conceptualizing of witchcraft that is currently taking place—the role of narrative in the actions and descriptions of those who immediately confronted it." He cites the "overwhelming power" of narrative to affect language and action and calls for continued attention to the role of language and storytelling in the operation and evolution of early modern witchcraft. Clark, "Introduction," 9. Clark traces his own scholarly interest and methodology to that of Natalie Zemon Davis' influential 1987 book, *Fiction in the Archives*, which explores the interpretive possibilities for the application of literary criticism techniques to archival texts. Subsequent work by other scholars in History and English including Tessa Watt, Peter Lake, and Frances Dolan has demonstrated that these works—and especially, for my purposes, those works dealing with domestic crime—serve as, in Dolan's words, "evidence of the processes of cultural formation and transformation in which they participated" in addition to serving as artifacts of those processes; Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 3. See also Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Peter Lake and Michael C. Questier, *The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). As these texts make clear, other kinds of crimes were also subject to extensive pamphlet coverage, and coverage of these crimes could offer competing discourses of criminal/moral guilt and responsibility even as these texts trafficked in tropes familiar to readers of witchcraft pamphlets. The relative rarity of surviving copies suggests that these works may have been put out in comparatively small printing runs, but pamphlets were to at least some extent available to audience beyond a literate London readership and as the intertextual connections among various pamphlets makes clear, neither written nor read in a vacuum

[29] Accordingly, some scholars, including James Sharpe, contend that assize records are the best source scholars have for understanding patterns of prosecution. Though existing records are patchy, a large number of early modern indictment records survive, though

Though these texts offer an intriguing glimpse into history of witchcraft, as Gibson, for example, has demonstrated, the lens they provide is refracted by a mode and genre inevitably adapted to ideological ends. They tend to depict witchcraft cases through combinations of purportedly fact-based trial reportage, motivated propaganda, breathless tabloid gossip, and morality-driven cautionary tales in keeping with Peter Lake's description of murder pamphlets more generally, in which one is "confronted with something of a mixed genre, simultaneously both festive and admonitory, titillating and moralizing."[30] As popular prose, the narratives operate reciprocally with the evolution of the cultural stereotypes of witchcraft: Jonathan Barry emphasizes, "these accounts are shaped by contemporary conventions about what would or would not carry conviction as a truthful and entertaining account."[31] In other words, preexisting language and tropes operate in tandem with expected audience reception to shape the evolving limits of narrative plausibility. The result is a self-referential literary form in which the peculiarities of individual cases emerge in conjunction with familiar plots. The increasing legibility of generic patterns of witchcraft lends accounts a narrative sense that is sometimes at odds with the internal coherence of individual documents; ages, relationships, names, and crimes get jumbled, even as the stories are often heralded as

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these are generally rendered in abbreviated legalese. The more fleshed-out pretrial documents—the information and examination—were seldom preserved after trials, so few survive. Even so, the assize records, while occasionally barren or incomplete, tend provide a more tempered view of the frequency and outcome of witchcraft accusations and executions than extent pamphlet accounts**.**

[30] Lake and Questier, *The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat*, xiv.

[31] Barry, Jonathan, "Introduction," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43. The phrase "carry conviction" is intriguing in that it alludes both to the persuasiveness of a witchcraft narrative and to the role of those narratives in the legal process.

authentic first-person accounts. The epistemological problems necessarily embedded in accounts of what are now generally seen as impossible crimes are not, however, just a liability of pamphlet narratives; rather, they are an essential feature, producing and reproducing culturally legible witchcraft in conjunction with always uncontrollable intersubjective reconstructions of specific acts and subjective histories.

The archival narrative history of a woman named Elizabeth Fraunces helps illustrate this dynamic. An account of her crimes appear in a 1579 trial pamphlet called *A Detection of damnable driftes,* and it aptly exemplifies the generic expectations associated with English witchcraft at the time. In the pamphlet, Fraunces, described as an elderly spinster, asks a neighbor named Alice Poole for some yeast. Mrs. Poole refuses, and as Frances walks away from the house, she curses her neighbor. At that moment, a spirit appears in the form of a white dog who asks Fraunces what she would have him do to harm Mrs. Poole. Fraunces asks him to plague the lady in the head and he agrees, though not before demanding that Fraunces feed him, which she does. After this fateful meeting, Mrs. Poole suffers severe pain and ultimately dies. Though Fraunces reports no contact with her victim after her initial request for yeast and only hears of Mrs. Poole's continued plight through third parties, she confesses to having bewitched Mrs. Poole, in doing so claiming personal agency for supernatural murder. As per the statute of the time, she is condemned and eventually executed.[32] This particular pamphlet is notable in part because of the predictable pattern of its narrative arc, a pattern suggesting that both the

[32] Anon., *A Detection of Damnable Driftes, Practized by Three Witches Arraigned at Chelmifforde in Essex*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 417:01 (London: [By J. Kingston] for Edward White, at the little North-dore of paules,, 1579).

participants in the real-life exchange and readers of the pamphlet share some understanding of the nature and course of conventional maleficium.

Fraunces' story, however, seems to have been more complicated than this relatively straightforward account suggests. This was not, in fact, the first time Fraunces was accused of witchcraft, nor was this the first pamphlet in which she featured. Thirteen years prior, Fraunces appears in the first known English witchcraft pamphlet, *The Examination and Confessions of certaine Wytches* (1566).[33] In this case, she confesses to utilizing the magic she learned from her grandmother to keep a cat as a familiar, which she fed blood and milk and kept in a basket. The pamphleteer notes that the cat was called Sathan, "as she [Fraunces] termed it."[34] Fraunces reports the following: the cat helped her find two lovers. It then killed one when he refused to marry her and lamed the next for being an unsatisfactory husband. The pamphlet does not specify whether Fraunces or the familiar purportedly came up with the name "Sathan," but I would like to draw attention to this act of naming to argue that in labeling her familiar as such, Fraunces referentially constructs *herself* as a witch. Butler has described the performative effect of naming insofar as it applies to the potentially injurious performative effects on the party being named: in *Exciteable Speech,* she explains that "one is, as it were, brought into social location and time through being named."[35] This case example operates in tandem with but shifts the focus of Butler's point— Fraunces situates and grounds the

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[33] In this pamphlet, she is called Elizabeth Frauncis; for clarity's sake, I retained the spelling from the later document. Marion Gibson points out a number of corroborating details that convince that these women are one and the same.

[34]John. Phillips, *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1802:07 (London: By Willyam Powell for Wyllyam Pickeringe dwelling at Sainte Magnus corner and are there for to be soulde, 1566), A6.

[35] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 29.

witchcraft of which *she* is accused in part through the act of publically naming her cat "Sathan" in a time and place in which the idea of the witch's familiar was in broad circulation. In other words, she reiterates and guarantees the performative naming directed toward her in the act of accusation through an act of self-naming displaced onto a creature produced through its label as a demonic familiar in terms of the social significatory structures of witchcraft.

Though in the confession recounted in the 1566 pamphlet Fraunces claims that she willed Sathan, the cat, to kill both her lover and later, an unwanted child—both crimes punishable under existing statues by death—she was at that point convicted for a non-fatal first offense and imprisoned. Assize records indicate that she was brought to trial again in 1573, but executed only following her 1579 acts against Alice Poole. The 1566 and 1579 pamphlets both demonstrate the peculiar mix of quotidian concerns and sensational detail that characterizes accounts of English witchcraft.[36] Despite their similarities, however, the two stories of Fraunces' witchcraft are distinguished by interesting stylistic and thematic differences. For example, whereas the earlier document delves into the gossipy details of Fraunces' life and upon the details of her relationship with her familiar, describing in detail, for example, the devil-cat's "straunge holowe voice," the later pamphlet takes a less sensational narrative approach. In both accounts, Fraunces' malignity is centered on her immediate social world, but the magical acts recounted in the 1566 pamphlet are relatively unique because they are *so* local. Through Sathan the cat, she exercises maleficium on others, but her motivations tend to be highly

[36] Marion Gibson has pointed out that both pamphlets include fantastical details that are reminiscent of fairy-tale narratives, demonstrating how aspects of available narratives could be incorporated into an individual's testimony Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 44.

personal, directed at her lover and husband, fetus, and child.[37] The husband and children of 1566 disappear from the story by 1579, and in this later document, Fraunces is referred to as a spinster, unlike her victim, Alice Poole, who is always referred to in relation to her husband.

The situating of the witch as a woman outside the bounds of the patriarchal order extends to the later pamphlet's take on motive. Poole holds tangible social power in her interaction with Fraunces; she is able to refuse the request for yeast. That this sparks Fraunces' maleficium signals this document's deployment of the transactional pattern, increasingly prevalent in pamphlet accounts by this point, of charity denied.[38] The invocation of this well-worn trope and the nature of the disparities between these two pamphlets suggests the shaping power of the author's voice in determining the way witchcraft "confessions" are understood: while the 1579 pamphlet suggests that Fraunces' use of witchcraft against Poole was a sudden and unpremeditated act of maleficium, the broader textual record suggests that she had long dabbled in witchcraft. It also suggests that the coalescence of commonplaces about witchcraft could have affected how witches were depicted in individual pamphlets. The author of the later document, less interested in lurid, but specific, details than his predecessor, relies instead on an

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[37] The pamphlet reports that after she gets pregnant by a man who will not marry her, she kills him, and then "douting herself with childe willed sathan to destroy it" (A6-A7).

[38] For example, in a 1589 pamphlet entitled "The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches," Joane Cunnye confessed to visiting the house of a neighbor "to demaund some drink, his wife being busie and a brewing, tolde her she had no leysure to give her any. Then Joane Cunnye went away discontented: and at night [the neighbor's] wife was greevously taen in her head, and the next day in her side, and so continued in most horrible paine for the space of a week, and then dyed." With regards to this kind of broad reading of the dynamics of early modern witchcraft, Marion Gibson has pointed out that this explanation can flatten out the complexities of the issue by reifying a stereotypical dynamic present in narrative accounts. Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 81.

increasingly legible array of witchcraft stereotypes which had evolved in the thirteen years separating the first English account of witchcraft and the one detailing Fraunces' 1579 crime.

In 1584, just five years after Fraunces' later appearance in the pamphlet record, Reginald Scot published his treatise *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, the first major English study of witchcraft.[39] In it, he identifies an image of the witch which was, as the Fraunces story illustrates, already familiar:

> One sort of such as are said to be witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious and papists… These go from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yest, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe; without the which they could hardlie live: neither obtaining for their service and pains, nor by their art, nor yet at the divels hands (with whome they are said to make a perfect and visible bargaine) either beautie, monie, promotion, welth, worship, pleasure, honor, knowledge, learning, or anie other benefit whatsoever."[40]

In distilling popular stereotypes about witchcraft into one almost parodic account, Scot captures early modern conventions about witches in a tidy and persuasive narrative that was influential to writers of his own era and has been intriguing to scholars of the present. Scot's evocative depiction of the exemplary witch is all the more compelling, however, insofar as it was intended to *undermine* the popular image, rather than reinforce it. Perhaps as a result of his skeptical stance, Scot is able to succinctly capture the

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[39] Demonological works from continental Europe had been in circulation for decades—and Scot would draw heavily on them to produce his study. Chief examples of influential early modern demonologies from continental Europe include *Malleus Maleficarum* by Dominican monks Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer and the works of French philosopher and jurist Jean Bodin. Scot's only other prominent work was a popular and comprehensive account of hops cultivation, entitled *Perfect Platform of a Hop-garden*, and published in 1574. Little is known about what led him to transition from that field of study to tackling the thorny contemporary problem of witchcraft.

[40] Scot, Reginald, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1972), 4–5.

patterns common across other accounts of witchcraft, and in doing so highlight the prescriptive generic qualities of the constellation of popular witchcraft tropes. He was certainly not alone in his skeptical stance, and even as Scot maintains a theoretical belief in magical power, he vehemently stresses that witchcraft is a cozening art and essentially hubristic in its implication that a human could have agency of the sort associated rightfully with God.[41]

Skeptical though its genesis may have been, the comprehensive detail of Scot's work ultimately may have helped solidify the tropes of witchcraft in the cultural imaginary.[42] Elizabeth Hanson has argued that even as it was playing its role in the legal and social landscapes of early modern England, "witchcraft was constructed as an epistemic problem generating debates about … whether the crime could in fact occur." She notes, however, that amidst these debates, the subjectivity of the witch it/her-self tends not to be of concern.[43] Though aspects of early modern witchcraft seem to most modern minds inherently implausible, "witch" also refers to a subjective category that had real valance for members of sixteenth and seventeenth century English society. This conflict between agential conviction and external doubt emerged in tandem with the epistemic debates referenced above, and it is ultimately reflected in the way witchcraft

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[41] Other notable vocal skeptics include George Gifford, whose 1593 work "A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes" maintains that while some evidence used to convict suspected witches might be suspect, witches did exist and were a genuine and serious threat. William Perkins, a Cambridge clergyman, invokes scriptural authority to bolster his condemnation of witchcraft, calling for a strict application of the death penalty, even as he urges for a careful consideration of circumstantial evidence in the trying of cases.

[42] Details from it appear in Middleton's *The Witch*, in *Macbeth*'s Hecate scenes, and in *King Lear'*s staging of feigned possession and madness.

[43] She ties this quality of the subjective construction of witchcraft to larger questions of the ontological status of explicitly gendered forms of subjectivity in the period. Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England*, 89.

confessions are deployed as a dramatic trope. Late in the Caroline-era John Ford play *Perkin Warbeck*, one character compares the titular figure's refusal to admit to being a pretender to the throne to the obstinate, but dangerous, delusions of witches who maintain their belief in magic. As Warbeck reasserts his own royalty, the king's chaplain points out, "Thus witches, / Possess'd, even [to] their deaths deluded… the enemy of mankind/Is powerful, but false, and falsehood confident" (5.3104-110). This comparison renders Warbeck's claims, like those of witches, patently impossible to a rational on-looker, but also suggests that their genuine belief in their delusions gives their confessions a peculiar kind of false and dangerous truth.[44] The logic of performativity alone suggests that *something* happened in instances of suspected or attempted early modern witchcraft, and even if one assumes that the magic described in various trials does not work the way it is described, we can plausibly assume that many of the participants in these trials did believe in it. What's more, as the next section details more fully, its reality as a legal category necessitated the production of a corresponding confessional subjectivity.

Narratives of Criminal Maleficium

Its legal evolution reflected, and ultimately helped produce and inspire, an increasingly legible narrative of witchcraft that quite often played out in village and domestic disputes and in popular narratives and dramas. First-person accounts play a

[44] For slightly more expansive reading of this scene relative to the discourses of confessions, see Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England," 261–265. Lilly explores the play's implicit claims about the formation of historical narrative, and notes, "a confession made under "confident" but false pretenses could have significant effects that conform neither to the desires of the non-confessant nor to truth" (264).

crucial role against this backdrop, sketching out the details of witchcraft as it was practiced or as individuals were accused of practicing it. Scot implies in his narrative that the English witch is more apt to be an object of pity than an actual threat, but witchcraft itself was seen in the period as sufficiently threatening to warrant legal prosecution. The legal codifications of witchcraft help illuminate the boundaries of the transgressions associated with it. The power of normative ideology situated in the language of law underlies its promise to contain and counteract the threat of magical harm that it has codified and helped produce. Though this model is consonant with a dialectic of subversion and containment associated with New Historicist criticism, it also aptly reflects a model of witchcraft control that was in circulation in the time period, as this section will demonstrate.[45] At the same time, I argue that in their efforts to depict confessions that are titillating, moral instructive, and purportedly true, pamphlet accounts of criminal witchcraft tend to expose insistent anxieties about an agency associated with witchcraft that evades the scope of legal or discursive confinement.

In the medieval period, instances of witchcraft fell under the purview of ecclesiastical courts, and in this context, it was generally treated as a transgression that called more for auricular confession and penance than for corporal punishment.[46]

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[45]As I noted in the introduction, this dialectic is associated chiefly with Stephen Greenblatt, who has elsewhere argued that confession is vital for "a thwarted system that needs to imagine itself merciful when it disciplines" (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 246. In other words, in confession, challenges to conventional power are reiterated in a context that makes them useful both for the exercise of that power and as a means of underscoring the legitimacy and merit of the dominant system.

[46] Unsworth 75. The inquisitorial approach to jurisprudence in pre-Reformation ecclesiastical courts did not rely on the interrogation of witnesses; these courts did, however, rely heavily on confession. As Anthony Wayne Lilly has argued, the evolution of civil courts in the early modern period brought an increased valuation of confession, absorbing the attitude toward it previously more associated with church courts. Lilly

Jurisdiction remained intertwined in many cases; Fraunces' interrogation, for example, was presided over by both ecclesiastical and assize judges. Keith Thomas has made the influential claim that the Reformation changed the way people were oriented toward magic in communities: whereas conceptions of religion and magic intermingled in the medieval church, Protestantism distanced itself from magical thought.[47] Protestant reformers directly linked Catholic practice to what one termed "socerous witchcraft" in their efforts to condemn Catholic regulatory rituals, including auricular confession.[48] The effects of this shift rippled outward and were reflected in how people tended to view magical words and actions in secular contexts.[49] Thomas argues that as the religious remedies that once met the threat of witchcraft disappeared, it became an increasingly serious social problem. Indeed, while witchcraft was considered a sin, it did not become a felony in English secular law until the reign of Henry VIII, and even then, the legal discourse of witchcraft remained suffused with religious language. In 1541/2, the "Act against Conjurations, Witchcrafts, Sorcery, and Enchantments" made a whole range of magical activities, including divination for treasure hunting, maleficium, and the invocation of spirits punishable by death.[50] The inextricably linked investments of civic

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offers a thorough history of the role of confession in the interrelated histories of civil and church courts. Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England," 50–65.

[47] Witchcraft itself was frequently linked to Catholicism in the post- Reformation period. For example, recall how Scot included "papists" in his description of the conventional witch.

[48] Quoted in Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 54.

[49] Thomas discusses this at length in *Religion and the Decline of Magic.* See for example p 52, 256, and 498 ff.

[50] 33 Hen. VIII c. 8. Reproduced in *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750* by Marion Gibson. Sharpe notes that the background of the 1542 statue is obscure, but raises the suggestion that the political turbulence of the time and increased attention to matters of witchcraft invited fears that ecclesiastical courts were not capable

and religious authorities in the regulation of witchcraft give it multiple valances as a peculiarly spiritual and secular crime. As it became associated with the more public realm of the secular court, however, the status of confession as integral evidence of guilt, rather than as submission to religious ritual, gained supremacy.

As the criminal definition of witchcraft evolved, the laws governing it focused increasingly on its material effects, shifting the emphasis away from its spiritual ones. Though the1542 statute that initially outlawed witchcraft was repealed along with several others by an Act of Edward VI, new legislation proscribing witchcraft appeared in 1563 with an Act of Elizabeth I "against Enchantments, Conjurations, and Witchcrafts."[51] Like the previous statute, this act was expansive in the forms of magical activity it proscribed, but it was notably specific in stressing tangible and physical acts that caused harm. It states that since the repeal of the previous law against witchcraft, "many fantasticall and devilishe [persons]... have used and practiced Wytchecraftes Enchantementes Charms and Sorceries, to the Destruccoon of the [Persons] and Goodes of their neighebours, and other Subjects of this Realme."[52] This preface to the new regulations makes an explicit link between the absence of legal jurisdiction over witchcraft and its practice. In doing so, the statute reaffirms the power of and necessity for the legal system to regulate magic and those who would make use of it. In referencing harm done to the persons or possessions

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of handling what was perceived as a growing moral and civil threat. Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 29.

[51] 5 Eliz. I c.16. Reproduced in Gibson, *Witchcraft.* Gibson notes that the reconsolidation of the protestant government after the reign of Mary provides key context for this Act. She also says that this act seems particularly interested in the material effects of witchcraft, rather than the religious aspects.

[52] ibid

of "neighebours," the new legislation also emphasizes the local and material, rather than simply spiritual or treasonous, aspects of the crime of witchcraft.[53]

As the justificatory frame around the Elizabethan statute makes clear, perceptions about what English witches were *already* doing (harming their neighbors, practicing charms, etc), helped dictate the law itself; in other words, legal encounters with witchcraft existed in a reciprocal relationship to popular behaviors and beliefs, with dramatic and prose accounts of its serving as a crucial link between the two. One of the first pieces of legislation passed during the reign of James I reflected the continuing evolution of conceptions of criminal witchcraft. The 1604 statute, called the "Act against Conjuration, Witchcraft, and dealing with evil and wicked Spirits," extended the definition of legal witchcraft and made it easier to prosecute in an effort to achieve "better restrayninge" and "more severe punishinge" of offences.[54] Under the 1604 law, the death penalty was expanded, attached to "any Invocation or Conjuration of any evill and wicked Spirit" or the exercise of "any Witchcrafte Sorcerie Charme or Inchantment, whereby any [person] shall be killed destroyed wasted consumed pinked or lamed in his or her bodie, or any parte thereof." This law emphasized even more of the material elements of the practice of witchcraft, and made the keeping of a familiar spirit a

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[53]This statute prohibited a broad range of magical activities, but unlike its predecessor, it allowed for degrees of guilt. Individuals found guilty of less serious acts of witchcraft—those not involving the invocation of an evil spirit or the death of another—were subject to prison time rather than the death penalty. State codes and social custom exist in a reciprocal relationship to one another: laws such as this one helped affirm preexisting conventions about witchcraft even as they produced and shaped it as a social and legal concept. This dynamic has been well explored by legal historians. See for example: C. R. Unsworth, "Witchcraft Beliefs and Criminal Procedure in Early Modern England." In *Legal Record and Historical Reality.* Ed. Thomas Watkin. London: Hambleson Press, 1989.

[54] 1 Jas. I, c12. Reproduced in Gibson, *Witchcraft.* This act would remain in effect until 1736.

felony.[55] The litany of illegal forms of bodily harm specified in the law is indicative of the way anxieties about general maleficium were giving way to more specific concerns about the physical consequences of the exercise of magical power.[56]

In assuming the power to adjudicate magical behavior, the law laid claim to supremacy over the alternate power structures associated with witchcraft; given this dynamic, the cooperation and confession of a suspect would be an important means of reinforcing the legitimacy of that authority. Peter Brooks argues that when the law "accepts and uses a confession… it speaks an authoritative language" about the nature of the confessional act itself.[57] The language surrounding the legal use of the narrative generated in an interrogation of a suspected criminal is suggestive, then, of the presumption of guilt that attaches to the accused party. Once witchcraft was established as a secular crime, cases fell under the jurisdiction of the Court of Assize (or the assizes), the common law courts charged with hearing the serious felonies. The general procedure

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[55] Because this expanded legal definition of witchcraft came to include the tools of the trade, so to speak, physical or material harm to another was no longer the chief marker of criminal witchcraft, which subtly affected the role of the "charity denied" model in witchcraft narratives.

[56] See Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 48. James' interest in strengthening existing witchcraft-control laws was generally unsurprising; when he assumed the English throne in 1603 after decades as King of Scotland, he brought with him a strong preexisting interest in the nature and prosecution of witchcraft. In 1597, he had published a tract against witchcraft called *The Demonologie*, which was inspired in part by a regicidal plot against him that had been linked to witchcraft, and accordingly he had a reputation as something of a witchhunter. This reputation was not wholly merited; in fact, during his reign as King of England, he was more likely to intervene on the part of accused parties than to zealously oversee their punishment. For an engaging account of such an intervention, see Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter*. This reputation, however, extends to the present era. Because of his self-professed belief in witchcraft, and perhaps because of associations between the beginning of his reign and the publication of *Macbeth*, with its ominous witches, contemporary writers often identify James I with witch-hunting.

[57] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 10.

for dealing with witchcraft was as follows: The victim or accuser would make an "information" before a local magistrate; this formal accusation became a part of the official record and inaugurated legal proceedings against the suspected witch, who would then have been brought in for questioning. This interrogation, known as the "examination" or sometimes the "confession," would have been recorded and entered into the official record. The use of the term "confession" here has legal implications that are distinct from colloquial and religious auricular contexts, but nonetheless, its usage in pretrial documents is suggestive. Even before an indictment was issued, this conventional association casts suspects' statements less in terms of their defense and more in terms of their ultimate concordance with a powerful accusation. After this phase of the investigation, an official indictment would be issued and the suspected felon held over for jury trial at the assizes.[58]

As pamphlet narratives make clear, the legal system presented itself as the antidote to devilish magic, with a binding power over personal and magical agents. The urgency with which this position is staked, though, can't help but underscore the potential menace of the self-authorized witch. James Sharpe has observed that by the late sixteenth century, it was generally believed that the effective way to deal with witchcraft was through the power of law. A character in *The Late Lancashire Witches* cites what was by

[58] In some cases, trials were first heard at the Quarter Sessions to determine whether or not there was sufficient material to proceed to trial. At trial, the grand jury would assess whether or not the case had sufficient merit to proceed, and if it was determined that it did, the statements of involved parties would be heard by two judges and a petty jury of twelve men and a verdict rendered. This is a simplification of the general process seen in early modern witch cases, as is noted in Gibson, *Witchcraft* 9. The legal procedures for dealing with felony cases did evolve over the period, so this narrative would not apply universally to all cases mentioned in this chapter. In his *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern Europe,* Malcolm Gaskill traces the evolution of these laws (see, for example, pp 22-23).

1634 a commonplace, reporting "that Witches apprehended under hands of lawfull authority, doe loose their power; and all their spells are instantly dissolved" (2631-2). This attitude is also reflected in a 1621 pamphlet by Henry Goodcole, which contains his jail interview with convicted witch Elizabeth Sawyer. As a chaplain for Newgate Prison, Goodcole had access to incarcerated and condemned individuals; he parlayed this insider status into a side career as a writer of crime pamphlets. In the question-and-answer style document, Goodcole asks Sawyer when she was last visited by the devil. She reports, "The Divell never came unto me since I was in prison, nor I thanke God, I have no motion of him in my minde, since I came to prison."[59] This statement suggests that Sawyer perceives herself to have little control over whether or not the devil comes to her since the symbolic power of the prison, rather than her own repentance, seems to be what limits the devil's access. Sawyer's words are significant not only for their suggestion that the literal structures of law and order are imbued with a kind of symbolic counter-magic, but also in the juxtaposition of that sentiment with reference to God. Though a secular crime, the spiritual aspects of witchcraft loom large in witchcraft confessions as they are recounted in pamphlet form. Furthermore, the realms of law and spirituality intersect as the local magistrate (rather than a priest, as would once have been the case) is imbued with the power to counteract the evil influence of the devil, but in a manner also intended to condemn the witch.[60] As a curate, Goodcole's interactions with Sawyer are not directly linked to her trial, but he does not approach the conversation in the traditional manner of

[59] *Wonderfull discoverie*. sig. C3v.
[60] This was, of course, subject to debate: Church of England loyalists, for example, might have turned to parish priests who could in theory carry out exorcisms. By the late sixteenth century, however, the priest 's intervention would most likely have been as an accompaniment to, rather than simply instead of, legal action.

the religious confession. His clerical background informs his authorial persona—his descriptions of crime and criminals are framed by exhortations to his readers to beware similar downfalls—but his aim is not to absolve, but rather to publicize and record.

The central role of the confession in the witchcraft narrative comes through loud and clear in a lengthy work entitled *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, which was produced by a clerk named Thomas Potts in 1612.[61] Potts reminds his audience of the singular merits of his work in an editorial note that culminates with a repeated emphasis on the extensive interesting confessions it contains. He rhetorically asks: "What Witches have ever upon their Arraignement and Trial made such open liberall and voluntarie declarations of their lives, and such confessions of their offences: The manner of their attempts and their bloudie practises, their meetings, consultations, and what not?"[62] The pamphlet is clearly a document intended to blend veracity and sensationalism to maximum effect, and confession is central to that authorial

[61] In it, he describes the investigation, trial, and conviction of the Pendle witches—a group of twelve individuals (ten women and two men) accused of the crime of witchcraft. Ultimately, ten of the accused were hanged, one died in prison, and one was found not guilty. Potts' access to and use of information from all stages of the trial make his pamphlet a valuable window into the prosecution of witchcraft in early modern England.

[62] "Thus at one time may you behold Witches of all sorts from many places in this Countie of Lancaster... Here then is the last that came to act her part in this lamentable and wofull Tragedie, wherein his Majestie hath lost so many Subjects, mothers their Children, Fathers their Friends, and Kinsfolk the like where of hath not been set forth in any age. What hath the Kings Majestie written and published in his Daemonologie, by way of premonition and prevention, that that not here by the first of last been executed, put in practise, or discovered?" *The Wonderfull Discoverie* T2-T2v His allusion to spectacle and the playhouse emphasizes the degree to which Potts' account is plotted relative to conventional narratives and clearly aware of contemporary discourses of witchcraft. His reference to King James' well-known treatise of witchcraft, The Demonologie, legitimates his narrative and gives context and shape to the crimes it contains.

mission: confessions evoke both the stamp of authenticity associated with the personal account and the intrigue associated with the intimate details of their titillating content.

Potts' assertion that the confessions his work contains are "open liberall and voluntarie" is in tension with his tendency to frame them as necessary and inevitable. As the introduction to this dissertation demonstrates, the demand for confession is generally seen as integral to the public response to social transgressions. For Potts and other pamphleteers, confession tends to be depicted as the appropriate legal and narrative telos, one that reinforces the truth claims of their reportage and compounds the sensationalism of the "bloudie practises" they describe. Though the stakes are different in a sensational narrative or an official interrogation, early modern pamphlets indicate that a persuasive confession tends to be taken as the "queen of proofs" in both. Though his account is in many places exhaustive in its thoroughness, Potts cites a suspect's first person narrative of guilt as a reason to omit other testimony, baldly explaining that "Since the voluntarie confession and examination of a Witch, doth exceede all other evidence, I spare to trouble you with a multitude of Examinations, or Depositions of any other witnesses."[63] Legal historian C. R. Unsworth suggests that this logic was not limited to scribes and pamphlet authors when he argues that "confession evidence extracted by torture, or in England by less formalized means of judicial coercion, was the primary means in which suggestion, delusion, fantasy, and fabrication … acquired the status of legally validated official knowledge."[64] This seems to have been particularly true in the case of witchcraft; Brooks cites the early modern "witchhunts" as among "history's most notorious abuses of

[63] *Wonderfull Discoverie,* P2v, E2. Foucault remarks on this dynamic in his discussion on torture in *Discipline and Punish* (pp 37-38).
[64] Unsworth 71-72

confession."[65] Though Potts suggests that confessions supersede evidence, I would amend his statement to argue that in practice, these witchcraft confessions are in and of themselves a kind of evidence. Conventions around the ritual of confession itself mean that in practice, narratives situated in its terms render fantastical narratives manageable for legal or popular consumption. In doing so, these confessions of witchcraft help retroactively justify the investigations and/or prosecutions that helped elicit them, and reinforce the legal status of witchcraft as a crime.

In the case of witchcraft confessions, a pedagogical function attaches to the entertainment value inherent in pamphlets that describe magical acts and cite—or ventriloquize—their practitioners. In making legible the conventional qualities associated with witches and their crimes, many pamphlet authors suggest that their readers might use the narratives they contain to combat the dangers of witchcraft. Goodcole urges his readers to be on guard lest they themselves fall prey to the nefarious power of the devil, claiming that he has provided an instructive counterexample so those "that doe detest her abhominable wordes, and wayes, may never taste of the cup nor wages of shame and destruction."[66] He advocates a kind of internal policing in which the negative example of Elizabeth Sawyer stands as a cautionary emblem against similar transgressions; the confessions of convicted witches are implicitly situated as discursive technologies useful for the internalization of moral discipline, anticipating the model Foucault articulates

[65] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 109.
[66] Goodcole D4v. Goodcole reinforces his suggestion that his reader be on guard for the influence of the devil by noting that he is always on hand waiting for a sinful word to give him an opening. The suggestion of the panoptic qualities of forces of evil helps underscore a broader message about the precarious delineation between the good and fallen subject.

more fully in *Discipline and Punish*.[67] Though Goodcole's admonition is directed toward the reader's own moral health, his warning also carries a broader social dimension as he tends to the moral health of those who "detest" Sawyer's ways, isolating her even as he gestures to the possibility that others could follow in her path.[68] The pedagogical function of exemplary confessions is inevitably a doubled one, however. Goodcole refers to Elizabeth Sawyer's confession as her "repeated foule crimes," a statement that, I argue, is significant in that it collapses the verbal reiteration of witchcraft and the repetition of its transgression.[69] In revealing the "meanes" of witchcraft, pamphleteers expose in their readers the potential for threatening magical performativity; in championing the purportedly successful containment of witchcraft through the mechanisms of law and order, Potts and Goodcole both identify—and could even be said to instruct—the potential for similar acts in their readership. Furthermore, in privileging and publicizing first-person accounts, these documents implicitly testify to the experiential authority and agency of the women Goodcole is attempting to reduce to exemplary figures.

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[67] See Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 174–195.

[68] *Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches,* Bv. This tendency was always a part of English witchcraft pamphlets: A prefatory poem in the first one to be published, *The Examination and Confession of certaine Wytches,* from 1566, exhorts its readers to "behold these acts & scan them well," using religious and ocular imagery to reinforce the idea that there is a lesson, and not just entertainment, to be gleaned from the scandalous tale that follows. Phillips, *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex*.

[69] Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch*, Early English Books Online (London: Printed [by A. Mathewes] for William Butler, and are to be sold at his shop in Saint Dunstons Church-yard, Fleetstreet, 1621), D3.

Manipulations of Confessional Space

Confessions of witchcraft, prized by assize judges and pamphlet authors alike, are integral to the establishment of comprehensible narratives of witchcraft, but the archival record reveals the extent to which witchcraft confessions are contested spaces that threaten to amplify, rather than assuage, anxieties associated with witchcraft. The extent to which confessions can be imagined to appropriately manage the crime is limited by the contests for authority over knowledge, narrative, and linguistic autonomy embedded within them. As is the case with witchcraft narratives more generally, however, these confessions tend to be tendered and received in relation to generic tropes, and as pamphlet recreations suggest, narratives of witchcraft tend to be produced in an atmosphere of coercive collaboration. As we have seen, however, the mystery and epistemological uncertainty associated with the practices of witchcraft make confessions especially valuable narrative sources and suggests that the witch occupies a role of relative authorial power. The rhetorical traces of witch cases recorded in pamphlet narratives suggest that individuals could and did participate in shaping their confessions, potentially finding space for agency in negotiating the conventions of confession and the stereotypes of witchcraft. The stories of witches recounted in pamphlets are shaped by multiple agents—by the individual or group who raised the charges in the first place, by the investigators and questioners, by the author of the narrative account, and by the confessing witch herself. In application, this dialogic quality produces texts that suggest that paradoxically, the avidity with which confessions are pursued for their evidentiary value can in practice undermine their capacity to serve as evidence of past acts or intents. The dynamics of confession are challenged and shaped both by the interpersonal

dynamics revealed in specific exchanges and by the power of language itself to reveal and refute subjective truths.

Henry Goodcole's account of Elizabeth Sawyer's witchcraft exposes the artifice of his authorial influence even as it purports to offer Sawyer's voice in the form of a verbatim confession, recounted in a series of questions and answers. This technique, and the pamphlet's embedded emphasis on the importance of Sawyer's telling her story in front of Goodcole and various witnesses, seems to allow her a privileged speaking position. This apparent privilege is in tension with the overall structure of the pamphlet, however, as this section follows a version of the same events narrated in Goodcole's own voice. Though as she is recorded, Sawyer seems to be a thorough and competent confessant, Goodcole informs his readers a touch peevishly that the confession was "with great labour…extorted from her," a complaint that undermines his own obligatory insistence that her confession is wholly free and uncoerced.[70] Goodcole locates control over the resulting narrative with himself rather than with the confessant. More subtle elements throughout the interview, including abrupt shifts in language and vocabulary borrowed from other discourses, strongly suggest an editing hand that leaves us with a heavily stage-managed voice. The confessional dynamic implied in this text supports my suggestion that the witch's confession is desirable insofar as it confers upon those who hear it a reflected narrative authority.

[70] Ibid., B4. Henry Goodcole's pamphlet about Elizabeth Sawyer was the last to be published in England for more than 20 years, and the anxious apologetic tone of his preface that he is responding to increasing controversy about the reality of witchcraft and the propriety of writing about it.

Sawyer's confession is characterized by signs of her apparent submission to normative moral authority and the judicial process that has called for her death, hoping that through it she can be shamed and thus prepared for death. Goodcole himself suggests that the "repeated foule crimes" of her confession are intended to domesticate her potentially subversive agency through the reiteration of her words in the recognizable language of penitence. However, as a narrator, he has every incentive to promote that narrative, and subject as she is to the mercy of her jailers, Sawyer has little incentive to resist it. The poignant last words of her jail interview illustrate that within her professed submission to legal and moral authority lies a resistance that she articulates through the language of confession. Though she acknowledges that confession has cleared her conscience, she notes in closing, "I must confesse, I would live longer if I might."[71] This rhetorical use of confession—the second of only two moments in which Sawyer states that she "confesses" something—frames within the conventional language of supplication and penitence the revelation of a will to live that is incompatible with the position she has, according to Goodcole, willingly assumed. In assuming the confessional role Goodcole prompts for her, she uncomfortably occupies and speaks in relation to a dissonant multiplicity of potential subject positions: lewd termagent, devilish murderess, reluctant convict, and repentant sinner. This pamphlet animates a persistent undercurrent in the sustained privileging of confession in the discourse of witchcraft: the destabilizing potential of these confessions' unpredictable perlocutionary effects.

A pamphlet known as *A true and just Recorde* (1582), allows us to more fully appreciate the extent to which the agency of the witch and her capacities as a confessing

[71] Ibid., D5.

(or recalcitrant) subject are bound up in expectations derived from the involved parties' understanding both of magic and of the operant social and linguistic hierarchies within which the narrative was produced. Throughout the pamphlet, the author—listed as W.W. but often suspected to be magistrate Brian Darcy himself—takes pains to aggrandize his skill and thoroughness as the magistrate, and in promoting the zealousness with which confessions are pursued, the pamphlet clearly exposes the highly charged power dynamic that dictates their composition. The nature of Darcy's manipulations underscores the incompatible coexistence of competing modes of confession as a technology of condemnation and conviction on one hand and of confidence and absolution on the other. When a suspect named Ursley Kemp proves reluctant to confess, Darcy apparently dismisses the onlookers (he subsequently notes that it is a "private" confession). Then, "The saide Brian Darcy then promising to the said Ursley, that if she would deale plainely and confesse the truteh, that shee should have favour & so by giving her faire speeches she confessed" (2A). Though he is acting as a legal authority, he positions himself as an individual auricular confessor and implies that confession will lead to mercy (as it would in a spiritual/religious context).[72] Though this could be an especially powerful promise for a Catholic-identified witch, as we have seen, the paradigm of auricular confession as a cultural artifact had by that point diffused beyond the bounds of religious practice, allowing Darcy to manipulate the dynamic without explicitly naming it as such. He exploits the slippage in the joint role of confession to console and police, producing a sense of collaboration between himself and his suspect, offering her a motive

[72] Reginald Scot references a related kind of trickery for securing a confession in which the jailor pretends to leave, and then has some of the suspect's friends come and say that if the alleged confesses, they will help her escape.

to confess (mercy, understanding) that is at odds with his intended ends (conviction and execution) and that inevitably shapes the narrative that results.

If the aforementioned exchange demonstrates that authority figures have the power to finesse the traditional role of the confessor, then it is equally significant to note that subsequent interactions between Darcy and Kemp illustrate a quality of confession that tempers institutional control of the dialogue. A short time after she initially confesses, Kemp announces to her jailers that she has forgotten to tell Darcy something, and claims that she has more to confess. Darcy/W.W.'s narrative frame implies that Kemp takes an active role in her position as confessant, which hints at the potentially empowering or exciting aspects of the attention granted to a confessing person (particularly, perhaps, a person on the fringes of village life).[73] Given the inherently dialogic qualities of confession discussed in the introductory chapter, in explicitly seeking out the role of the confessant, Kemp is performatively demanding an audience with a man in power. This demand implies an insistence on being heard, recorded, and responded to, and signals an opportunity within the larger hierarchy governing the exchange for Kemp to exercise a will to speak. Having achieved this space, Kemp uses the confessional space *not* to more fully take part in the ritual, but in fact to minimize the effects of her guilt. In their second conversation, she delivers more particulars of her previously confessed crimes, but devotes much of her testimony to accusing another

[73] Marion Gibson points out that W.W./Darcy frames Kemp's request for a second audience with the magistrate in a way that "makes Ursley seem to be seeking the limelight which examination offered her," highlighting the extent to which the interrogator's narrative frame shapes our reception of Kemp's reported words (Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 85.

woman of practicing witchcraft.[74] It was a common feature of witchcraft interrogations for the suspected witch to in turn implicate others; the background of this particular instance of that dynamic helps frame the move from confessant to accuser in terms of the desire for relative power that operates amidst the circumscribed array of available subjective roles.

Confession necessarily requires an interlocutor (or at least the idea of one)—accordingly, though the narrative that results is situated as the responsibility of the confessant, it is always to some degree the product of intersubjective collaboration. The interaction between Darcy and Kemp exposes how inquisitor and suspect can, by turns, shape the resulting narrative of confession; a subsequent interrogation directly stemming from their conversation adds more nuance to this terrain by demonstrating the power of the accuser, and the accusation itself, to shape the confessional space. Ales Newman, the woman Kemp implicates in her second confession, is "obstinate" (in Darcy's estimation) in her refusal to confess to the crime of which she has been accused. While she acknowledges she did privately accuse Kemp of witchcraft, she "denieth the residue of the speeches alleadged" by Kemp against her. The word "residue" is powerfully suggestive: having been uttered, Kemp's statements have a sustained significance that seems to verge on the material (or perhaps illocutionary) in its tangibility. The specter of Kemp's narrative, which has increased credibility for Darcy because of the former's eventual willingness to confess at length, creates the perlocutionary demand for a first

[74] The substance of Kemp's confession/accusation is reflective of the pressure placed on suspects to implicate other witches. These kinds of transitive accusations show up in numerous pamphlets; whether they stem from an effort to secure mercy at the hands of the court through cooperation, or from a desire to access some of the power of the accuser on the part of the confessing subject, suspects in these cases frequently turn on their partners in crime.

person narrative—specifically one that corresponds with the story of guilt that Kemp herself produced.[75]

The interactions of confessor and confessant constantly form and reform confessional narratives and configurations of power to reveal a paradox at the heart of Darcy's zealous pursuit of confession—the confession that meets the standards of the interlocutors can threaten them altogether by exposing their conventional construction. After having investigated the cases of Ursley Kemp and Ales Newman, Darcy hears the voluntary confession of Ales Manfielde. The tale she tells corresponds in tone and detail with other accounts from the investigation. In fact, it matches a bit too well: in its details it seems to borrow liberally from the story Kemp already told.[76] In other areas, it is marked by shifts and inconsistencies that seem to concerned Darcy, who publicly questions Manfielde about her statement. The pamphlet reports that he told her "what a danger it was, and howe highly shee would offende God if shee shoulde charge any person with any thing untrue, and also telled her that her sad confession should bee read agayne unto her, willing her that if shee hearde any thinge read that she knew was not

[75] Darcy finally elicits an implicit confession from Newman that exposes the slippery dynamics of intent and implication underlying confessional speech acts. According to the pamphlet, Darcy informs Newman that "hee would sever and part her and her spirites a sunder, nay sayth this examinat [Newman], that shal ye not, for I will carry them with me, and hold being taken of her words, after some distance she added (if she have any)" (B5v). With his threat, Darcy goads her into an excited utterance that seems damning—in vowing to remain with her spirits, she acknowledges both their existence and her relationship with them relationship. This statement's functionality as a binding confession is undermined by tense, rather than content or intent; Newman's conditional addendum (delivered, the pamphlet suggests both in words and through brackets at a distance that renders it suspect) makes her statement an act of hypothetical resistance to Darcy's threat, rather than an admission of past witchcraft.

[76] Gibson points out that it is impossible to know whether this echoing is the product of Manfielde's own plagiarism of Kemp's confession, the words of the questioner, or the narrative styling of the pamphleteer. (*Early* 107).

true, that she should speake."[77] This warning having been delivered, Manfielde continues to stand by her confession.[78]

It is possible that Manfielde did in fact believe what she was saying and that parts of it were true; what is more significant for us here is the anxiety the text suggests is provoked by a confession of witchcraft which the confessor himself does not believe. That her confession is read back to her underscores how it has become a part of official record—as a story, it has an authority that extends beyond its initial utterance and to which she is now beholden. In refusing to recant, in effect she insists on confessing *in spite* of official resistance, as opposed to *in answer to* official force. A recent study of contemporary examples of false confession calls it the "ultimate abrogation of one's self-interest," but given the perverse social capital Manfielde achieves by insisting on her powers of witchcraft, this abrogation is countered by the supernatural authority associated both with her statement and with her subsequent refusals of the attempts of others to shape her story without her consent.[79] Darcy's dire warnings of "dangers" of false confession demonstrate the stakes for the system he represents of her refusal to retract a problematic confession: it highlights the epistemological anxiety that is always a factor in conversations of witchcraft. Brooks, meditating on the potential dangers of false confession for contemporary legal processes, notes, "when the confessant [in response to their guilt being posited as fact] in return posits his guilt as universal, this fact is

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[77] *A true and just Recorde* D8

[78] Though the pamphlet is inconsistent on this point, it appears that Manfielde was never officially charged with witchcraft.

[79] Rob Warden and Steven A. Drizin, *True Stories of False Confessions* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), vii.

unusable."[80] In other words, a confession such as Manfielde's, which simultaneously invokes a set of tropes that are widely familiar and exposes the artifice of the confessional metanarratives with which those tropes are associated, is dangerous in its capacity to undermine altogether the truth value associated with the ritual.

The assumption of truth value is fundamental to the very construction of confession; this is true to the extent that confessions and the reality of the events they describe are often construed relative to a tautological logic whereby one guarantees the other. For example, a 1612 pamphlet entitled *The Witches of Northamptonshire* uses the fact that witches have regularly confessed at assize trials in an effort to persuade any wavering readers of the authentic existence of witchcraft.[81] This same pamphlet, however, undermines this association in its attribution of guilt to individuals who resist the judicial and social impetus to confess. One woman, Agnes Browne, is accused of witchcraft in what seems to be the culmination of years of suspicion directed toward her by virtue of her gender, temperament, social standing, and physical attributes:

> This Agnes Browne led her life at Gilsborough in the county of Northampton, of poore parentage and poorer education, one that as shee was bourne to no food, was for want of grace never in the way to receive any, ever noted to be of an ill nature of wicked disposition, spightfull and malitious and many years before she died both hated, and feared among her neighbours: being long suspected in the Towne where she dwelt of that crime, which afterwards proved true.[82]

This description lends an air of inevitability to Browne's eventual conviction and execution; according to the society in which she resides, she *is* a witch even before she is "proved" to be one. The dynamics surfaced in this pamphlet are consonant with Althusser's arguments about the role of interpellation in the formation of ideological

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[80] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 61.
[81] (A3v).
[82] *The Witches of Northhamptonshire* (1612, B2).

subjects; "individuals," he argues, "are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects."[83] Insofar as Browne is depicted as always already guilty of witchcraft, this document shows how witchcraft can operate separately, but not always simultaneously, as a practice, a crime, and an identity category. Amidst the network of already circulating assumptions and expectations about witchcraft and individual personation, she is legible as a witch even before she can move to identify with that subjective category. The pamphlet author's insistence on the inevitability of her witchcraft belies, however, Browne's own reported steadfast refusal to confess either during the investigation or before her execution.

Rather than reconcile the conflict manifest in her refusal to acknowledge an identity category to which she has already been inscripted, the author of the pamphlet acknowledges it only to further emphasize the obvious degeneracy with which he has associated her. As Browne's example suggests, given the powerful social and evidentiary value of confession, the absence of it does little to exonerate a suspect already cast as guilty in the popular re-creation of events. In a genre of pamphlet literature tied largely to the political aims of the authors and the expectations of audiences, declarations of innocence tend to be depicted in terms of the absence of confession rather than as dynamic social and subjective stances. In effect, within the operant paradigms of these pamphlets, and, to some extent, of the cultural paradigms they reflect, innocence does not exist as an available subjective category. This is especially true of dramatic accounts of witchcraft, like pamphlets, in which the guilt is a fundamental narrative expectation. Potts, whose pamphlet was published in the very same year as the one that featured

[83] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, 176.

Browne, describes another such unrepentant convict. He ends his account of the execution of Alice Nutter with this note to his reader: "you shall heare shee died very impenitent; insomuch as her own children were never able to move her to confesse any particular offense, or declare any thing, even in *Articulo Mortis*:[84]which was a very fearfull thing to all that were present, who knew shee was guilty."[85] Once again, conventional knowledge—of her guilt—outweighs her own declarations (or lack thereof) in determining her cultural position. Potts makes her refusal to confess a kind of spectacle of absence that he uses to drive home the horror and folly of Nutter's ignominious death without the implied benefit of confessional honesty and some attendant social absolution, but his narrative maneuvering cannot completely cover over the extent to which, I suggest, these silences can have a performative effect produced by their relationship to the discourse of confession against which they are measured.

A second example of witch resisting the available narrative of guilt represented in the confession demanded of her can be seen in an account detailing the 1612 trial and execution of Jennet Preston. This story is included in Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, but was likely appended later and probably written by a different author.[86] Preston goes to her death insisting on her innocence—in fact, her family would later raise charges of malicious prosecution. This author is clearly personally convinced of Preston's guilt and disdains her family's efforts to challenge the court's ruling. The author cites her supporters' claim "that (even at the Gallowes where she died impenitent and void of all

[84] dying speeches
[85] *Wonderfull Discoverie* P2v
[86] Strong stylistic differences and discrepancies in dating support the assumption that these two separately authored pamphlets were merged in the publishing process

feare and grace) she died an Innocent woman because she would confesse nothing."[87] The phrasing here suggests that Preston's innocence is a product of, and not just the reason for, her lack of confession; by refusing to accept the social identity foisted upon her by the charges brought against her, Preston could (at least in this theoretical phrasing) resist full inscription into the narrative suggested by her guilty verdict and by the frame of the pamphlet. The slippage in the author's attempt to render her refusal to acquiesce to the confessional demand as a symptom of guilt rather than a sign of innocence suggests that the latter subjective category is in this case only accessible in a conditional way.

The epistemic concerns and contests for performative authority associated with early modern witchcraft on a broad scale underlie the emphasis these pamphlets place on confession. Though Potts himself points to the confessions attached to the trial he describes as evidence of the authenticity of the pamphlet and the guilt of those it contains, the reported words of the magistrate who tried the case betrays some anxiety about the exercise of justice in the case of the confessed witch. He notes at the end of the trial that he is reluctant to pass down the death sentences required by the statute, but he insistently reminds the convicted witches that he is following the law and relying on their own confessions, saying:

> You of all people have the least cause to complaine: since in the Triall of your lives there hath beene greate care and paines taken, and much time spent: and very few or none of you, but stand convicted upon your owne voluntarie confessions and Examinations, *Ex ore proprio*… Nay I may further affirme, What persons of your nature and condition, ever were Arraigned and Tried with more solemnitie, had more libertie given to plead or answere to everie particular point of Evidence against you? (V2)

[87] ibid X4v

Bromley beseeches the very people he has just sentenced to death to respect and embrace his ruling on the basis of their assent to the legal system signaled by their confessions. The nature of his justification for conviction suggests implicit concerns about the injustice of the proceedings, and Bromley's very insistence on his proper and fair exercise of authority in response to confession exposes the fact that the system that demands it and the role it plays within it might be fallible. Just as this sentiment calls into question the capacity of the system to successfully respond to the threat posed against it in the form of witchcraft, so too does it hint at the anxiety associated with concerns about the lack of credibility of personal confessions.

"Forc't Tears" and "Enchanting Words" in *The Late Lancashire Witches*

I return now to the story with which this chapter began, of the 1634 case of witchcraft in a Lancashire village that ultimately attracted the attention both of London authorities and two playwrights, Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome. The village with which this case is associated is the same one detailed in the 1612 Thomas Potts pamphlet described above, *The Wonderfull Discoverie*. The details of the Pendle witches, as they were called, remained very much alive in the cultural memory of the town, and 21 years later, played a role in shaping the false accusations made by Edmund Robinson and the (probably) false confession made by Margaret Johnson. Robinson's confession of lying and the subsequent retraction of the accusation did not change the material effects of the story, which proved stronger than the evidence that refuted it: the narrative of witchcraft was sufficiently compelling to adhere to the individuals it touched. As Alison Findlay puts it, for the women implicated in the case, "their fictional identity as a weird

sisterhood outlived the evidence of their innocence."[88] The rhetorically constructed identity to which Findlay alludes finds is most compelling realization Heywood and Brome's play. The play trumpets its connection to the actual ongoing investigation; it opened in the summer of 1634 at the Globe Theater, while the participants in the case were being interrogated in London. In rearticulating the case for entertainment, the play recirculates the conventions of witchcraft that produced the charges. Even though the real accusation that instigated the case was eventually shown to be false, the play reifies the suspicions that allowed the case to take root by depicting witchcraft as unequivocally real within the village. At the same time, however, it depicts it in a farcical light that undermines the severity attached to the social transgression that it manifests in the play.[89]

The confluence of generic tropes (those associated with witchcraft itself, comedy, and intra-communal/domestic conflict) that characterize the play frame various scenes of confession. These instances exemplify a mode of confessional performance that can register as either false or genuine by turns, according to a shifting epistemological economy. These confessions demonstrate the ways in which such tropes can be manipulated for personal gain or deployed for generically appropriate forms of closure. In doing so, they demonstrate that the reliability of any given confession is contingent on the expectations and understanding of the participants in the exchange. While the tone of

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[88] Findlay, "Sexual and Spiritual Politics in the Events of 1633-34 and 'The Late Lancashire Witches'." She ascribes this position in part to a deliberate, politically-motivated forgetting, suggesting that "the Council members wishing to sentence the witches did as Robinson had done before them, and turned to the power of the story." (151).

[89] *The Late Lancashire Witches* is not the only play to explore magic and witchcraft through a comedic lens. *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*(~1600), for example, was a popular production that approaches the story of a magician through a frame of low humor and farce. See Anonymous, *The Merry Devil of Edmonton: a Comedy*, ed. Walker, Hugh (London: Dent, 1897).

the play seems to minimize the stakes of these confessions, the ways in which these exchanges unsettle the conventional discourse of confessional authenticity and authority has implications extending beyond the slapstick of the play. Though *The Late Lancashire Witches* is not often the subject of contemporary literary criticism, relationship between the drama—in both its content and tone—and historically situated questions about the reality of witchcraft in general and in Lancashire have been the subject of debate.[90] The playwrights clearly had access to unpublished documents, including Robinson's initial examination and Johnson's confession, and they incorporate details of both into the play.[91] This inside information has led some scholars, most notably Herbert Berry, to suggest that the authors were writing with official sanction. Berry argues that the play was commissioned by Philip Herbert, earl of Pembroke with the specific intent of discrediting skeptical Archbishop William Laud; under this hypothesis, the playwrights

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[90] Heather Hirschfeld has done extensive work exploring the politics of joint authorship, both generally and in relation to *The Late Lancashire Witches.* Her essay on this play explores the extent to which that, in conjunction with the political atmosphere surrounding witchcraft generally, the particularly thorny dynamics of the real Lancashire shaped the play. Her insights into both issues of authorship and the historical context of the play have been highly valuable to me here. See her "Collaborating across Generations: Thomas Heywood, Richard Brome, and the Production of *The Late Lancashire Witches*." In *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies.* 30.2 (2000) 339-374. Hirschfeld is one of relatively few critics to focus extensively on this play, though there are some notable examples of its exploration including in Kathleen McLuskie's early feminist study of early modern drama, *Renaissance Dramatists* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc, 1989) and in Dolan's *Dangerous Familiars.*

[91] Among other things, the witches of the play, who are uniformly women and work in a coven, keep familiars, confound hunters, and use their magic to traverse space at fantastic speeds. At one point, the group steals food from a wedding feast, replacing it with stones. They use the food for a devil's sabbat featuring a lavish feast attended by many witches—this banquet was a feature of both Johnson and Robinson's testimony. The playwrights—in particular, Heywood, whom critics generally attach to the witchcraft scenes—combine elements from the case which were elaborations on tales already present in the village with comedic and theatrical flourishes.

were charged with convincing their London audience that witchcraft was indeed at work and in exchange received access to behind-the-scenes information.[92] Findlay follows Berry's assumption, suggesting that prosecution would have relied on the persuasiveness of the *story* of witchcraft, rather than the facts, to make their case, a move that underscores the strong symbolic power of witchcraft.[93] I build on Findlay in suggesting that the play's relationship to its historical context is indicative of symbolic currency of witches; in doing so, I suggest that the play's interest in the legibility of this power comes through in conflicts *within* it over the ontological status of the witch as speaking subject. The play illustrates that the ability of characters to recognize and deploy the narrative tropes of witchcraft has significant ramifications for their interpersonal and linguistic agency.[94]

In pursuing this inquiry, I participate in a conversation recently initialized by Heather Hirschfeld, who pushes back against the implications Berry proposed, suggesting that he overstates the correlation between patrons' hopes and playwrights' attempts to

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[92] See Herbert Berry, "The Globe Bewitched and El Hombre Fiel," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984): 211–230.

[93] Findlay, "Sexual and Spiritual Politics in the Events of 1633-34 and 'The Late Lancashire Witches'," 151–152.

[94] Madeleine Harwood suggests that the popularity of the play is due in part to the explicitly sensational nature of the case, and linked to the audience's desire to occupy a privileged space relative to a contemporary case. Despite the levity of the play, she argues that the authors use the spectacular qualities of a visual representation of witchcraft to cultivate an atmosphere of fear in the audience. See her article "Witches, live witches! The house is full of witches! The Concept of Fear in Early Modern Witchcraft Drama." In *Fear Itself: Reasoning the Unreasonable.* Eds. Stephen Hessel and Michèle Huppert. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. Though her reading serves as an important reminder of the realities of staging the dramatic and fantastical structure of witchcraft, in light of the distance the play seems to maintain between the depiction of witchcraft and the concept that the practice might have serious effects, I am not inclined to agree with her assessment of the nature the of the fear the play might have been intended to produce.

realize them.[95] She argues that in responding to a range of immediate pressures in their depiction of witchcraft, Heywood and Brome decline in *The Late Lancashire Witches* to take part in the epistemological questioning which characterizes other witchcraft plays, "refusing to deliver a definitive statement about the witches' existence or guilt."[96] Though witches certainly seem to exist within the play, Hirschfeld suggests that their comedic role undermines the extent to which the play indicates that witchcraft should be taken seriously as a reality or concern.[97] Hirschfeld's contention that the playwrights' treatment of witchcraft is a product of, and not an answer to, an atmosphere of epistemological

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[95] Contra Berry's claims that the play is a work designed to function as part of the prosecution's case, Hirschfeld posits that "the play shows that the prosecution and the defense are mutually implicated" (Heather Hirschfeld, "Collaborating Across Generations: Thomas Heywood, Richard Brome, and the Production of The Late Lancashire Witches," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 2 (March 20, 2000): 363, doi:10.1215/10829636-30-2-339.

[96] Ibid., 355.

[97] The acts of magic staged in the play are not especially violent and are relatively mild in terms of the harm they cause; this departs from Johnson's testimony, which referred to murder among other serious forms of maleficium. Hirschfeld argues that "rather than endorsing or denying the witches or their craft… scenes [involving witchcraft] make the coven's activities seem not so much illegal as recreational" (ibid., 364). This claim builds on the suggestions of Kathleen McLuskie, who has argued that the casual and humorous attitude toward witchcraft and misogyny in the play may indicate the extent to which the urgency and anxiety behind narratives like those of the Pendle witches was being hollowed out by 1634. McLuskie states that the "comic effect… suggests that this serious subtext has become an automatic and dead metaphor" that neutralizes the "serious satiric implications" of much of the witches' activities. Kathleen McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists* (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 78. Editors of the two primary contemporary editions of the play both address the comedic tone. Laird Barber attributes the comedic tone to the attitude taken by Londoners toward witchcraft, one he suggests was generally more lighthearted than that of their more provincial compatriots. Gabriel Egan indirectly addresses Berry's claims that this is explicitly intended as an anti-witchcraft play by stressing that while the witches seem to cause little real harm, they seem to be punished in excess of those misdemeanors—with beating, amputation, etc. See Laird Howard Barber, "An Edition of The Late Lancashire Witches, by Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome," *Dissertation Abstracts* 23 (1962): 19; Brome, Richard and Heywood, Thomas, *The Witches of Lancashire*, ed. Egan, Gabriel (London: Routledge, 2002), ii.

questioning is persuasive, but the political ramifications she ascribes to equivocation actually seem to underscore the fact that within the universe of the play, witchcraft unequivocally exists. The comedic inversion associate with witchcraft in the play does not undermine its significance or reality; rather, its depicted disruptions of gender and domestic power structures highlight deep anxieties associated with witchcraft and the regulation of local ecosystems. The play's most significant intervention into the fraught landscape Hirschfeld describes comes, I contend, in its exploration of the capacity of the individual to manipulate the performances invited by their prescripted subject positions, a quality associated specifically with witchcraft in this play.

An account from contemporary playgoer Nathaniel Tompkyns speaks to the popular currency of the play's topic while situating it firmly in the realm of apolitical comedy. He describes the popularity and humor of the play in detail in a letter to a friend dated to August 16, 1634.[98] The play, in his estimation, did "provoke laughter" and as such, in Tompkyns view "passeth for a merrie and excellent new play." His earlier description of the play's topic: the "slights and passages done or supposed to be done by these witches," conscientiously leaves the question of the guilt or innocence of the real-life supposed witches an open question. Tompkyns also reports that "…there be not in it (to my understanding) any poeticall Genius, or art, or language, or judgment to state or tenet of witches (which I expected,) or application to virtue, but full of ribaldrie and of things umprobable and impossible." His expressed surprise that the play does not take a stronger stance on the ontological status of witchcraft seems consonant with the tendency of cultural treatments of witchcraft to include or engender debate by that era. Tompkyns'

[98] This letter is reproduced as an appendix to Gabriel Egan's edition of the play.

assessment seems to indicate that the theater-going populace had been inoculated against the threat theoretically represented in witchcraft. The play itself help supports this point of view by minimizing the ramifications of the witches' acts and moving violence offstage to facilitate its comedic tone.

The playwrights' treatment of witchcraft as simultaneously real and humorous extends in a self-reflexive capacity into the play itself—though the witches identify themselves as such, they tend to view their practices through the lens of fun and entertainment rather than in terms of the personalized maleficium that was more common to narratives of English witchcraft. When the audience first encounters the coven, the witches are celebrating their most recent act. As one of the witches reminds her fellows: "before we dance and play another game, / We must a little laugh and thanke/ Our feat familiars for the pranck / They playd us last" (530-533), a speech that firmly situates witchcraft in a festive realm. Though the magic practiced in *The Late Lancashire Witches* tends to be approached with levity, it is important to note that its pattern is one involving direct disruptions to the patriarchal social order. In the play, for example, the witches are apt to cause impotence, but not death—though both targets, death in particular, threaten the sanctity of law and order, the witches' targeting of male procreativity fits in with the play's tendency to explore acts of magic that are mild enough to be mined for humor but serious enough to carry insistently unsettling connotation.[99] The "prank" the witches gleefully reference above, for example, involves the sustained disruption of the Seely

[99] Its treatment of these topics can be contrasted productively to the Hecate scenes in *Macbeth.*

household, including the two women, Joan and Winny, referenced above.[100] The family suffers complete inversion, as the parents are bullied and abused by their children, who are then abused by their servants. In other instances, witchcraft disrupts patrilineal inheritance and the maintenance of estates and prevents the consummation of marriage.[101]

Though witchcraft is a source of humor in the play, recognition of and belief in it is generally a serious matter for characters within it. The tension between these two poles drives a thread of tragedy in the play that frames the confessional subjectivities that emerge by its end. Throughout the drama, people in the village link the unnatural happenings of the Seeley household to witchcraft; to most characters in the play, it is available as a viable explanation for events, and the tropes of witchcraft are in general circulation. This corresponds with the audience's own experience—throughout, they are "in on the joke," so to speak, privy to the witches' plots and aware of how they are affecting other characters. In contrast, the few characters who don't believe in witchcraft are induced over the course of the play to see the error of their ways. One of the most prominent doubters is Mr. Generous, whose wife is, unbeknownst to him, the informal leader of the coven of witches.[102] Mr. Generous is consistently shown to be plain-

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[100] The kind of social disruption this subplot also plays a role in Brome's *Antipodes,* a later comedy of inversion.

[101] There are also other examples of this pattern. In a subplot that runs parallel to the witchcraft story, a young man named Arthur seems to secure his family estate; he is unable to ask his uncle, Seely, because the latter's home has been thrown into such disarray. Later in the play, the witches also cause impotence which thwarts the consummation of the union between two servants, Lawrence and Parnell. This situation is mostly played for laughs, but the disruption of heterosexual union implied in it is in keeping with the witches' more general disdain for such relationships.

[102] Another prominent doubter, the appropriately named village man Doughty, eventually leads the witchcraft examinations. His realization about the reality of witchcraft in the village is not nearly as traumatic as it was for Generous, in part because for the latter, the

speaking, honest, and as his name indicates, generous, an earnest set of qualities which from the outset set him off from his fellow villagers. His disbelief in witchcraft is established from his first appearance: when another character voices the prevailing assumption that the disruptions in the Seely household are the result of witchcraft, Generous replies, “They that think so dreame, / For my beliefe is, no such thing can be” (291-2). The dramatic irony produced by Generous’s earnest refusal to recognize witchcraft in light of the blithely evil actions performed by his wife for the audience drives an unsettlingly tragic element in a play that otherwise tends toward slapstick.

Generous does not take seriously the performative power of witchcraft, and is accordingly inevitably thwarted in his eventual attempts to exert control over his household—chiefly his wife—through the discourse of confession. Tompkyns identifies the eventual discovery by Mr. Generous of his wife’s witchcraft as “the onely tragicall part of the storie.” This tragedy stems from the fact that Generous believes in his wife and his marriage—he seems fundamentally unable to understand both his wife’s true nature and conventions of the plot in which he is imbricated.[103] His role is “tragicall” on a deeper, more meta-performative plane, as well, as he self-consciously comes to occupy the subjective spaces associated with a mode of domestic tragedy that is out of sync with his wife’s more powerful plot. When he learns from his groom that his wife has been

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transition comes with marital tragedy, whereas for the former, it is incorporated into the play’s humor and slapstick.

[103] McLuskie has noted the “uneasy mixture of comedy and passion” that characterizes Mr. Generous’s role in this scene and in the play” (82). I would go further to suggest that this mixing is the result of a generic paradigm associated with Mr. Generous in particular, that of domestic tragedy. I will explore this dynamic more fully in the next chapter. Frances Dolan claims that the depiction of witchcraft as a humorous phenomenon undermines female agency given that the witches are "trivialized yet still [held] legally accountable" (223.).

going out for mysterious nocturnal rides, Generous does not assume that this is because she is a witch, rather he seems to imagine infidelity. McLuskie has described his instinctive approach in noting, "the offense is witchcraft but the only available dramatic language for dealing with erring women is that of domestic melodrama."[104] Generous' attitude toward his wife signals his emotional and moral commitment to the domestic sphere, a space that the rest of the play suggests is unstable and subject to inversion. It also signals his general incapacity for imaginative or magical thinking, a trait that puts him at a distinct disadvantage in the play's epistemic universe. The play's treatment of Generous' assumption signifies an important reversal central to the paradigms of believability at work in the play—in real life, his assumption that a wife's nocturnal absences might indicate adultery rather than witchcraft is much more sensible than the suspicion that she might be a witch, but in the play, this is a humorous misreading at his expense.

Mr. Generous is only induced to believe that witchcraft is behind his marital concerns when his groom, Robin, manages to present him with the spectacle of his wife magically changing form.[105] For a man who has a demonstrated tendency to believe what he sees, this physical evidence of witchcraft is compelling, but he nonetheless seeks a

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[104] McLuskie, *Renaissance Dramatists*, 82.

[105] When, upon his master's orders, Generous' groom, Robin, attempts to prevent Mrs. Generous from going out at night, she puts him in a magic bridle which transforms him into a horse and allows her to ride him. The tables turn when Robin puts his mistress in the bridle and leaves her in the stable. When Mr. Generous castigates Robin about Mrs. Generous' absence—still not believing it could be for a magic purpose—the hapless groom complains: "You will believe there are no Witches! Had I not been late brideled I could have sayd more, but I hope she is tyed to a racke that will confesse something" (1653-5). Robin plays here with the implications of being bridled, but it is clear that for Mr. Generous, verbal explanations will not suffice because he has repeatedly been Robin also likens Mrs. Generous' current state—tied up in the stable—to being on the rack, a torture device known for its use to induce confessions.

confession from Mrs. Generous. This scene demonstrates the power Generous attributes to performative ritual to address violations of the patriarchal order, for though Mrs. Generous' crimes didn't involve infidelity per se, the order of the household has been dramatically challenged. Robin exhorts Mrs Generous to "confesse yourself to be what you are; and that's in plaine English a Witch" (1737-8). He labels and reduces her identity to her role as witch, but still identifies the more general demand for her to express it herself that is attendant to popular confessions. In the exchange that follows, Mr. Generous assumes the role of confessor, citing the Anglican baptism service and questioning his wife to elicit details about her transgression and her penitence.

Just as Mr. Generous easily slides into a performative guise of power underwritten by his deployment of conventional confessional scripts, Mrs. Generous situates herself as the model penitent subject to the personal and institutional power that rests in her husband/confessor. She claims to seek social and moral restitution, telling her husband that she hopes she "never bargain'd for that fire / Further than penitent teares have power to quench" (1787-6); she suggests her transgressions are still within the realm of recuperation through the successful performance of confession. She pairs the conventional language of penitence with tears "tinctured," she says, "in blood, blood issuing from the heart" (1791) to guarantee authenticity and to better convince a confessor who needs to see to believe—her confession includes not only the appropriate language, but also the expected bodily evidence. In other words, this scene between husband and wife seems to contain a simulacrum of confession. It proves persuasive to its onstage audience, and accepting that her confession is full and penitence genuine, Generous pardons his wife. In assuming the authority to do so, he lays claim to his

superior role in the hierarchies adhering to marriage and to the confessional exchange. He also seeks to rectify the challenge to his subjective identity presented in Mrs. Generous' transgressions. Generous' very assumption of this confessorial power attests to the fact that while he has come to realize that witchcraft is real in the universe he inhabits, he is still out of sync with the conventions at work in the play. The tragic space he occupies is at odds with its comedic nature, and the pathos he brings only serves to highlight the fact that neither the victims of witchcraft nor the witches themselves, who seem doomed to be condemned, engender sympathy from the audience.[106] Furthermore, the audience has witnessed a broader range of acts and behaviors from both confessor and confessant in this scene, and accordingly have access to a higher judgmental authority than does Generous, undermining his position as confessor even as he assumes it.

Mr. Generous' genuinely felt grief over his wife's transgressions and gravitas in absolving her accrue pathetic/comedic value as it becomes clear that his wife has duped him in her confession**.** Rather than signaling her moral recuperation, Mrs. Generous' successful performance of conformity to social standards actually masks and enables her continued disruption of order. When a fellow witch asks her about being caught by her husband, Mrs. Generous offers a new narrative of her supposed confession:

> Some passionate words mixt with forc't tears
> Did so inchant his eyes and eares
> I made my peace, with promise never
> To do the like; but once and ever
> A Witch thou know'st. (2046-2050)

[106] The Seeley's remain generally sympathetic characters, but their plight is largely played for laughs and results in no lasting harm, so they never inspire much genuine concern. The miller, who is also tormented by the witches, belongs to a profession which, as Gabriel Egan argues, was notoriously corrupt, a fact which could mitigate potential sympathy for him (Egan 5).

Mrs. Generous describes her false confession as itself a form of witchcraft: she enchants his senses with a performance that combines performative language and bodily reactions that she is able to control. The effect of this "witchcraft" is a confession that is not false in terms of the facts is recounts, but rather in its spirit and intension; her continued proud self-identification as witch keeps her at odds with the social taxononomies spelled out in confession.[107] The play draws attention to the utter infelicity, to return to Austin's parlance of speech acts, of her confession. It is *not*, however, what he calls a misfire—an abuse radical enough to obviate its status as a confession—both parties had the requisite social authority to participate, and something did occur. Both parties performed as befit the occasion, and her interlocutor did in fact forgive her based on her words. Instead, it is an abuse of performativity, rendered hollow by Mrs. Generous' insincerity.[108] The disconnect in the performance of reconciliation exposes the intersubjective contingency in the negotiation of the "rules" at play in various realms of performative speech; this scene reflects and exaggerates the synchronous multiplicity that always attends to such realms. Abuses of performativity stem from the subjective stance of the performer; appropriate scripts and the will of the auditor cannot compensate for the internal contradiction that undermines a speech act. These words still have meaningful effects for her interlocutor, which suggests (in the context of the play) the essential correspondence between a socially sanctioned ritual speech act and a spell. Mrs. Generous' advertised ability to feign an authentic expression of interiority belies the assumption, embodied in Mr. Generous, that the proper performance of the tropes of confession, especially those

[107]At the same time, she affirms the subjective sense of community shared by the witches, who instinctively "know" one another.
[108] See Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 16–17.

that accord with the narrative of mercy and marital restitution that he favors, indicate meaningful sincerity.[109]

Though Mrs. Generous' private confession works in the controlled space of their home, the intersubjective reality it temporarily produces does not signal any meaningful change, and it does not contain or resolve the witchcraft that underlies it. Generous' personal tragedy involves his efforts to maintain moral authority within his household. In the play at large, witchcraft signifies differently, exposing his agential incapacity in dealing with it through the domestic ritual. The failure of Generous' ideological authority manifests itself in the incontrovertible evidence of his wife's guilt that finally emerges: her wedding ring on her severed hand, cut off in the midst of a magical prank.[110] The wedding ring is a signifier that emphasizes the resonance of her transgressions in two thematically related realms: both in the domestic tragedy fueled by her husband, and also in the farcical comedy of domestic inversion associated with witchcraft in the play. Mr. Generous takes this sign of her continued witchcraft as a punishment for his "great incredulity"(2449)—his previous skepticism of witchcraft—a stance that made him ill equipped to deal with his wife's performances and reinforces play's message about the

[109] Earlier in the play, another character speaks to the relationship between words and sincerity, Arthur, grateful to Mr. Generous because the latter agrees to help him with financial trouble, laments: "could I, at once dissolve my selfe to words/ And after turne them to matter; such/ And of that strength, as to attract the attention/ Of all the curious, and most itching eare/ Of this our Crittick age; it could not make/ A theame amounting to your noble worth" (625-9). His suggestion that words are insufficient to convey deep feeling runs counter to Mrs. Generous' object lesson in the ability of words to insincerely simulate deep feeling.

[110] Having assumed animal forms, she and her coven spend an evening tormenting a soldier charged with guarding a mill, and when the soldier attempts to fight back, he cuts off Mrs. Generous' hand (which then resumes its human shape). The severed hand has no root in the original legal case. Brett Hirsch (Notes and Queries 2006) links the depiction of Mrs. Generous hand to a Bouget narrative, which critics often also connect to *Duchess of Malfi*.

ontological status of witchcraft. The treatment of bodily evidence at the end of the play is significant; Mrs. Generous' hand is treated as a stable form of proof that constitutes, by virtue of her handless arm and wedding ring on the dismembered hand, a kind of physical confession that circumscribes the witches' linguistic autonomy.[111]

The play's final scene, culminating in the apprehension of the witches whose magic has driven the plot of the comedy, offers two competing models for the subject called on to confess: Mrs. Generous and Peg, a member of her coven. The former's demonstrated capacity to reshape conventional paradigms to her ends dramatically contrasts with the latter's submission to the demand for a satisfactory narrative of "truth." While Mrs. Generous was an eager participant in false penitence before her husband, she refuses to accede to the social power manifest in the local townsman, Doughty, who assumes the role of interrogator. She announces: "I will say nothing, but what you know you know, / And as the law shall find me let it take me" (2726-7). Her phrase, "what you know you know," recalls the words of Iago at the end of Shakespeare's *Othello*.[112] Iago's plots tended to depend on the manipulation of expectation and affect, something at which Mrs. Generous also proved adept. Her earlier confession to her husband allowed her to flip the script of penitence, controlling a discourse in which she purported to cede control. It was the product the unsettled domestic power structures in the play, and further, it served to underscore them. On a broader level, this disconnect exposes fissures in the

[111] She acknowledges that she is "undone" (2520): her artifice exposed, and her guilt confirmed through her dismemberment, Mrs. Generous no longer has the capacity to effectively occupy the space of the penitent. This apparent disempowerment can also linked to her broader audience; whereas before she sought to manipulate the expectations of only her husband, by the end of the play, she finds herself charged with answering to a more generalized array of community representatives.

[112] In act five, scene two, Iago answers his interrogators: "Demand me nothing: what you know, you know: / From this time forth I never will speak word."

popular discourse of authenticity and authority associated with confession itself. Her performative manipulations earlier in the play emphasize the important fact that what one "knows one knows" is always suspect. In declining to speak her guilt (let alone her penitence) in this new context, she proffers another more direct challenge to the authority structures that demand her words. She does not refute the charges—rather, she seems to recognize that her guilt is for many a foregone conclusion, but in maintaining her own silence, she maintains some symbolic autonomy.

Unlike the rest of the coven, who follow Mrs. Generous' lead, Peg, a character clearly modeled after the real Margaret Johnson, begins to confess with ingenuous-seeming alacrity; she demonstrates no sense of control over the exchange.[113] Doughty immediately takes to the role of a Brian Darcy-like interrogator, informing the audience in an aside that he will "dandle a Witch a little" (2737), and promising Peg favorable treatment if she tells him the truth. By explicitly referencing the interrogative manipulation that frames Peg's confession, the play emphasizes Peg's subordinate place in the power dynamics governing this exchange.[114] Doughty's leading questions in the interrogation mean that they provide the "confession" he seeks; Peg need only assent to the narrative being provided for her, one which serves not only to confirm her condemnation, but also that of all the other witches. For audiences of the play, who have

[113] In some editions, this character is referred to as Meg, which reinforces the connection between this fictional version and the real Margaret Johnson.

[114] In answer to Doughty's questions, Peg repeatedly reasons that "tis folly to dissemble," echoing a sentiment that Mrs. Generous voiced in her earlier strategic confession when she answered her husband's questions about witchcraft with "it cannot be deny'd, I am such a curst Creature" (1746). The negative phrasing in both instances emphasizes the fact that both women are confirming preexisting narratives, rather than generating new information through their stories, a role they seem to be aware of and respond to, though certain on different levels.

witnessed the witchcraft and experienced Mrs. Generous' earlier evasion of punishment, the transitive guilt conferred by the suspect last-minute admissions of an addled-seeming witch would be a humorous and not particularly problematic conclusion that implicitly demonstrates the narrative power of confession.

The resonance of this closing scene takes on further complexity given the historical situation of it and of the play. Heywood and Brome culled the exchange largely from Margaret Johnson's confession, which would, in the real-life version of events, later be discredited as not true as a narrative of what she and others actually did. As critics of the play always tend to point out, the real-life stakes facing the Lancashire witches inevitably affect the way one interprets its depiction of witchcraft. The play concludes with an epilogue in which the playwrights self-consciously reflect on the relationship between inspiration and drama. Though the investigation was unraveling as the play was being staged, the epilogue seems to assume the guilt of the play's subjects, proclaiming that "Witches must expect their due /By lawfull Justice" (2803-4), just as the playwrights must expect their judgment from the audience of the play.[115] This analogy between the legal processes on which the play capitalizes and its value as a work of entertainment underscores the suggestion that the play represents real events even as it emphasizes what is at stake for the authors as dramatists in a cultural market.[116] The humor of the play, targeted for popular appeal, complicates the question of its epistemological stance. I

[115] The concluding speech alludes to the uncertain fate of the real witches in the case the play capitalizes on, mitigating the sense that their punishment is inevitable, reminding the audience that "what their crime/ May bring upon 'em, ripeness yet of time/ Has not reveal'd" (2804-6). This mirrors the end of the play itself, in which the actual sentencing and punishment of the witches is deferred beyond the scope of the drama.

[116] For a compelling discussion of the mutual investments of law and drama in the early modern period, see Mukherji, *Law and Representation in Early Modern Drama*, 2–7.

would suggest, however, that the acts that have just been performed guarantee that within the universe of the play—a universe which overlaps with and blurs into reality—the witches are guilty and their "due" seems inevitable. The playwrights situate their depiction as one that is consistent with real events and necessarily uncolored by the structure imposed by an official verdict, saying: "we represent as much as they have done, before Lawes hand did touch/ Upon their guilt; But dare not hold it fit,/ That we for Justice and Judges sit" (2809-12). By collapsing what was represented into what was done, Heywood and Brome refute their own disavowal of judgment. Furthermore, as the endlessly deferred fate of the real Pendle witches suggests, a narrative of potential guilt, especially one tied to a first person teller has an indelible impact—on theatrical audiences and village communities alike.

Conclusion

The failure of historical reality to confirm the convictions in *The Late Lancashire Witches*' staged iteration only serves to highlight that the system of signs through which confessions function depends on a mode of self-authorizing epistemological agency that produces itself as its own referent. In the play's depiction of confessions performed and refused, and its reference to false or feigned ones, it demonstrates that the potential of one to personate the anticipated role of the confessant has a dramatically disruptive effect on efforts of regulatory figures to efficaciously embody confessorial roles. Both the play *The Late Lancashire Witches* and the events on which it was based demonstrate that while the colorful history of English witchcraft had entered a phase marked by increasing skepticism and debate by the mid-seventeenth century, the preceding decades of build up

of a rhetorical constellation of witchcraft tropes had had an indelible impact on the cultural imaginary. This impact extends into the discursive site of confession, but while confession's conventional role as queen of proofs made it valuable for witchcraft prosecution and persecution, individual texts and the theatrical appropriation of the type of story they tell demonstrate that while judicial manipulation can indeed shape the confessional space for conservative ends, it is also a site at which subjectivities can be negotiated and prejudicial identities resisted in a dynamic fashion. The speaker *and/or* her interlocutor can manipulate the language of confession, resulting in speeches whose transformative power is detached from truth-value. Accordingly, witchcraft serves as a fruitful ground for assessing simultaneous instability and power that can adhere to the act of confession more generally.

Written into judicial code and prosecuted in criminal courts, witchcraft was ensconced in apparatuses of state power even as individual cases tended to affect and be tried in specific communities. The nature of encounters between suspected witches and these various structures of power have obvious ramifications for the possibilities for agency of the subjects involved. In theory, confession operates as a ritual that serves as an antidote to rituals of witchcraft—to confess to having supernatural power is to subjugate oneself to the power of law. The efficacy of confessions for producing this desirable social transformation is contingent on their correspondence with the tropes they traffic in, and on the prevailing social currency of those tropes. The discourse of early modern witchcraft helps illuminate the boundary between fiction and non-fiction when it comes to confessions—as the archival narratives and popular theatrical version both demonstrate, the parameters for "real" confessions can be porous, defined as they are by

the competing demands of perceived facts, ideological motivation, social coercion, and personal interest

CHAPTER III

'HARMS LAMENTED, NOT REDRESSED': *THE WITCH OF EDMONTON* AND FICTIONS OF CLOSURE

The final moments of Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* illustrate a fundamental paradigm of dramatic public confession: the verbalization of wrong-doing on the part of the condemned is a vehicle for personal and social moral rehabilitation.[1] In doing so, this scene *also* shows how performative inhabitations of this mode of confession rely on legible configurations of subjective power while opening a space for the strategic appropriation and manipulation of the subjective categories through which that power operates. At the play's end, the Duchess stands accused of conspiring to murder her husband, the Duke. Faced with his corpse on stage, she confesses to her instigation of the murder and offers a performance of noble and contrite submission to the Governor's authority to punish her, inviting him to "perform a justice that may light all others / To noble actions" (5.3.53-4).[2] The noble didacticism of this speech corresponds with the conventional scripts of early modern individual public confession. The Governor denies

[1] Peter Brooks has identified this essential doxa of confession: "the confession of wrongdoing," he says, "is considered fundamental to morality because it constitutes a verbal act of self-recognition as wrongdoer and hence provides the basis of rehabilitation." Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 2. Rebecca Chapman has written persuasively about the valences of "rehabilitation" in the constitution of queer subjectivities. Though I use the term as part of a constellation of assumed confessional effects, her work on the nuances of this idea, especially as it pertains to non-normative socio-rhetorical fields, is intriguing and worth pursuing further. Rebecca Chapman, "Rehabilitating Shakespeare cultural appropriation and queer subjectivity" (Vanderbilt University, 2009), http://etd.library.vanderbilt.edu/available/etd-07232009-180528/.

[2] Citations from the text are from the edition found in Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1989).

her the redemption commonly associated with contrite death, however, and he introduces further charges of adultery, which the Duchess vehemently opposes.[3] When the Duchess' maid confirms that she did not commit the adultery suspected of her, the supposedly dead Duke, to whose murder the Duchess has just confessed, suddenly awakens—very much alive—and offers her a last minute reprieve. Rather than, in the Governor's words, "die a murd'ress only,"—a phrasing which in context works to clear her of the taint of adultery while stripping her of regal authority—the Duke announces that his wife will "live a duchess, / Better than ever lov'd, embraced and honour'd" (5.3.123-4). Citing the amends she made with "grief and honor" and implying a hierarchy of guilt that renders attempting to murder a husband more forgivable than the sexual betrayal of the same, the Duke absolves her, a move that reinforces his own power, which her plots were intended to undermine, while simultaneously reinstating her as an authority figure.[4]

The scene exemplifies the paradigm of closure and catharsis associated with scenes of public confession that helps makes such performances compelling fodder for the early modern stage. The effects of this final confession vividly demonstrate the

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[3] She announces, "I dare my accuser and defy the world, / Death, shame and torment. Blood I am guilty of / But not adultery, not the breach of honour." (5.3.101-3). Her confession to murder but not adultery is reflective the ties in theme and character between *The Witch* and the controversies associated with the scandalous separation of the Earl of Essex and the Countess, Frances Howard, in 1612, and the related Overbury murder trial in 1615-1616. For more on this relationship, see Swapan Chakravorty, *Society and Politics in the Plays of Thomas Middleton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 109–111.

[4] Monika Karpinska has recently argued that Middleton's virginal woman—the servant who confesses to sleeping with Almachides instead of the Duchess, is indicative of the conception of virgins as "walking shells of symbolic chastity already firmly entrenched in the artificial social system of appearances and imaginary hymens." This function, it seems to me, helps the Duchess efficaciously manipulate her resistance to confessing adultery. Monika Karpinska, "Early modern Dramatizations of Virgins and pregnant women," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 50, no. 2 (2010): 427ff.

narrative logic of expiation built into scenes of admission and revelation: the Duke's performative declaration: "vanish all wrongs" (5.3.126) enacts a kind of ritual forgetting on the play, insisting on a restoration of marital and civil order. The abruptness of this reversal plays off the satirical absurdity of Middleton's self-described "tragi-comedy," and the declaration "works," insofar as the play ends on a festive note. These same qualities of the scene, however, built as it is around the suggestion that a proper confession can literally bring characters—and in the figure of the Duke, social order itself—back to life, tie the idea of full and happy restitution suggested in the play's end to the realm of farce or fantasy. For a court that has always been plagued by corruption and intrigue, the notion of restoration through confessional spectacle, particularly one that features an irredeemably disingenuous performance from its confessant, is a hollow one.[5]

In this chapter, I read *The Witch of Edmonton* in light of some questions that this scene at the close of *The Witch* helps foreground: To what ends do confessional speech acts signify for communities and intracommunal bonds? What power dynamics define the agency potential of inhabitations of confessional spaces? To what extent can these subjective spaces be appropriated and manipulated in terms of the rhetorical conventions of the ritual and of the intersubjective spaces of address in which it is deployed? The presumed capacity of dramatic confession to alternately restore, condemn, and console shapes the dramatic arc of Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's 1621 domestic tragedy-cum-

[5] This hollowness presents itself in the Duchess' own confession. Its touted sincerity, for example, is undermined by the Duchess' belief, known to the audience, that the Governor is in her thrall and unlikely to actually condemn her. Her subsequent effort to clear herself of the latter charge represents a move to work from within the role of the confessant to orchestrate the terms of her condemnation; her efficacy in doing so is indicative of agency afforded her with the confessional exchange through her simultaneous subjective legibility within the play's taxonomy of power as regent and murderer.

witchcraft drama *The Witch of Edmonton*.[6] Over the course of its five acts, the audience witnesses an array of disruptions of social and moral order, including murder, bigamy, illicit marriage, and malefic witchcraft.[7] I trace the conditions for rhetorical and performative agency in the two primary characters, and perpetrators of these acts, Frank Thorney and Elizabeth Sawyer, to show how the play exposes the complexities of efficaciousness in confessions: both public spectacles and those dependent the manipulation of specific affective bonds.

The public confession scenes of the play's conclusion produce a sense of communal sanctity born of an interplay between forgiveness and repudiation, but the anodyne effects attributed to these confession are shadowed by the extent to which catharsis is problematized in the play itself. The first section of this chapter foregrounds the theorization of confessional efficacy that emerges in the final scene of the play. The power of the scene derives in part from its juxtaposition of two dramatically different, yet thematically linked, social subjects. In the second section, I reframe their confessional efficaciousness in those terms. To do so, I draw on Judith Butler, along with Louis Althusser, whose theories of subjective interpellation she takes up, to explore confession in terms of the role that the social performative plays in the formation and reformation of the subject. The final two sections of the chapter trace the socio-linguistic trajectories of

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[6] In focusing on a play that is more closely indebted to the English popular witchcraft pamphlet than any other from the period, this chapter builds on thematically on the previous one, picking up on the anxieties and power dynamics associated with the discourse of witchcraft described there, and resituating them in the context of an investigation of aspects of confession which extend beyond the specific cultural purview of witchcraft.

[7] This recalls the assumption, in circulation in early modern England, as Heywood's *Apology for Actors* demonstrates, that the staging of bad acts could have an instructive moral value through deterrent exemplarity.

Frank Thorney and Elizabeth Sawyer to show how the perceived performative agency of individual speakers shapes, and is in turn shaped by, the roles they can take up in confessional exchanges. The fiction of closure is teleological; as such, in the words of Madhavi Menon, it "depends on a sequence leading to an end that can retrospectively be seen as having had a beginning."[8] This play helps illustrate, on structural and thematic planes alike, that the notion of expiation depends on and is always measured by its distance from the idea of a previously clean slate. Lacan and Derrida have both demonstrated, though in rather different terms, how the notion of this origin, constituted by its very inaccessibility, is a powerful force. It is one that underlies the role of confession, not only as it works in this play, but also more generally as a cultural construct.[9] Confession normatively suggests a move toward social and spiritual cleansing, but those ends are complicated by the ways in which socially situated subjects reappropriate, respond to, and resist its goals. *The Witch of Edmonton*'s confessional modes ultimately expose the fissures that were already present in, rather than produced by, the moral failures and criminal lapses for which characters are expected to verbally atone at the play's conclusion.

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[8] Menon continues, "issues of time and consequence are paramount for such narratives." She explores teleology in order to productively refute it in service of the theorization of a queer temporality of sexuality. Madhavi Menon, "Spurning Teleology in Venus and Adonis," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11, no. 4 (2005): 392.

[9] The concept of a confessional self-identity is produced in terms of social subjectivity, which relies on structures whose origins are essentially inaccessible, present only as an absent ideal. Lacan situates origins in terms of the realm of the Real, the space of the incomprehensible connection between signifier and referent. See Jacques Lacan and Bruce Fink, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 64–65. Derrida uses the word *differance* to refer to this kind of "absent presence," characterized by the irreducible but unattainable trace of what is absent. The origin, *qua* Derrida's theorization, is multiple and complex, refuting efforts to access or re-inhabit. As he also argues, the inaccessibility of subjective origins renders them the stuff of myth. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (JHU Press, 1998), 40–60, 92.

Public Confession and the Cathartic Imagination

The public speeches that shape the conclusion to *The Witch of Edmonton* are legible in terms of the historical conceptual model and literary generic trope of the gallows confession.[10] This cultural paradigm draws scenes of confession and narrative closure together, but as my reading of the play suggests, the presupposition of closure and amelioration that accompanies it is undermined insofar as it privileges a stable and preexisting configuration of social subjectivity that can be cleansed in ways that efface the tensions in its structuring forces. The term refers to one of the most prominent forms of popular confession in the period: the public or publicized narrative of a previously confessed and/or convicted criminal before their punishment. Following Foucault's arguments in *Discipline and Punish*, historian Randall Martin argues that this form of public address was an integral part of the "theater of early modern capital punishment," a technology of the broader discourse of state power.[11] The public confession in this context

[10] For an excellent example of the gallows confession in pamphlet form that showcases the role of contrition and the production of narrative suspense, see Anon., *The Arraignement, Judgement, Confession, and Execution of Humfrey Stafford*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 723:28 (London: Printed by E. A[llde] for A. J[ohnson] and F. B[urton], 1607).

[11] Randall Martin, *Women, Murder, and Equity in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 114–116. The allusion to the theater is intentional; Martin is among a number of scholars who have explored the formal connections between the spatial and narrative patterns of early modern theater and the public execution. See also Frances E. Dolan, "'Gentlemen, I Have One Thing More to Say': Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563-1680," *Modern Philology* 92, no. 2 (November 1, 1994): 157–178; Molly Smith, "The Theater and the Scaffold: Death as Spectacle in The Spanish Tragedy," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 32, no. 2 (April 1, 1992): 217–232; Maus, Katherine Eisaman, "Inwardness and Spectatorship," in *Neo-historicism: Studies in Renaissance Literature, History, and Politics*, ed. Robin Headlam Wells, Glenn Burgess, and Rowland Wymer (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2000), 111–137. In her investigation of the phenomenon, K. J. Kesselring locates a comprehensive conservative efficacy in the

does not signify primarily as a narrative of informational discovery, given that legal guilt has been fixed to some degree by prior confession and/or the verdict of authorities. These speeches function instead as performances of contrition, hinging on reconciliation and conversion, and insofar as they operate generically, as narratives of transgression that satisfy the conventions of the crime.[12] As exemplary spectacles of largely prescripted penitence, they serve a disciplinary function intended to reinforce normative hierarchies of power through recognition of that power on the part of the condemned and the audience.[13] As speeches simultaneously prescripted and unpredictable, dependent on the inhabitation of the confessional mode before a live audience, they lack, as Martin notes, "any guarantee of semiotic stability or repeatability."[14] Situated as a mode of triumphant reassertion of

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mobilization of public confession in service of the theater of punishment, arguing, "authorities attended not just to the visual components of executions, but also to the aural," in service of a comprehensive performance of contrition intended to demonstrate "the state's power over the body, but also, seemingly, over the mind." In doing so, she contends, gallows confession "offer[s] a symbolic restoration of the social relations of power that disobedience had disrupted." K. J. Kesselring, *Mercy and Authority in the Tudor State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 147.

[12] Martin, *Women, Murder, and Equity in Early Modern England*, 27. Martin, like Frances Dolan, examines these gallows confessions in particular relation to gender, exploring ways in which the ideologically mandated gender roles structure the crimes and confessional spaces associated with women. This attention to the dynamics of gender and social situation certainly underlies my argument; however, gallows confessions in general were by no means limited to women.

[13] Dramatic representations of this spectacle are tied to its role in the pamphlet world as a popular literary subgenre—the witchcraft confessions recounted in the previous chapter are part of the tradition of the narrative gallows confession. Their presumed sense of subjective authenticity is tempted by the clear fact that these are written for a market prizing tales both lurid and moralisitc, and by the chaplain, or Ordinary, rather than the criminal his/herself. Brooks discusses the boom in the genre of the gallows confession in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—beyond the purview of this dissertation—in which so-called "Newgate biographies" became particularly popular, and also profitable for the prison chaplains who wrote them. Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 159.

[14] Martin, *Women, Murder, and Equity in Early Modern England*, 114. Foucault explores the slippages inherent to gallows confession as well, even when they are done

hegemonic ideology, inhabitations of this confessional zone are prone to exposing both its potentially malleable artifice through the slippages these inhabitations can reveal and the reinscriptive performances they can facilitate.

The dominant dramatic structure of early modern tragedy tends toward a therapeutic value rooted in the Aristotelian model: plays seem to both grapple with and favor the expectation of structural closure—if not its fulfillment. The teleological tendencies that propel both generic form and rituals of confessional speech intersect in the role scenes of confession that often play in theatrical endings. Tragedy, for Aristotle, works through a form of mimetic action that produces an emotional response of pity or fear in its audience, an experience that ultimately produces a cathartic, or purgative effect associated alternately with cleansing and revelation.[15] O. B. Hardison has suggested that the use of public confession in early modern literature constitutes a particular type of

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"correctly"; the criminal's words could be reappropriated by their audience to make them a folk hero. Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 62.

[15] Tanya Pollard has noted that some critics question this association as pertains to Renaissance drama on the grounds that this text was not in wide circulation in the period. See Tanya Pollard, "Tragedy and Drama," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 62. Nonetheless, based on the Aristotelian supposition, O.B. Hardison has suggested that catharsis can accordingly be defined as the effect of tragedy, dependent on it and naturally following it. Hardison, "Three Types of Renaissance Catharsis," 78. Ania Loomba has described the dominant critical assumption pertaining to early modern drama that it tend toward some sense of catharsis, and with it "moral certainty"; she cites Kenneth Muir's contention that "recognition of truth" for characters within the play is central to dramatic closure. Critics, including Loomba herself, have worked to unsettle those structural assumptions, and I follow in that critical vein. Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1989), 119. As the last chapter noted, marked refusals of cathartic confession feature frequently in drama from the period. This resistance to or refutation of closure is all the more significant for playing off the expectation, however hollow, that it can and should be present for the survivors in the wake of tragedy. We saw this kind of refutation, for example, in the refusal of Mrs. Generous to confess to witchcraft in the play's final scene, and in the silence of Iago at the end of *Othello* to which her lines allude.

catharsis that works doubly: "a crime is solved and a criminal punished… society is strengthened, if only minutely," and "confession brings relief to the criminal (or sinner)."[16] This understanding of the cathartic function of the play is a useful one, and one *The Witch of Edmonton* itself evokes, but it, like *The Witch*, also reveals the nearly inevitable ambivalence in the dramatic catharsis associated with spectacles of confession.

These fissures emerge through the range of levels at which confessional efficaciousness can be assessed: though the concerns of state power and "society" writ large traverse the gallows confession, *The Witch of Edmonton* reminds us that a range of inter- and intra- subjective relationships can be implicated in the work that public confession can be imagined to do. Sarah Beckwith has recently argued, in terms of Shakespearean drama, that confession can and does effectively reaffirm community, specifically on an intersubjective level. The rituals of public forgiveness at the end of Shakespeare's post-tragic plays serve, she suggests, as spectacles of healing, intended to "return the protagonists to themselves and to each other all at once," and she singles out confessions as a technique of dramatic conclusion through which, in her example, the play's "particular community is restored."[17] Beckwith helps demonstrate how the ideological underpinnings of gallows confession as a relatively discrete genre extend into

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[16] He dubs this "moral catharsis," part of the taxonomy of modes of catharsis he sees at work in Renaissance literary culture. Hardison, "Three Types of Renaissance Catharsis," 79.

[17] Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 1–2, 123. Though Beckwith does not explicitly argue that Shakespeare implements a self-consciously Catholic heuristic for the depiction of intra-subjective ritual, she consistently suggests that that model has efficacy in the a range of scenes of confession and contrition. She indicates that the constellation of confessions at the end of Shakespeare's at the end of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is integral to this effect, noting that through the series of separate performances of the ritual, the characters in the play affirm and reaffirm the specific relationships among one another. Beckwith indicates that the search for forgiveness is itself in a sense a search for community.

other modes of public confession, punishment, and absolution, and her emphasis on the stakes for a "particular" community is significant—the affective bonds and disaffiliations through which the social subjectivity of characters cohere are shaped by configurations of power that are products of, but only imperfect metonymies for, ideology as Althusser describes it.[18] Beckwith's arguments about the structural and moral dynamics of the relationship between confession and forgiveness are compelling, but they are predicated on a faith in the efficaciousness of a traditional Catholic model of performative confession and absolution. As I explain in the first chapter, I look to that model, but only insofar as its diffuse iterations and echoes are inevitably affected by the perlocutionary unpredictability of individual iterations of confessional speeches, particularly in a theatrical context in which slippages in and reformations of performative agency are constantly at work. In this context, it is evident that the bonds of community forged through the performative rituals of confession are tenuous, based on an unattainable paradigm of predictable efficacy and closure. The socio-symbolic power of confessional performances helps produce subjects in relation to one another; intersubjective connections buttress *a priori* institutional structures while programmatically exceeding them.

The Witch of Edmonton depicts closure for its titular community through the juxtaposed scenes of judgment and confession of its two primary tragic characters, Frank Thorney, guilty of bigamy and murder, and Elizabeth Sawyer, guilty of malefic witchcraft. Their plotlines, in addition to a third comedic subplot featuring the buffoonish Cuddy Banks' attempts to stage a morris dance, unfold in tandem with each other, but largely

[18] I address Althusser in more detail later in the chapter. This point is based on the function of his concept the, Ideological State Apparatus, a category of everyday regulatory structure that includes the family.

separately.[19] The disparate narrative strands of the play come together most strikingly in the play's final scene, in which the two condemned figures are called upon to publically confess their crimes before the village.[20] I follow Todd Butler in highlighting the role of performative language in solidifying the link between these two speakers; as he argues, both plots hinge in some way on "the efficacious nature of speech--the power of words to constitute and to transform not only individual identities but also the communal relationships that define and bound them."[21] Put in a different way to emphasize the

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[19] In their introduction to the play, Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge note that though there has been debate about the distribution of work among the collaborators, Dekker was the leader of the project and is traditionally most associated with the Elizabeth Sawyer subplot, Ford with the Frank Thorney subplot, and Rowley with the Cuddy Banks subplot (21). A number of critics have addressed the relationship among the three primary plotlines of the play. The separations between the various plots have led some scholars to condemn the play for its poor integration of its component parts and led others to find ways make a case for its conceptual unity. Edward Sackville West was an early voice to suggest that the plots were not well integrated, in 'The Significance of The Witch of Edmonton" *Criterion* 17, 66 (October 1937): 23-32. Todd Butler has recently argued that scholarship of the play has paid insufficient attention to the links between the plots, with most work concentrated on the witchcraft plot featuring Elizabeth Sawyer. Todd Butler, "Swearing Justice in Henry Goodcole and The Witch of Edmonton," *Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900* 50, no. 1 (2010): 128–9. Other critics have explored the ways in which these disparate plots do fit together, not always neatly. See for example Anthony B. Dawson, 'Witchcraft/Bigamy: Cultural Conflict in *The Witch of Edmonton*', *Renaissance Drama*, 20 (1989), 77–93; H V Bonavita, "Maids, Wives and Widows: Multiple Meaning and Marriage in The Witch of Edmonton," *Parergon* 23, no. 2 (2007): 73–98.; and '*The Witch of Edmonton* and the guilt of possession', in Dennis Kezar, *Guilty Creatures: Renaissance Poetry and the Ethics of Authorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) pp. 114–38.

[20] Like *The Witch of Edmonton, The Witch* is also composed of somewhat tenuously linked plots, juxtaposing a depiction of witchcraft with a narrative of violent domestic intrigue. See Corbin and Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, 14. Though they differ substantially in tone and in their use and characterization of witchcraft, it is interesting to note the tendency in early modern playwrights to associate the tropes of witchcraft with other narratives of intra-communal ruptures.

[21] Butler, "Swearing Justice in Henry Goodcole and The Witch of Edmonton," 129; Butler joins Eric Byville in arguing for a consideration of the play in terms of performative language. Where the former focuses on legal discourse and the efficaciousness thereof, the latter focuses specifically on a neoclassical tradition of

constructedness of the configurations it produces and enables, Butler's description highlights the linguistic construction of social subjectivity. He goes on to suggest, "confession marks the extremity of efficacious speech," highlighting its role in a public context that both promises forgiveness and culminates condemnation.[22] The relative efficaciousness of confession speech resonates for the subject inhabiting the performative role, and in the intersubjective space through which their words comes to signify. The scene of confession in the play's conclusion demonstrates competing, but interrelated, modes of agency within the conventions of this confessional paradigm.

Frank and his auditors alike foreground the normative cathartic stakes of his penitential speech; the performance makes him, in the words of his (surviving) wife Winnifride, "as white as innocence" (5.3.95). Her words posit a virtual expiation of his guilt for the myriad wrongs that have come to light.[23] He produces his sympathetic audience as such by offering the conventional scripts of model penitence, affirming his sinfulness while reminding his interlocutors of the affective bonds that join them. Though he emphasizes the portable moral utility of his exemplary confession, he also appeals to mercy on a more local level, in part by acknowledging that it is unearned, noting, "there is not one / Among you I have not wronged" (5.3.107-8, 111-3). The degree to which the social effects of confession are ingrained in constructions of narratives of transgression, punishment, and forgiveness emerges clearly in the fact that Frank goes to his death with

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witchcraft and its role in the character formation of Elizabeth Sawyer. See Byville, Eric, "How to Do Witchcraft Tragedy with Speech Acts," *Comparative Drama* 45, no. 2 (2011): 1–33.

[22] Butler, "Swearing Justice in Henry Goodcole and The Witch of Edmonton," 140.

[23] Frank is guilty of secretly marrying against his father's wishes, entering into a bigamous second union in an attempt to preserve the family estate, and finally, murdering Susan, his unwitting second wife. All textual references are from Corbin and Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*.

the forgiveness and blessings of virtually *all* the people he has wronged in the play, who are in turn able to share in what Frank's father calls the "comfort in this penitence" (5.3.91).

Frank's performance of contrition affords a transactional interplay of confessional agencies; he is dependent on his audience to forgive him, but he retains, even from the space of the condemned confessant, the performative currency of a gentleman, son, and husband. Having secured forgiveness, he asks those members of the group that serve as his audience and collective confessor, "Let me beseech you, gentlemen, / To comfort my old father. Keep him with ye; /Love this distressed widow" (5.3.134-5). His expressions of confession, then, ripple outward in their social effects, reinforcing threatened social relationships and forging new ones. In response to Frank's request, Carter takes in Frank's pregnant widow and pledges his continued support to Frank's father, telling the man, "Whilst I stand by you, you shall not want help to keep you from falling." (5.3.144-5). The purported ameliorative effects of Frank's confession hinge on his sustained legibility as a speaking subject imbricated in and authorized by the normative discourses that continue to organize his social arena. In his speech, Frank acknowledges his submission to a moral and legal taxonomy that demands his death, but suggests that in speaking the guilt that plagues him throughout the play, he achieves a comforting forgiveness, assuring his audience, "You are all merciful, / And send me to my grave in peace" (5.3.125-6). Frank equates repentance with peace and happiness, but repentance for him is also directly tied to what the play suggests is a kind of compulsory ritual of forgiveness: Winnifride, for example,

notes that it is "her part" to offer it (5.3.106), dependent on the pressures of normative affiliation.[24]

The analogy of redemption through which Frank's repentance makes him "white as innocence," though seemingly intended to emphasize his redemption, implicitly suggests the ambivalence within it. On a purely structural level, the statement underscores that Frank can only approximate, not embody, innocence: this semblance is always shadowed by the distance his post-confessional state maintains to its inaccessible symbolic referent. Whiteness itself is also, at this point in the play, a multivalent signifier. Dog, Elizabeth Sawyer's familiar and representation of devilish evil in the play, participates in Frank's crimes as well as those of the witch.[25] Having appeared black throughout the rest of the play, Dog appears white in the scene immediately preceding the gallows speeches.[26] Interpreters of the play generally link this transformation to Dog's hypocritical rejection of his witch as she faces punishment. He taunts Sawyer with the suggestion, "my whiteness puts thee in mind of thy winding sheet," a reference to her impending execution that foreshadows death without redemption (5.1.36-7). Dog's final appearance also serves to shift the symbolic value of whiteness, associating it with the potential superficiality of performances of morality. It indicates that the semblance of purity attached to conventional

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[24] Dennis Kezar links this line to a "metadramatic hypostatization of self-consciously inhabited "roles" in the play. Dennis Kezar, *Guilty Creatures: Renaissance Poetry and the Ethics of Authorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 126.

[25] He is often in referred to as "the Dog" in criticism, and occasionally as Tom, which is what the characters in the play who can see him, Cuddy and Sawyer, call him. In the cast of characters, however, he is called simply "Dog," and the rather discordant appellation suits him, highlighting the inversion of "God" in his name and reminding us that he is not simply a pet, but rather a more mysterious and symbolic entity.

[26] In the Henry Goodcole pamphlet from which the playwrights took their inspiration, the real Elizabeth Sawyer notes that her familiar appeared black and white variously. Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch*, C2v.

signifiers can reinforce, instead of covering over, their hollowness; Winnifride's allusion to cathartic cleansing contains within it a reminder that markers of rhetorical sincerity are difficult, if not impossible, to parse.

Frank's confession heralds, as we will continue to see, a salvific potential that it cannot wholly sustain; this dynamic emerges in sharper relief in relation to the subjective configurations that characterize Sawyer's scene at the gallows, which immediately precedes his and relies on the different rubric of comfort and condemnation Dog predicted.[27] She stands accused of a host of magical crimes, many of which, as the audience is aware, she did in fact intend and execute by way of her familiar, and while the play suggests that Frank Thorney's amends for bigamy and murder are associated with the production of a *sense* of social rehabilitation, this is not available to the witch.[28] She is identified through the play with this subjective category, and though it facilitates a certain form of supernatural performativity, it circumscribes the cathartic efficaciousness of her confessional speech. She is urged to speak in large part to confirm the logic of a social condemnation that has always been a part of her characterization. Criticism of *The Witch of*

[27] Throughout, I generally refer to Elizabeth Sawyer as "Sawyer," whereas Frank Thorney is shortened to "Frank." This apparent inconsistency reflects the fact that the witch is never referred to by her given name, but rather as "Mother Sawyer," or often, "the witch." Frank, in contrast, is frequently referred to as such. In abbreviating the names this way, I follow a precedent set by a number of scholars including Dolan and Todd Butler.

[28] Allison Findlay's reading of the nature of the transgression coded in witchcraft by arguing that "witchcraft functions as a metaphor for threats imposed by unruly subjects whose actions challenged the authority of their paternal masters, both secular and spiritual" (153). She is speaking specifically about *The Late Lancashire Witches*, but her argument here suggests a symbolic link between the pressures Frank faces and the opprobrium facing suspected witches. Butler has highlighted an interesting subtext that unites the two characters' differing forms of criminality: he mentions that a law that made bigamy punishable by death was passed immediately in sequence with the 1604 witchcraft law (129).

Edmonton has traditionally read Frank's gallows confession in terms that suggest embrace of the expiative paradigm that his on-stage auditors suggest.[29] Editors Corbin and Sedge implicitly include the witch in the realm of communal redemption and "charity of mutual forgiveness" they associate with the aftermath of the scene's confessions, but scholars generally situate Sawyer rather differently relative to the play's depiction of closure. Frances Dolan, for example, argues that it "ultimately eliminates [Sawyer] from the play's community" and denies her "the prestige of tragic heroism" that she implies Frank is afforded through his affirmation of normative structures.[30]

The differential in the play's treatment of the two confessions is integral to Sawyer's symbolic role in the play; the mobilization of the discourse of confession as a means of condemning Sawyer helps facilitate the fantasy of communal forgiveness and rehabilitation that follows Frank's. This is in keeping with Dennis Kezar's argument that "her violent removal" is *the* mechanism through which the figurative cleansing embraced by the survivors is achieved.[31] I further suggest, however, that Sawyer's very confessional

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[29] Helen Vella Bonavita, for example, has recently argued that he answers the cultural demand for confession "willingly, participating to the full in the ceremonial by which the injury done to the body of the state is made good upon his own body, and in so doing he redeems himself in the eyes of the men he has offended and the father he is abandoning." Bonavita, "Maids, Wives and Widows," 74. She builds on a long rhetorical tradition in making these claims. Henry Hitch Adams, for example, working within the moralistic paradigm of domestic tragedy, seems to accept whole-heartedly the salvific expressions of the play's final scene, noting that with Frank's gallows confession, "he is at once forgiven by those whom he has offended"; Adams emphasizes "the manifestations of Christian feeling" that accompany the necessary exercise of earthly justice, imputing a redemption for Frank that is withheld from Sawyer. Henry Hitch Adams, *English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy, 1575 to 1642* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 137.

[30] Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 219.

[31] Kezar, *Guilty Creatures*, 127. Kezar suggests here that Frank is "effectively exorcised," along with the community, through her exclusion in service of a broader argument about the ethical problem of the punishment of witchcraft.

subjectivity has, throughout the play, been shaped by a tense interplay between social exclusion and conscription; her "violent removal," in other words, is by no means a single or sudden act, nor is it one in which she completely lacks agency. At the gallows, the villagers repeatedly call upon her to confess, in part through the form of accusations of further malefic harm; the critical tendency has been to read these exhortations in relation to the scapegoating of suspected witches. While that dynamic is certainly active here, it is significant to note that it derives its urgency from anxieties about less immediately legible sources of evil in the midst of the community, and furthermore, that it underscores uncertainty among her neighbors about the extent of her actual magical agency.[32]

Sawyer suggests that for her, confession is essentially a waste of breath: a source of "vexation" when she has "scare breath enough" to pray (5.3.25, 48). While Carter, in his warning that she'd "best confess all truly," implies that it is a question of personal urgency, there is no sense that Sawyer's confession will be met with expiation or benediction, nor is there a sense that she has a meaningful or desirable role within the community to which she can be figuratively restored. Though she does not admit to specific acts, Sawyer eventually offers a *pro forma* gesture to the gallows confession, announcing: "Bear witness. I repent all former evil; / There is no damn conjuror like the devil" (5.3.50-51). I explore the nuances of this moment in more detail later in the chapter, but here I want to emphasize that in contrast to the elaborate performance of redemption that follows Frank's later speech, Sawyer's serves primarily to signal her departure from the stage; both, however, are met with a sort of general chorus, Sawyer's being a communal shout of "Away with her! Away!" (5.3.52). In this case, confession is a mechanism geared to reify the social

[32] Kezar argues that her resolution to die without repentance wavers "as her zealous accusers tempt her with anger and despair." Ibid., 126.

exclusion that framed Sawyer's recourse to witchcraft in the first place. It is instrumental to the reassertion of order that patriarchal authority figures within the play seek, but it is predicated on the threat that she and her magical agency have posed to that authority.

If, as has been suggested, the discourse of confessional speech is animated by an interplay of consolation and condemnation, then *The Witch of Edmonton*'s final scene shows the degree to which those dynamics are configured in differential terms. Though for much of his on-stage audience, Frank's confession signals an affirmation of preexisting communal bonds, it also hints at its own recuperative limitations. As Frank acknowledges, "A court hath been kept here where I am found / Guilty; the difference is, my impartial judge / Is more gracious than my faults / Are to be named, yet they are monstrous" (5.3.87-90). He refers to the scope of his crimes in a relatively conventional posture of sorrowful guilt, but his vagueness is suggestive, (re)subsuming his "monstrous" acts into the realm of the unspeakable. In her reading of Lacanian foreclosure, Judith Butler argues, "the norms that govern the inception of the speaking subject differentiate the subject from the unspeakable, that is, produce an unspeakability as the condition of subject formation"; though psychoanalysis traditionally locates this process in infancy, Butler suggests that it continues throughout the life of the speaking subject.[33] By framing his confession in terms of the unspeakable, Frank simultaneously alludes to the magnitude of his crimes and retreats from them. In her compelling work on the dynamics of Renaissance inarticulacy, Carla Mazzio has argued that silence acts as "a powerful cover story for otherwise

[33] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 135. Laplanche and Pontalis offer a helpful explication of the dynamics of foreclosure/repudiation. See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), 166–168.

discomforting, because inchoate…forms of expression."[34] Rather than silent, Frank is hyper-articulate through much of this scene, which demonstrates his ability to manipulate conventional scripts, but the un-nameable things to which he refers resonate with the same discomforting force Mazzio attributes to certain signifying silences.[35]

A version of this same discomfort subtends the enthusiastic affirmations of communal value at the play's end: the play ironizes its own gestures toward the reassertion of normative patriarchal order in Katherine Carter's stated reluctance to participate in it through entering into marriage herself. Her father's reference to it, addressed to her suitor Somerton, comes directly after his own pledge to support Frank's father, a juxtaposition that clearly situates it among the cathartic social realignments associated with Frank's execution. Katherine admits, "I should fear to be married, husbands are / So cruelly unkind. Excuse me that / I am thus troubled" (5.3.152-3). Katherine's implicit apology for being "troubled" highlights the importance attached to her marriage in light of Frank's crimes against a tainted patriarchal order.[36] Her generalization from Frank's acts to those of "husbands," however, indicates that his specific crimes indict the entire social system with which they are associated. It reinforces the extent to which the matrix of heterosexual state union that underlies the play's primary affective network has been strained. Katherine's resistance to the narrative of closure generically signaled by the gallows confession emblematizes the fact that the (re)production of social normativity through conventionally

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[34] Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, 4.

[35] The "monstrous" quality of Frank's faults also bespeaks their relationship to devilish inspiration, something the play suggests but does not spell out completely; I discuss this relationship further later in the chapter.

[36] Butler notes that Katherine's speech "calls into question the efficacy of sworn speech by contrasting it with a drama that appears to have a more forceful claim upon reality," assessing it in terms of what is suggests about legally-sanctioned performative oaths. Butler, "Swearing Justice in Henry Goodcole and The Witch of Edmonton," 141.

recognizable modes of social confession is always to some degree thwarted by the irreducible tensions associated with efforts to embody those subject positions in an unpredictable intersubjective space.

Katherine's cynical worry recalls another play, Thomas Heywood's domestic tragedy *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603), which likewise dramatizes the cathartic efficacy associated with gallows/deathbed rituals, while linking them directly to the reassertion of patriarchal hegemony. Anne Frankford, the play's eponymous adulterous wife, exiled from husband and family, has starved herself, performing a form of self-shriving in which she is able, in diminishing her own body, to eliminate the outward manifestations of her crime.[37] Lacking other material substance, Anne becomes, in her terms, a woman made of tears; just as in *The Witch of Edmonton* Winnifride claimed that repentance would make Thorney "white as innocence," Anne is confident that tears will "wash" her "black soul white" (16.104).[38] This purgation and penitence produces a redemptive effect in excess even of the one Frank experiences. Anne's husband returns and pardons her personally as would a priest, a conflation Anne herself implicitly seems to

[37] For a reading of the play that situates this self-shriving in a broader context of gendered corporeal regulation, see Nancy A. Gutierrez, *"Shall She Famish Then?": Female Food Refusal in Early Modern England* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2003).

[38] Textual references are from Thomas Heywood et al., *A Woman Killed with Kindness and Other Domestic Plays*, ed. Martin Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Note that this edition divides the play by scenes and lines, but does not subdivide it into acts. The association between tears and the cleansing of the soul was a common device. See for example this stanza from a *The Penitent Publican* (1610), a poem distributed in pamphlet form:

Oh could as many tearse come from mine eyes,
as there are drops of water in the Sea,
I feare me all of them would scarce suffice,
To wash my foule, and filthy sines away (C)

endorse, having earlier associated forgiveness from Frankford with forgiveness with God.[39] Though he reinforces her role in producing their estrangement, he acknowledges the power of her display, saying "Though thy rash offense/ Divorc't our bodies, thy repentant tears/ Unite our souls" (17.105-7). Though Frankford self-consciously equates being a husband with being spiritual director of the household, Anne's act of self-shriving suggests a more complicated distribution of confessional agency. The play enacts a fantasy of rehabilitation through confession, repentance, and death that returns the couple, in a sense, to their newlywed state from the beginning of the play. This final scene cannot, however, completely exorcise the social damages that precede it. Frankford once again calls her wife and mother to their children, restoring to her the social recognition of "name" and "title" that she lost in the wake of her adultery. He symbolically reenacts the marriage ceremony by kissing her, whereupon she immediately dies, cementing the connection between re[marriage] and death to which Katherine alludes.[40] When Frankford calls Anne "my wife, the mother to my pretty babes!", he is reasserting *his* paternity as an effect her restitution (17.113). The continued presence of these children, however, is an insistent reminder of the instability of patriarchal authority as the play has staged it, which Frankford's performance of absolution can cover but not expunge. Though Frankford foregrounds his own performative agency in redelineating the domestic space, Anne's own willful embodiment of guilt helps exposes its limitations.

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[39] Mr. Generous' attempt to confess his supposedly adulterous wife in *The Late Lancashire Witches* also recalls this play. This later play satirizes the patriarchal/spiritual authority of the husband-confessor by reversing the power dynamics between the confessor and confessant, as the wife in that play is not a penitent adulterous wife but rather a strategically playacting witch.

[40] This collapse of reassertion of marriage and death condenses the timeline of Frank's own fate, reinforcing the connection between the disparate ends of absolution.

Naming, Embodying Social Subjectivity

Confession is, in perhaps an obvious sense, an act of self-naming, which, depending on context, can confirm, instantiate, or reiterate a particular kind of relationship to a social hierarchy. As *The Witch of Edmonton* helps illustrate, the shape and stakes of this self-naming are framed in advance by the chain of previous instances of naming though which one's social subjectivity coheres and evolves. Multiply coexisting social relationships constantly intersect in the shaping of subjectivity; whereas Elizabeth Sawyer is persistently reduced to one, Frank Thorney is defined in terms of a range of ideological demands, including those of service, marriage, and filial piety, which are, given the circumstances of the play, in some tension with one another. The normativity of these associations makes Frank more obviously sympathetic, but the extent to which he can be seen as a victim of his circumstances is undermined by his tendency to allow greed and cowardice to propel him increasingly into the subterfuge and vice he ascribes to the social demands he faces.[41] He links this quality to fate rather than volition, claiming at one point, "on I must: / Fate leads me; I will follow" (1.2.102-3). In demonstrating the tragic ends of the incompatible demands Frank associates with the expectations of popular morality, the play illuminates problems already embedded within them. In other words, Frank's self-conscious effort to embody and manipulate the subjective categories into which he has been interpellated actually inspires the filial disobedience, fraud, and bigamy of which he is guilty. Bourdieu suggests that the "social

[41] Corbin and Sedge suggest that Frank is a "victim" of his conflicting affections and responsibilities, which complicates the audience's ability to view him as a villain. Corbin and Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, 25.

positions" from and through which subjects speak are always inflected with the cumulative effect of all "their present and past positions in the social structure," and as Frank's juggling act demonstrates, these positions are defined in terms of a range of fields.[42] The accumulated force of the social positions that frame Frank's trajectory in the play depends, nonetheless, on the legibility and circulation of the expectations associated with these various normative subject positions. But, as Judith Butler emphasizes in her reading of Bourdieu, these positions are neither necessarily stable nor fixed.[43] Frank embodies his various social roles in a manner that demonstrates their perverse flexibility: in pursuing the incompatible affiliations past the point of salvageability, he undermines their foundations.

Frank reiterates the social values he has violated in his confession, but this only underscores the fact that within the narrative bounds of the drama, they have always already—from first moments of the play—been violated. A number of scholars have identified connections between the two largely separate primary plots based on the relationship between the tragic trajectories of the main characters and their subjection to

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[42] In his *Outline on a Theory of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu observes, "'interpersonal' relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and that the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction." Bourdieu's arguments here are part of his discussion of the habitus, a term Bourdieu applies to the socially constituted dispositions of subjects formed through their relationships to everyday life; the habitus operates in relation to the field, or the various structures that are both frame and are constituted by the subjects operating in it. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Nice, Richard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 81–2.

[43] She indicates that he overstates the fixity of these positions, basing his theory on the assumption that the conventions that govern them are stable and already in place. See Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 142.

the impossible normative roles enforced upon them.[44] Arthur Kinney argues that "social conditioning and social construction work" to put Frank "in a double bind," a circumstance Kinney later extends to Sawyer, suggesting that the two are "essentially no different."[45] Indeed, for both characters, the attempt to operate relative to the expectations they face within and throughout the play also foregrounds their violation of social order; as Mikhail Bakhtin indicates, sociolinguistic subjectivity "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other."[46] In relation to Kinney's more general statement, it seems that the downfalls of these two characters are tied to the inverse relationships they seem to represent relative to these formative intersubjective spaces that organize power in the play. The differing subject positions open to Thorney and Sawyer in the play drive home the point that subjects can be interpellated into the ideological systems which frame them

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[44] Kinney writes about the play in the introduction to John Ford, Thomas Dekker, and William Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (London: Methuen Drama, 1998); See also Dawson, Anthony, "Witchcraft/Bigamy: Cultural Conflict in The Witch of Edmonton," *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 77–98; Butler, "Swearing Justice in Henry Goodcole and The Witch of Edmonton." Dolan more explicitly draws attention to the links the play makes between social conflict and witchcraft, and more specifically, and to the lively relationships among the social "enforcements" of a variety of subject positions including, but as Frank's case demonstrates, by no means limited to, witchcraft. Though I am indebted to Dolan for her powerful assessment of how the dual forces of agency and conscription frame Sawyer's embodied performances of witchcraft, I complicate her reading in my efforts to engage the complexities associated with the particular forms of speaking subjectivity that result from the processes she describes. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 219.Julia Garrett has made related claims in her argument that the play itself functions as an early exemplar of a developing sociological discourse of deviance. Julia M. Garrett, "Dramatizing Deviance: Sociological Theory and The Witch of Edmonton," *Criticism* 49, no. 3 (2007): 327–375, doi:10.1353/crt.0.0037.

[45] Ford, Dekker, and Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, xx.

[46] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 293. Bakhtin is speaking about discourse within the prose novel; Lynne Magnusson has offered a persuasive case for the utility of his arguments in consideration of verbal exchange, and by extension, staged exchanges. Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, 8–11.

in markedly different ways.[47] From the outset of the play, the audience witnesses Frank wrestled with feeling *over*burdened with community ties, which only serves to emphasize Sawyer's evident exclusion and isolation from her neighbors in the scenes that follow the establishing of the Thorney subplot.

The relationship between naming and subjectivity to which I refer is informed in large part by Judith Butler's reading of Althusser's scene of interpellation, wherein the subject is hailed, and in responding, assents to terms of their subjection: in his words, "*there are no subjects except by and for their subjection.*"[48] Butler argues for a more flexible understanding of interpellation than Althusser's statements on ideological subjection might initially seem to allow, suggesting that this scene is most productively understood as "exemplary and allegorical."[49] Althusser's figurative street-scene of subject constitution depends, she says, on "the divine voice that names," but its formative power lies in its function as an "instrument and mechanism of discourses whose efficacy is irreducible to their moment of enunciation."[50] Elizabeth Sawyer's liminal social status emerges in her first scene, in which the first character to address her, Old Banks, does so through an injurious interpellation intended to reinforce her exile from the community:

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[47] As Louis Althusser's philosophical model suggests, everyone is always already a subject; this is a precondition of being in the world. See Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, 172–6.
[48] Ibid., 182, emphasis original.
[49] She points out, for example, "we might object that the 'call' arrives severally and in implicit and unspoken ways, that the scene is never quite as dyadic as Althusser claims." Later in the same chapter, she suggests by way of juxtaposing her interpretation of Althusser with a consideration of Giorgio Agamben's work on ethics we might understand "'being' as precisely the potentiality that remains unexhausted by any interpellation." Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 106, 131.
[50] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 31–32.

"Out, out upon thee, witch!" (2.1.17).[51] The play itself underscores the importance of his act of naming when Sawyer asks him to reiterate it. She imputes a tautological quality to the construction of her own social identity: she argues that the "bad tongue" that marks her as a witch has been "enforced" upon her by neighbors, who have constructed as threatening the very qualities that then seem to warrant her social exclusion.

The interpellative quality of Elizabeth Sawyer's naming as "witch" has been the subject of recent criticism, but less frequently discussed is the extent to which naming plays a role in the prescriptions of Frank's plot, and later, in the production of his assumptions of confessional agency.[52] The first speech of the play heralds the importance of relational labels for the production and reproduction of certain kinds of social subjectivity when Frank assures the pregnant Winnifride she "needst not / Fear what the tattling gossips in their cups / Can speak against thy fame. Thy child shall know / Who to call dad now." (1.1.1-3).[53] The names through which Frank's social relationships are organized reverberate through the play's first acts: "husband," "master, "servant,"

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[51] Her status begin to cohere before he arrives on stage in her own self-description. Banks' unsympathetic naming is accompanied by his beating her for collecting wood. Their exchange helps tie the witchcraft story in the play to the popular "charity denied" model for witchcraft motivations. Bonavita notes the language of economic exchange that marks Sawyer's expression of interest in witchcraft in the play (82).

[52] Byville also reads this scene in terms of the linguistic production of identity in this scene, arguing, "these ambiguities suggest the circular causality by which social alienation produces witchcraft and witchcraft produces social alienation." Byville, Eric, "How to Do Witchcraft Tragedy with Speech Acts," 16.

[53] Helen Bonavita has argued that "the threatening figure of the single, pregnant, potentially masterless woman is simultaneously evoked and banished" in this scene, "establishing a pattern which is to be repeated with increasing violence as the play progresses." She ties this to the overall instability of apparent social security in the play, a dynamic exemplified in Winnifride's dual roles as wife and servant, roles which underscore the narrow range of options available to her. Bonavita, "Maids, Wives and Widows," 87.

"continual friend," "son."[54] The communal effort made at the end of the play to use performative ritual in an effort to reestablish the sanctity of these relationships is undermined by the extent to which Frank's social role is defined by the incompatible demands with which he associates them. The first lines establish sociolinguistic ramifications of his presupposed relationship to Winnifride's unborn child, and they also serve to immediately expose the secret marriage between the two adults. This marriage, situated just outside the frame of the drama, establishes from the outset the fact that the challenges to normative authority are an essential facet of its social organization.[55]

The authority structures that organize Frank's plot—and frame Sawyer's recourse to supernatural power—cohere in terms of patriarchal order. Frank's network of affiliations exposes fault lines in the symbolic integrity of the father/son bond that subtends that authority. The unborn child that prompts Frank's secret marriage is, unbeknownst to him, the child of his master, Sir Arthur.[56] The stakes of this dramatic irony are framed at the outset of the play; Frank not only labels himself a "dad," he goes on to refer to Winnifride's child as his "heir," (1.1.16). This marriage, intended to secure the legitimacy of his own (supposed) child, does so at the expense of another patriarchal obligation.

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[54] The correlation between naming and relationship echoes in the Cuddy Banks plot as well; near the end of the play, Dog and Cuddy—who have had a relatively friendly relationship—bid farewell to one another. Dog allows, based on Cuddy's treatment of him, he "used [Cuddy] doggedly, not devilishly" (5.1.110).

[55] Helen Bonavita has pointed out that Frank and Sawyer are linked from the outset of the play in that both make an alliance that in some way threatens their society; Todd Butler has made a similar point, but ties it specifically to their use of performative speech in the form of vows and curses. Bonavita, "Maids, Wives and Widows," 76; Butler, "Swearing Justice in Henry Goodcole and The Witch of Edmonton," 133–6.

[56] Sir Arthur situates himself as Frank's benefactor, though he is secretly relying on him to marry Winnifride, when he gives the newlyweds money. He places Frank further in his debt when he agrees to write a letter to Old Thorney to convince him that the marriage has not, in fact, taken place.

Frank's father's disapproval (which necessitates their secrecy) calls Frank's own status as heir into question. In Winnifride's unknowingly prophetic words, the marriage itself is something Frank must "confess" (1.1.24). From the beginning of the play, Frank frames his social goals in terms of calculated performance; as he explains, "my plots but aim to keep my father's love" (1.1.20-1).[57] "Love" here signifies not just affection, but the subjective role secured by affective bonds. The play forecloses the possibility that Frank might legitimately and efficaciously sustain roles as "dad" and "heir" himself; as it quickly becomes clear, the effort to do so threatens the category of "husband." Frank's father reveals, "the best part of my whole estate's encumbered" (1.2.125), and offers (belatedly) a compelling disincentive for marriage to Winnifride—he and Carter have negotiated a marriage between their children that would save and secure Frank's own inheritance.[58] Thorney emphasizes the combined interpersonal and economic consequences of Frank's potential disobedience, indicating that if Frank does not marry Susan Carter, his father "shall have the shame, / And [Frank] the loss" (1.2.138-9).[59] This canny appeal both to the

[57] These "plots" self-consciously depend on the efficaciousness of performances to cover over inherently unstable social bonds. Winnifride's assurance that he has "discharged / The true part of an honest man" (1.1.5-6) is prescient hint not only because it hints at Frank's tendency to act a part, but also because it suggests that seeming to embody a social value, in this case honesty, might involve its opposite.

[58] Carter, Susan's father, operates in the play as its most obvious signifier of community-spirited virtue and good-humored patriarchy, making him an intriguing foil for Frank. He advertises himself as an "honest Hertfordshire yeoman" and claims transparency and good faith in his promises, noting, "my word and my deed shall be proved one at all times" (1.2.5-6). Later, after the murder, Carter's family-oriented spirit takes on an increasing tinge of dramatic irony, as he takes Frank into his home to convalesce, a move that foreshadows the reaffirmation of community ties in response to loss that he helps to produce in the play's final scene.

[59] The marriage and inheritance issues both signify the solidification and perpetuation of recognizable place within the community, elements privileged throughout the play and structurally situated as oppositional forces to the danger of more obvious social evil symbolized in witchcraft. *The Late Lancashire Witches* also raises anxieties about

demands of filial obedience and to his son's self-interest speaks to the very dynamics which author Frank's downfall and structure his various explanations and confessions. Frank's negotiations with his father reveal the power of modes of address that operate through the lens of social identification: as his father interrogates him in an effort to elicit a confession of the suspected secret marriage, he addresses his son variously as "a godless son," "son of my curse," and finally, "my good son."[60] The responsibility conditions of Frank's character, as well as his efficacy in establishing them, are constituted relative to a form of ever-shifting socio-rhetorical subjectivity.[61]

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inheritance a subplot: Generous steps in to help Arthur, whose financial problems are complicated by the disruptive witchcraft plaguing his uncle Seely's home. Their relationship, solidified by the inheritance plot, emphasizes the exclusion of the witches and witch sympathizers. The third subplot or *The Witch of Edmonton* also helps demonstrate the role of community ties in counteracting the forces of evil. The foolish young Cuddy Banks is intent on performing a morris dance, a festive ritual tied to communal life; his interactions with Dog are generally innocuous.

[606060] The labels are in act 1, scene, 1 at lines 158, 160, and 199. The relationship between desire, identification, and the father in this scene resonates in terms of psychoanalytic theory; bringing the two together could productively inform a reading of the socio-subjective dynamics of this play, and in terms of rhetorical agency in scenes of dissembling/confessing.

[61]. Frank later complains/explains to Susan that he married her because old Thorney "would not bless, nor look a father on me, / Until I satisfied his angry will" (3.2.25-6). His phrasing casts intersubjective affiliation in terms of affect, and subsumes Frank's agency into a model of obedience based on preserving the semblance, or "look" of family ties (one that disregards the fact that his actions have led to the incipient murder of his innocent interlocutor). Frank reiterates this sentiment in a later conversation with Winnifride, suggesting, "To please a father I have heaven displeased," (4.2.102) an excuse that underscores the competing moral standards to which he has been subject, but also represents a failure of responsibility and self-awareness on Frank's part. He situates Winnifride in a similar position in the same conversation when he tells her, "to save those eyes of thine from weeping, / Being to write a story of us two, /Instead of ink, dipped my sad pen in blood"(4.2.96-98).

In terms of the overall economy of responsibility established in the play, evil forces amplify rather than generate malefic intent.[62] This is in keeping with the manner in which the origins of the social conflict that drive the plot are deferred beyond the boundaries of the drama, with the play itself revealing how the effects of that conflict continue to accrue. Frank marries Susan to preserve his inheritance—both financially and in terms of his standing with his father—despite the fact that the plan is fundamentally untenable.[63] The breaking point of this matrix of associations is signaled by Dog's appearance in Frank's plot. Dog's role in the murder scene does not, however, wholly exculpate Frank—Dog does not produce evil intent, only helps manifest it. The Dog implies his own agency in instigating the act, informing the audience, "one touch from me/ Soon sets the body forward" (3.3.2-3). Frank's reaction to Dog's touch: "Thank you for that. Then I'll ease all at once. / Tis done now, what I ne'er thought on," indicates a collapse between Frank's own intent and Dog's inspiration (3.3.15-6).[64] The claim that he

[62] This is suggested both in Saywer's conjuring of the Devil and in Cuddy Banks' failure to inspire any serious malevolence. Since Cuddy treats Dog as a pet, the latter responds in kind. As a result, Cuddy is one of few characters in the play who is unharmed by the evil forces at work in the village. It is also, as I indicate in this section, demonstrated in the theatrical construction of Frank's own guilt.

[63] The marriage plot that is brewing between the two men, Carter and Thorney, highlights the circulation of women that helps guarantee the bonds among them, a transaction whose stakes Katherine Carter exposes when she voices aversion to marriage at the close of the play. Eve Sedgwick has written at length about the role of women in the triangulated relationships among men that help organize society. Though her argument is targeted in particular toward a discussion of gender and sexuality, she also discusses the social and material bases for these social transactions. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

[64] Corbin and Sedge suggest that Dog does not drive Frank through possession, but rather "crystalizes his murderous impulses," and Dolan likewise cites Dog as an inspiration for, rather than the force behind, the murder. Her characterization of Frank, however, as "spineless, yet murderous" implies that Dog's intercession is a necessary precondition of

"ne'er thought on" murder is an intriguing one—it works in conjunction with a temporal slippage ("Tis done now") that suggests that Frank exculpates himself from premeditation even as he conceives of his future act. It also manifests the act's unthinkability, or more specifically, Frank's inability to articulate to himself the concept of himself as a murderer, a subjectivity Frank actively rejects. Susan's earlier revelation that in his sleep, Frank is prone to "utter sudden and / Distracted accents, like one at enmity / With peace" indicates he has struggled with the unthinkable for some time; Dog is the mechanism that helps surface those thoughts.[65]

Dog participates in Frank's crime, but his access to the plot is afforded by Elizabeth Sawyer, who summons him through a supernatural performative, which is itself the product of her own ideological interpellation.[66] *The Witch of Edmonton* depicts witchcraft itself in

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Frank's action. Corbin and Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, 25; Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 219.

[65] The Dog is a key factor for the (re)emergence of the foreclosed association. His position in the play on the boundaries of imagination and reality make him an apt vehicle for this, as Laplanche and Pontalis stress that foreclosed signifiers "re-emerge… in 'the Real,' particularly through the phenomenon of hallucination. Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 166. In this, Dog serves as an analogous role of the witches in *Macbeth.* He facilitates the exposure of what was already in his mind, but inarticulable; like the witches, he complicates the role of assessing agency in the play, not least because his tangibility is always in question by virtue of his connection to the supernatural.

[66] I draw the term "supernatural performative in part from Eric Byville, who describes it in an effort to define the parameters for the tragic witch as a theatrical figure. He argues that "the tragic witch abandons 'human' language and resorts to a radically antisocial utterance, the supernatural performative; this speech act, rather than other characters, divinities, random chance, or fate, defines her character and determines her catastrophic end." It seems productive to explore the specific nature of the witch's speech act, but I resist the suggestion that witchcraft is "radically antisocial." The social awareness and intention that Elizabeth Sawyer brings to both her efforts to acquire and her eventual attempts to exercise such supernatural power show it to be a force that is insistently defined relative to the broader socially conventions of performativity. Though I question this tenet of his reading of witchcraft as it appears in *The Witch of Edmonton*, Byville's work aptly demonstrates how the threat of the supernatural performative is a persuasive

terms of an omnipresent social problem that operates in tandem with Frank's own descent into crime and sin. Unlike the witches of *The Late Lancashire Witches*, likewise drawn from real-life examples, or the more mythical, omnipotent witches of plays like *Macbeth, Sophonisba,* and *The Witch*, Elizabeth Sawyer's initial social and verbal *dis*empowerment is a crucial component of her characterization, instantiating and framing her efforts to exercise intersubjective agency—in malefic forms and, by the end of the play, in high-stakes social dialogue.[67] Though the community around Sawyer negatively socially identifies her with witchcraft, at the start of the play she lacks the capacity to exercise the power associated with it. The people who accuse her of it clearly assume as much, since they don't seem to fear her supernatural retaliation. In the agential taxonomy at work in the play, witchcraft only emerges as a category of efficacious action when considered

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one, helping explain centuries of anxieties which centered in practice on relatively powerless individuals. He is convincing in his argument that speech act theory offers crucial nuance to the traditionally socio-historically inflected study of witchcraft tragedy. Byville, Eric, "How to Do Witchcraft Tragedy with Speech Acts," 2 ff. Byville is certainly not alone in pursuing the relationship among speech, agency, and witchcraft. Dolan, for example, has approached this relationship through the lens of gender, noting that "the criminalization of women often focused on their speech." Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 199.

[67] Middleton does not attempt to provide a cohesive or realistic social backdrop for the action, nor is he interested in exploring the moral and ethical dimensions of "real life" witchcraft. Though, as Deborah Willis has noted, the activities of the witches in the play are largely consistent those associated with village level witchcraft, they exist at a remove from disciplinary social structures and demonstrate their own cultural fluency and power (Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, 161–2.). When, near the end of the play, the Duchess questions Hecate's knowledge and abilities, the latter responds with a torrent of Ovidian Latin intended to demonstrate her epistemological authority, to which the Duchess immediately submits (5.2.15ff). Unlike Elizabeth Sawyer, Hecate is subject neither to the regulation of mortal authority figures, nor to the interference or authorization of the devil, and accordingly, she is never called upon to confess to her actions or account for herself. The disjointed social landscape of The Witch is not constituted relative to the threat the witches suggest; furthermore, Hecate wields a symbolic power that competes with, and cannot be subsumed by, the ideological hegemony associated with the Duke's court in the opening and closing scenes of the play.

belatedly—in other words, she can be blamed for it, but she is not feared for it, a paradox that underlies the persistent role of witchcraft in the operations of social hierarchies.

When Sawyer reasons, "tis all one/ To be a witch as to be counted one" (2.1.118-9), she alludes to the fact that the accusation of witchcraft, when leveled against her, has measurable social ramifications, shaping her very subjective constitution. This explanation imputes a reciprocal performative capacity in her, who possesses the "bad tongue," and in those who, by calling her witch, teach her to be one. This formulation collapses the temporality of social identity formation, imputing an educational quality to that acts of naming that delineate her social role. In Judith Butler's inquiry into the effects of naming, she synthesizes the theories of Althusser and J. L. Austin to argue that in its illocutionary dimension, the transitive speech act serves a corresponding interpellative function. In doing so, she establishes that the relations among subjects and ideologies are formed and guaranteed through their relationships to conventions that give speech acts their force and interpellation its meaning.[68] The interpellative function of Sawyer's socially constructed identity as witch does not, in fact, initially grant her its supposed magical capacity. Supernatural performativity, *The Witch of Edmonton* suggests, relies on a doubled interpellation: Sawyer's curses against her enemies lack the illocutionary power with which they are imagined to be associated without the authorization of an appropriate(ly) devilish figure.[69] The efficaciousness of the supernatural performative is

[68] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 24 ff. Butler reconciles their apparently opposed positions regarding the primacy of the subject and the linguistic speech act by arguing that "the interpellation that precedes and forms the subject in Althusser appears to constitute the prior condition of those subject-centered speech acts that populate Austin's domain of analysis" (24).

[69] The efficacy of staged curses was a question of broader concern for early modern audiences worried about the potential effects of speeches. For example, a 1606 statute

not located within those utterances themselves, but comes through their perlocutionary effect—in this case, on an audience she didn't know she had: Dog, who appears with the power to carry out her curses.[70]

Sawyer's curse, and Dog's corresponding claim that she is "[his] own," marks a transformative moment, but one complicated by the extent to which it confirms a preexisting assumption rather than being wholly generative of a new state "made so" by her utterance (2.1.121).[71] The dynamics of Sawyer's doubled interpellation into witchcraft show that in practice, this process can happen belatedly or incrementally. Her curse, directed at Old Banks, leads to her own conscription by the devil, but invoking a higher authority enables subsequent speech acts to work as such and to produce material effects. In keeping with its explanation of the genesis of efficacious witchcraft, the play ties Sawyer's subjective agency directly to her speech.[72] The tangible effects her words

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forbade the use of certain oaths and utterances on stage Frances Shirley, *Swearing and Perjury in Shakespeare's Plays* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1979), 10–14.

[70] Elizabeth Sawyer reports that the devil originally appears to her when he happens upon her cursing in the Goodcole pamphlet as well; the idea that curses or blasphemy left one vulnerable to evil influence was commonly expressed at the time. He acts as her familiar in keeping with the cultural expectations of that role. Sawyer often calls him Tom, or Tommy, and they have a relationship that is by turns sexual, familial, and abusive.

[71] In Searle's explanation, a performative quality is associated with "cases where one brings a state of affairs into existence by declaring it to exist, cases where, so to speak, 'saying makes it so.'" John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16.

[72] Byville defines the supernatural performative in part through its illocutionary production of direct transformation of "metaphysical reality"; Todd Butler make a similar claim when he suggests that Sawyer's curses themselves have transformative effect. Though I build on this recent scholarly work on the realm of supernatural performativity as it pertains to this play, in emphasizing the indirect effects of her linguistic exercise of maleficium, I trouble the illocutionary agency that these readings seem to confer on Sawyer herself. Byville, Eric, "How to Do Witchcraft Tragedy with Speech Acts," 3; Butler, "Swearing Justice in Henry Goodcole and The Witch of Edmonton," 129. Byville draws on Searle to address the fact that the belief of others, rather than power intrinsic to the magical curse, lends it its efficacy; I argue, however, that the other people of

seem to produce depend on the intervention of Dog, whose existence in a liminal space between the symbolic and agential keeps Sawyer's performative efficaciousness in question through the middle of the play[73] Dog functions, on one hand, as a theatrical manifestation of the otherwise intangible forces and structures that allow performative utterances to work; that he seems to be invisible to most of the other characters underscores his symbolic role.[74] He also enables Sawyer's supernatural performativity through a paradigm of perlocutionary efficaciousness that complicates notions of sovereign subjective agency. Sawyer and Dog operate in terms of a complicated, decidedly hierarchical linguistic relationship in which Dog both seems to act as Sawyer's agent and control the boundaries of her agency—he both mediates and intervenes in the exercise of maleficium. [75] This complicated interplay resonates with Katherine Rowe's

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Edmonton do not seem to genuinely believe in the power of Sawyer's words until Dog begins to intervene (5).

[73] Sawyer's most dramatic onstage crime demonstrates this dynamic: her most obvious victim, Anne Radcliffe, is driven mad and seemingly induced to kill herself only after Dog obeys Sawyer's command to "touch her" (4.1.189). Though the crime is clearly linked to Sawyer's desire to exercise maleficium, it resists clear explanations of the specific nature of its exercise. The apparent psychosomatic response of her victim, however, can be connected to the material effect given the early modern assumption that emotion was itself a materially composed force. See Michael Carl Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), i.

[74] As his intervention in Frank's murder demonstrates, Tom acts in other plots without Sawyer's knowledge or behest and, and he develops an independent relationship—very different from the one he has with Sawyer—with the foolish young Cuddy Banks. His role within the broader community of Edmonton underscores the extent to which the play's supernatural performative is socially constructed not only in terms of the power of its popular definition, but also in the exercise of language with which it is associated.

[75] The hierarchical relationship between Sawyer and Dog manifests itself in her ability to understand and deploy a language that he provides for her: he teaches her the incantation "*sanctibecetur nomen tuum*," a corruption of the Lord's Prayer, as an alternative to conventional prayer. The foreignness of this phrase—drawn from Latin and thereby associated with illicit Catholic practice— and the concomitant sense of access to new knowledge and power associated with learning it are part of its appeal for Sawyer.

work on the role "effectual, intentional action plays in our sense as persons."[76] Rowe problematizes sovereign human agency through the trope of the disembodied hand. In *The Witch of Edmonton,* Dog, like the figure of the hand for Rowe, calls into question Sawyer's capacity to control her attempts to act in relation to others, and it undermines the association between volition and action.[77]

In her study of forms of inarticulate Renaissance communication, Mazzio argues that "departures from rhetorical competence… could be seen as enabling new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting."[78] Part of the capacity of new or expanded signifying systems shape one's subjective stance is affective, as Mazzio's description of "feeling inarticulate" shows.[79] As we have seen, the exercise of supernatural performativity is a transactional social exchange, in which the efficaciousness of an utterance does not depend on individual illocutionary force. Sawyer's performative agency in the role of

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Though Sawyer's association with Dog allows her to imbue her words with a performative capacity she could not muster earlier, the playwrights suggest that she doesn't understand the language system through which she is operating. She misrepeats Dog's words, first seeming to mispronounce them, and then garbling the phrase by saying "*contaminetur nomen tuum"* (2.2.180) – an apparent error that self-reflexively alludes to her contamination of the incantation. In the Goodcole pamphlet, Sawyer relates this incantation, and notes that since she didn't learn the Latin elsewhere, it could only have come from the devil. This is symptomatic of a strong tendency to equate the speech of witches to that of the Catholic mass (C4v). As Carla Mazzio has explored more fully, while Protestant reformers described the Latin of the Catholic service in terms of unintelligible and ineffectual mumbling, they at the same time betrayed trace anxiety about the deployment of the inarticulate. Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, 30–34.

[76] Katherine Rowe, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 17. She later argues that "we feel purposeful or aimless, know our intentions or doubt them, when our attention is called to our performance" (21-2).

[77] Ibid., 1–22.

[78] Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, 2. In this work, Mazzio exposes how the articulacy and inarticulacy are differentiated on ideological, rather than essential grounds, a fact that has bearing on the delineation of supernatural performances relative to other kinds of speech acts.

[79] Ibid., 175–214.

witch is characterized, I contend, by the extent to which her association with Tom allows her, to reformulate Mazzio's phrase, to "feel articulate," a claim that further builds on Rowe's suggestion that a sense of selfhood and a sense of agency are mutually constitutive. Sawyer's belief in her performative efficaciousness frames her efforts to act as a speaking subject in other arenas. Her embrace of the magical agency associated and exercised through Dog functions less as a means of circumventing or replacing orthodox systems of power and meaning and more as part of an effort to participate more meaningfully and powerfully in the microcosm of Edmonton.[80]

This subjective stance is enabled by specific manner in which Dekker, the playwright generally associated by critics with the witchcraft plot, deploys his source material.[81] Much of the narrative comes from Goodcole's pamphlet, but the play also draws on Reginald Scot's skeptical study, *The Discovery of Witchcraft,* for details about magic and social criticism of witchcraft phenomenon in English life. From this juxtaposition comes a witch that emblematizes both the vulnerability *and* the agency associated with witchcraft. Dekker depicts small village witchcraft with a convincing air of realism, through the inflection of their source story with details gleaned from circulating stereotypes about witchcraft.[82] As we saw in the previous chapter, ostensibly

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[80] A 2011 production of the play, discussed at the end of this chapter, used staging to manifest this transformation. Though the actress portraying Sawyer initially stays very low to the ground and on the periphery of the stage, but this scene she is standing upright, speaking from a central location to auditors scattered around her.

[81] See note 19.

[82] These literary and historical connotations of the play's treatment of witchcraft conventions have been well explored by a number of scholars such as Marion Gibson, Frances Dolan, and Viviana Comensoli. See, Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*; Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*; Viviana Comensoli, "Witchcraft and Domestic Tragedy in The Witch of Edmonton," in *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth

nonfiction accounts like Goodcole's tend to be constructed in terms of popular stereotypes, but in the play Dekker further exaggerates the extent to which Sawyer fits the clichéd conventions of witchcraft.[83] Goodcole references a husband and children, and suggests that Sawyer has at least some access to the market, with property to sell, however meager. That these details are missing from the theatrical version reinforces the vulnerability of Elizabeth Sawyer as she is rendered as a stage character.[84] This vulnerability works in productive tensions with the eloquence with which Sawyer articulates her strong meta-awareness of the witchcraft conventions that define and circumscribe her subjective agency, claims influenced by Scot's work. In putting these arguments in the voice of a self-described "poor, deformed, and ignorant" woman (2.1.3), Dekker manages the seemingly paradoxical trick of sympathetically reinforcing her forceful conscription into a particular system of cultural signification and imbuing her character with a self-reflexive appreciation of her own performative agency. This relationship between power and language associated with witchcraft simultaneously situates it as a product of preexisting social tensions and informs Elizabeth's Sawyer's

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Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 43–59. Comensoli further suggests that this relationship in the play demonstrates that roots of witchcraft lie in social issues: "the external conditions of class, misogyny, and poverty" (45). Helen Vella Bonavita has likewise emphasized that in playing up her status as a poor, old, single woman, the playwrights exacerbate the extent to which "socially as well as economically disenfranchised." Bonavita, "Maids, Wives and Widows," 81.

[83] Randall Martin has pointed out the extent to which Goodcole's livelihood was dependent on his ability to demonstrate his own skills as a Newgate chaplain working in service of a regulatory ideal, and he makes a persuasive case for the necessity of understanding context in assessing Sawyer's confession in the document. Martin, *Women, Murder, and Equity in Early Modern England*, 98–101.

[84] Corbin and Sedge indicate that this is intended to produce the witch as an object of sympathy, in keeping with Scot's claims. Corbin and Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, 24.

capacity for agency within the confessional space eventually enforced upon her by representatives of normative social authority.

Frank Thorney and Configurations of Confessional Agency

As I noted earlier in this chapter, scholars have often explored the thematic meaning of Frank's final confession, but I draw attention to the ways in his words work *throughout* the play to situate him in relation to the range of subjective spaces associated with confessional speech. This play reveals the extent to which the modes of address that underlie intersubjective agency can be malleable, extending to the appropriation of the conventional tropes that signal and reproduce affective bonds.[85] Frank's fluency in and capacity to manipulate the conventional rhetoric of community bonds extends to his deployment of confessional rhetoric. The success of these speeches relies not on their truth-value, then, but rather in their capacity to invoke a subjective mode, but these performative manipulations are in tension with the air of sincerity the confessional mode conventionally requires. This irony is built into Frank's very name, which suggests a transparent openness in speech that is at odds with his efforts to exploit his fluency in its conventional scripts.

The examples from the previous sections help illustrate an economy of social relations in *The Witch of Edmonton* that relies on the effective inhabitation of legible

[85] One's mode of address, defined by Judith Butler as a "disposition or conventional bearing," helps establish the intrasubjective efficacy of speeches associated with predicable relationships and effects. She notes that that the potential for linguistic injury "appears to be the effect not only of the words by which one is addressed but by the mode of address itself… that interpellates and constitutes a subject." Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 2. As she later makes clear, these modes are effects of power: "the conditions of intelligibility are themselves formulated in and by power, and this normative exercise of power is rarely acknowledged as an operation of power at all" (134).

social roles secured by linguistic performances. Social subjectivity is a question of semblance even more than substance, and the play also surfaces the tensions inherent in such a system. This tension emerges early in the play, when Frank, intent on persuading his father that he has not married Winnifride, is confronted by his father's command that he "speak truth and blush" (1.2.160). Thorney associates truth with manifest outward signs, but Frank's subsequent aside vowing to "outface" the news refutes that connection (1.2.163). Sincerity itself is ironized by Frank's use of its conventions to allay his audience's justified suspicions: he chastens his father, "innocence / Needs not a stronger witness than the clearness / Of an unperished conscience" (1.2.183-5).[86] This alliance of transparency and innocence invites an important question: in an intersubjective context, how can the "unperished conscience" be efficaciously performed (as indeed it would have to be to serve as an effective "witness")? What happens when "innocence" is inhabited as a self-reflexive subjective category? Some provisional implications for this play's answer to these questions are suggested by context: Frank manipulates affective bonds in order to dissemble, and undermine their authority, creating the moral tension that builds up to his final speeches.

The stakes of Frank's negotiation of performances of innocence informed by a type of stance he, along with Sawyer, develops relative to the theatrical audience. Though these two are not the only characters to use asides, they among other characters are by far the most prone to staged reflection, particularly as pertains to guilt or judgment, in soliloquy. This representational pattern evokes the critical distancing effect Bertolt

[86] He simultaneously furnishes his father with the proof he suggests he doesn't need, producing for his father a letter from Sir Arthur that contains a false account of Frank's honesty in the matter.

Brecht describes, in which "the audience [is] hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play… acceptance or rejection of their actions [is] meant to take place on a conscious plane."[87] Frank alludes to the inevitable emergence of secrets such as those he harbors when he muses in another aside, "no man can hide his shame from heaven that views him" (1.2.226-7). This reflection delivered before a theatrical audience privy both to these reflections and to a fuller picture of Frank's actions, could be imagined to stand in for "heaven": aware of secrets and shame, and empowered to judge him accordingly.[88] The asides in these early scenes help position the audience as a repository for confession, following the trajectory of Frank's increasing guilt. As Katherine Carter's resistance to the popular narrative of Frank's confession reinforces, however, there is only a limited extent to which one can control the effects of speech in a multisubjective space.

The persistently contestable dynamics of confessional authority in the self-authored exchange that emerges in the murder scene, and later, in its disclosure, demonstrate the role of operant social paradigms in the construction of speaking subjectivity. Furthermore, the confessional rhetoric in these scenes underscores the ineluctable limitations to one's potential to completely control the configurations of subjective power in the inhabitations of those paradigms. Before Frank kills Susan, he

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[87] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 91.

[88] For more on the audience-character dynamics produced through the aside, see Jeremy Lopez's *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* pp 57-72. He situates the aside relative to the more "immediate interpretive effect" generated in the close relationship between individual characters and the audience in lines delivered as asides (58). Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 58. Frank seems to assume homogeneity in his audience that he cannot, in actuality, control, a dynamic that also surfaces in his attempts to predict and prescript his onstage confessional interlocutors.

claims that she has "dogged [her] own death" (3.3.39); this pun (probably a subconscious one, given Dog's invisibility to Frank) is based in no small part on her persistent tendency to probe the meaning behind his social performances.[89] In the previous act, for example, he met her anxieties about his behavior with a skillful deployment of the standard tropes of the romantic sonnet, blazoning her beauty and chastity in eloquent, but highly conventional, language (2.2.97ff). Susan, however, recognized this conversational trick for what it is, labeling and distancing herself from his "golden strings of flattery" (2.2.109). Frank's insistence that she "dogged" her death shifts responsibility for the murder he is in the process of committing to its victim. This inversion emerges even more clearly in his rhetorical move to situate *himself* as the auditor and arbiter of *her* confession. He calls her a whore, telling her that he will "prove it,/ And [she] shall confess it" (3.3.26-7); in framing the situation this way, he suggests moral virtue and authority in himself, claiming the relative power of the one who demands and hears confession. Susan initially responds in kind, claiming that she deserves death for her unwitting sins.

Embedded in the conversation that follows, however, is a competing configuration of confessional agency. Frank's accusation is itself an implicit admission—she is only a whore because he committed bigamy—and despite the speech's frame, what follows constitutes a more complete confession: "I was before wedded to another, have her still / I do not lay the sin unto your charge, / 'Tis all mine own. Your marriage was my theft, / For I espoused your dowry, and I have it" (3.3.32-35). He equivocates throughout the play when it comes to the agency behind his bad acts, but in this instance,

[89] This pun deflects responsibility from Frank not only in shifting it to Susan, but also in referencing Dog who, unbeknownst to Frank it seems, has participated in the act.

he offers a relatively clear narrative construction of them to his victim. He shadows it, however, with the exculpatory suggestion that murder was not his plan, signaling the deep ambivalence of his approach to confessing. Though she initially seems to embrace the role of the guilty penitent that Frank suggests for her, Susan uses her dying words to forgive Frank, and urges heaven to do the same, saying, "let me for once be thine example, Heaven. / Do to this man as I him free forgive, / And may he better die and better live" (3.3.63-64).[90] This forgiveness is complicated—for many, it seems to signal her complete passivity in the face of Frank's will. Within the logic of confession, however, it suggests a compelling kernel of agency: in forgiving Frank, Susan reverses the confessional script Frank initially established. Susan asserts authority over him that coheres in her utterance of the confessional speech act, empowered by both innocence and the conventional gravitas of the deathbed speech. Her forgiveness both implies and collapses the space of judgment; in speaking it, she posits herself as a preemptive echo of heavenly judgment. This mode of agential efficacy operates within and through her victimization.

Susan has the potential to embody a comingled form of confessor, accuser, and judge; Frank's evident anxiety about this mode of performative agency suggests that hers is a threat to his own in its potential to expose and fix his guilt relative to that of his victim. As he repeatedly stabs Susan to ensure her death, he notes specifically that he will not leave her a "tongue to blab" (3.3.56). Frank's resistance to Susan's potential to speak is a preemptive response not only to the threat of subjection to the processes of law and order, but also to the threat of a more fundamental subjective fragmentation. Judith

[90] Susan's move to forgive her husband/murderer with her dying words recalls Desdemona's final speech.

Butler's interpretation of the subject's efforts to negotiate the boundaries of intelligibility has bearing on Frank's rejection of Susan's assumption of confessorial agency. As she argues, "acting one's place in language continues the subject's viability, where that viability is held in place by a threat both produced and defended against, the threat of a certain dissolution of the subject."[91] In this scene, Susan represents an insuperable obstacle to Frank's sense of his own subjectivity so long as she lingers as simultaneous speaking subject and victim of Frank's bigamy and murder.[92]

The play stages the revelation of the murder in two contemporaneous channels of discovery that demonstrate counterpoised dynamics of self-representation and material evidence in the construction of narratives of guilt, an interplay that underlies and undermines the effective meaning of confessional agency. Frank's welcome into the Carter household in the wake of the murder simultaneously underscores the latter's community-minded spirit and reinforces the former's guilty conscience. This proximity and his sense of guilt jointly set the stage for Frank's exposure: first, Katherine Carter finds the knife that Frank used to kill her sister in his pocket.[93] Before she accuses, Susan's spirit appears to Frank, a scene that can be read alternately as sparking Frank's

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[91] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 136.

[92] Frank's rejection of the subjective role of "murderer" is emphasizes further in his subsequent attempt to literally play the victim, binding and cutting himself and specifically implicating other men for the crime.
Corbin and Sedge imply that Frank's lack of awareness about the influence of Dog is related to his move to implicate Somerton and Warbeck, the connection between the two plot elements seems, however, to be tenuous at best. Corbin and Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, 25. The genuine expressions of grief for Susan and concern for Frank exhibited by the two fathers when they happen upon the body throw the charade of Frank's ersatz victimhood into sharper relief.

[93] The dog appears at this moment to dance with joy, suggesting that Frank's downfall, and not just his crime, is part of the plan.

guilty conscience or surfacing a disquiet that was already present—Frank seems to discover the absence of the knife immediately before he sees the spirit.[94]

Susan's spectral appearance and the complicated emotions it could be imagined to conjure frame Frank's confession of murder to Winnifride. Their conversation takes place in private; Frank reinforces the importance of privacy when he orders Winnifride to make "the chamber-door fast." (4.2.94). Confession has long been associated, in Peter Brooks' terms, with the "enclosed, self-contained space," especially insofar as it "appears to offer the inner sanctum of hidden truth."[95] The confession Frank makes to Winnifride is, in its privacy, inflected with the intimacy of the marital bond, and the space, secrecy, and intimate connection between speaker and auditor all suggest a private, sanctioned confessional space. Rhetorically, however, Frank situates his wife in the conflated terms of the juridical process, rather than as a spiritual auditor, telling her "thou my evidence art, / Jury and judge. Sit quiet and I'll tell all" (4.2.108-9).[96] As Lorna Hutson has argued, by the seventeenth century the jury was well established as a body of evidentiary judgment, but its medieval roots were based on the issuing of "verdicts based on local

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[94] The juxtaposition of the ghostly figure of Susan and the role of the knife in serving to expose Frank's guilt revises the dagger scene in *Macbeth*, which dramatizes the paranoia of his guilty conscience. The dagger signals the blurring of the boundaries for Macbeth between the material and imaginary; here, the two are separated more clearly, but intertwined via staging, for dramatic effect.

[95] As Brooks notes, this private space plays a role in the construction of confession in relation to the religious confessional booth, the analyst's office, and the investigator's interrogation room alike. Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 14.

[96] The Oxford English Dictionary dates the conflated nonce word "judge-and-jury" to 1874, suggesting that at the time the play was written, it was not yet in wide circulation as a generalized term for the processes of passing sentence. "ˈjudge-and-ˈjury, v.". OED Online. September 2012. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/view/Entry/101890?redirectedFrom=%22judge+and+jury%22 (accessed September 26, 2012).

knowledge and memory."[97] Frank's subsequent appeals to Winnifride's sympathy seem to hint at this second, older, version of the jury's functioning: he maintains that he, "to save those eyes of thine from weeping, / Being to write a story of us two, /Instead of ink, dipped my sad pen in blood" (4.2.96-98).[98] Though he presents his own guilt in much more emotional terms than he did in the murder scene, the dynamics of this exchange echo those between Frank and Susan earlier; Frank's words muddy the waters between confessor and confessant to suggest a shared culpability. The blood associated with the murder is tied, in this formulation, to the narrative of married life that was already in progress when the play began. Though Frank is the one confessing, he attempts to exercise prescriptive agency from within the exchange, offering his confessor a prospective response to his speech. He prefaces his confession with the suggestion/prediction to her, "when thou'st heard me speak, melt into tears" (4.2.95). This scene, then, epitomizes Frank's tendency to attempt to author scripts while negating his agency for them.

Frank's suggestion that Winnifride will "hear" him speak prefaces a strategic theatrical bait and switch: though the audience can still see the pair whispering, the stage direction indicates that they are inaudible as the focus shifts to Katherine and her father elsewhere onstage.[99] In *staging* the private confession, however, the play evokes secrecy

[97] Lorna Hutson has explored the complex evolution of the English jury trial, especially as pertains to judgment, narrative, and evidence. Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion*, 31; See also 30–35, 80–90.
[98] In referring to his confession as a "story," Frank reinforces the sense of plottedness to which he returns throughout the play.
[99] Brooks offers a summary of the epistemological anxiety associated with private confession, noting, "privacy produces secrecy that produces a gap in our knowledge." Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 12. He is paraphrasing United States Supreme Court

while refuting the physical boundaries with which it is usually associated. Furthermore, in enclosing this ostensibly private space in the Carter household onstage and more broadly, in the space of the theater in which the audience witnessed the acts to which Frank is confessing, the play exposes a mode of privacy that calls into question its sanctity and stability. The content of the confession Frank delivers to Winnifride, however, does remains a secret between him and his confessor, demonstrating a powerful form of household confession that exposes the potential for an inversion of gendered power dynamics within it. When Winnifride reveals the substance of his secret revelation, Frank labels the revelation a betrayal, reflecting an apparent faith in the sanctity of a confession bound by not only by the intimate space of the bedchamber but also by the vows of marriage.[100]

By staging a dual process of discovery that places the interpretation of forensic and circumstantial evidence in conjunction with an onstage confession in the same theatrical chronotope, *The Witch of Edmonton* explores the competing epistemologies of guilt that shadow confessional agency—one that depends on the verbal reconstruction of the guilty, and another that depends on the suspicions of those drawn into investigating the crime.[101] The visual juxtaposition of Frank and Winnfride's silent conversation and Katherine's damning revelation heightens the suspense of the scene and undermines the

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Justice Earl Warren in an argument about the legal merits of confession from custodial interrogation.

[100] A wife was able to testify against her husband during the period, as Frances Dolan describes in her account of the 1631 trial of the Lord Audley, earl of Castlehaven; the earl is informed that a wife can indeed testify, "especially where she is the party grieved." Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 82.

[101] The concept of the chronotope is drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin's essays, and refers to the temporal and spatial interconnectedness expressed artistically in literary works. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 84–258.

privileging of confession's association with the aural. Carter confronts his erstwhile son-in-law with a case that hinges on material evidence: most spectacularly, the dead body of Susan, whom he brings onstage to "accuse" Frank. He ventriloquizes the dead woman, refuting Frank's earlier effort to leave her without a "tongue to blab." Carter bases his claims on the strength of the material evidence of the knife, which he situates as incontrovertible and unanswerable: "Thou canst not answer honestly and without trembling heart to this one point, this terrible bloody point" (4.2.166-7). Carter simultaneously demands confession, obviates the necessity for it through evidence, and suggests that the horror of the crime and the force of the accusation render such a speech act impossible.

Frank's confession to Winnifride operates in tandem with Carter's evidence to compromise the confessional autonomy that Frank had pursued earlier in the play. The two modes of revelation intersect when Winnifride confesses on Frank's behalf in answer to Carter's seemingly irrefutable claims, exposing Frank to official judgment and crystallizing a model of portable epistemological authority for the confessor. Winnifride simultaneously reveals herself and confirms the crime, saying, "'tis confessed to me" (4.2.184). Her social status seems tenuous at this point: she is a servant with no personal cultural clout, and the pregnant secret wife of a confessed murderer in whose acts she is arguably culpable. However, in shifting the confessional script that Frank had earlier suggested, she exercises implicit power relative to her husband in a more public context. When Winnifride admits that she is both a woman and Frank's wife, she is, in a sense, performing a kind of bodily confession, and in doing so she embodies another kind of material of evidence against Frank, one that acts as a counterpoint to Susan's dead body

that can only be imagined to accuse its killer.[102] At different moments, Frank works to conscript each of his wives into confessorial relationships with him in which he maintains authorial control; in this scene of revelation, however, both women are figured as agents of his exposure, once again flipping the script of patriarchal confessional authority that Frank suggests. In this scene, however, the multiform applications of confessional speech collide with one another as the increasing demand for a public narrative of guilt in terms of the "judge and jury" Frank evoked earlier comes into conflict with an evident desire for prescripted, private absolution.

Thorney's crime is marked by a surfeit of confessors and confessions. These exchanges demonstrate the complex array of social configurations that enable certain forms of confessional agency both in terms of how it is experienced on a subjective level and how it is communicated according to normative standards of guilt. When Winnifride laments, "I must arraign this father for two sins, / Adultery and murder" (4.2.187-8), she collapses the dual authority systems—legal and moral/spiritual—to which he is now subject and which will frame his subsequent confession in the final scene.[103] She casts his

[102] For a theoretical exploration of the dynamics among the body, confession, and betrayal with a rather different, but highly compelling valance, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 29.

[103] There is some confusion in the reception of this line; Carter responds indignantly as though he is the father in question; if he is, Winnifride seems to be misusing the word arraign. Otherwise (and as I interpret it), Frank is the "father" she must arraign, and in referring to him as such, she publicizes his connection to her own pregnancy, adding to the list of his transgressions. Her response to Frank's accusation of betrayal demonstrates a related conflicting desire to be faithful both to moral order and to a husband who has violated that order. She suggests that her admission by proxy was involuntary, reassuring Frank that she "know[s] not what I speak" (5.1.186). This claim suggests that the revelation of the truth is in this case an inevitability, one which outweighs her intent or desire, but her subsequent mention of arraignment and sin belies the notion that her statements implicating Frank are mere slips of the tongue.

actions as "sin," while the phrase "must arraign" both underscores the necessity she attaches to her revelation of their private conversation and implies a juridical agency in herself, as the one producing these charges as such. Frank vacillates throughout and after the murder between accepting and denying culpability, a negotiation that plays out largely in terms of the language and processes of confession and discovery. Frank's redemptive turn at the gallows rests on this foundation, and accordingly reminds us that having exposed the fissures that exist at the heart of cultural hegemony through his actions, Frank cannot wholly exorcise the specter of that exposure through confession. His friends and family displace that task onto the exile of the witch, poised in popular culture to serve as a ready scapegoat. As the final section of this chapter demonstrates, however, this process is likewise compromised by the potential resignification of the terms of confession from within.

Elizabeth Sawyer and [Non]Confessions of Witchcraft

Near the beginning of this chapter, I described the way other characters in *The Witch of Edmonton* approach Elizabeth Sawyer's gallows confession: for spectators more interested in regulating the physical, social, and linguistic transgressions she represents than in a personal narrative of repentance, her semblance of assent to the ritual is sufficient. She is pressed into the confessional space by her interlocutors in order to reinforce the boundaries of a body that defines itself through her exclusion, facilitating the performance of forgiveness of a more familiar criminal. The play also makes clear, however, that the practice of witchcraft for which she is impelled to confess is bound to her construction as a character always already conscripted into that particular subject

position.[104] Judith Butler has described the paradoxical processes by which reinscription can occur through normative processes of disciplinary identification, arguing,

> where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioral conformity of the subject is commanded, there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law unto hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it. (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 122)[105]

Sawyer's witchcraft is the product of an interpellation rooted beyond the boundaries of the plot. Her trajectory in the play, however, affords her the opportunity to take that interpellation to its extreme, appropriating the agency associated with the identity category while also straining its bounds. *The Witch of Edmonton*'s staged witchcraft confession helps illuminate this process: the attempts Sawyer makes to function as an efficacious speaking subject from within the social role into which she has been conscripted allows us to recognize the potential for unconventional authority—the subject position from which she speaks "signifies in excess of any intended referent," to resituate Butler's

[104] This sentence's implication of agency in the play is intentional; Dekker's deployment of his source material invites a version of the distancing effect described in the previous section, prompting a space for judgment in its audience.

[105]She further argues on that page, "the performative, the call by the law which seeks to produce a lawful subject, produces a set of consequences that exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention motivating the laws." In *Excitable Speech,* Butler returns to the question of the exercise of agency within existing linguistic structures. In this argument she differentiates the "'opening up the possibility of agency'" from "a replication of conventional notions of mastery" associated with "sovereign autonomy in speech." Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 15. I follow her in emphasizing this distinction, especially in light of the particulars of this text; agency for Elizabeth Sawyer never implies sovereign agency, even as it troubles the hierarchies that secure her subjection as a witch.

argument—within a series of exchanges that seem to reinforce her helplessness before a social hierarchy that demands her excision.[106]

Sandwiched in between Susan's murder and Frank's unmasking, Sawyer has a scene featuring her own related power struggle: characters with social clout repeatedly demand confession from Sawyer, alternately to establish her official guilt in interrogation and to reinforce her punishment at the gallows. In using Sawyer to self-reflexively call attention to the dynamics of conscription at play in these scenes, the playwrights demonstrate the tensions embedded in the normativity presupposed by the discourse of public confession. The ideological theory that emerges in the play itself through these scenes emerges more sharply when they are considered in relation to corresponding moments in the Goodcole pamphlet that was a primary source for the Sawyer plot. Though the narrative details of the pamphlet and play largely correspond, one particular vein of discordance is especially significant.[107] In the series of events Goodcole describes, Sawyer obstinately refuses to confess at trial, is condemned, and finally, in a jail interview preceding her execution, responds in detail to his interrogation.[108] The trial and legal condemnation are elided altogether in the theatrical version, however,

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[106] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), 122.

[107] Corbin and Sedge go so far as to characterize the play as, in modern terminology, a "docudrama." Corbin and Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, 22.

[108] Randall Martin has pointed out the extent to which Goodcole's livelihood was dependent on his ability to demonstrate his own skills as a Newgate chaplain working in service of a regulatory ideal, and he makes a persuasive case for the necessity of understanding context in assessing Sawyer's confession in the document. He notes, for example, that prior allegations that Sawyer had been able to commune with the devil while under Goodcole's clerical supervision would, in conjunction with a broader crackdown on illicit activities enjoyed by prisoners of Newgate, have inflected Goodcole's overall tendency to spend more time on the question and answer style confessional and prompted his specific questions about her piety in prison. Martin, *Women, Murder, and Equity in Early Modern England*, 98–101.

reinforcing a more nebulous and pervasive understanding of the regulatory dimensions of intersubjective bonds. Sawyer consistently declines to describe her purported crimes in her confrontations with authority figures in the play; in other words, the details of Sawyer's plot are drawn from a confession that the theatrical version of the figure consistently refuses to make.

The playwrights the interrogation scene with an attempt at mob justice in which the villagers, led by Old Banks, burn a piece of thatch from her hut in order to draw her out and thus prove her witchcraft according to an epistemology of folk superstition.[109] Goodcole dismisses this method as an "old ridiculous custome," and the play likewise rejects its fairness and validity: the Justice of the Peace appears for the first time in the play to castigate the villagers for their "violence" and "abuse" (4.1.31, 35). The playwrights draw an implicit contrast between the villagers, with their overt cruelty and disrespect, and the Justice, who is, in Julia Garrett's words, "the primary official agent of social control" and comes across as relatively temperate and fair.[110] The Justice suggests that Sawyer is entitled to protection from their court of public opinion since "she is a subject" (4.1.65). Literary and historical interpretations of the play have tended to emphasize the sympathy toward Sawyer implied by the Justice's stance, especially

[109] See 4.1.15-26 for the articulation of this superstition in the play. Goodcole describes this test as "slight and ridiculous," but he asserts that it nonetheless helps lead to her conviction, in that "it setled a resolution in those whom it concerned, to finde out by all meanes they could endeavor, her long and close carried Witchery." Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch*, A4v.

[110] Garrett, "Dramatizing Deviance," 353. Garrett puts Sawyer's crimes in relation to other forms of deviance: when the Justice arrives, she notes, the "deviant conduct he must discipline includes not only Sawyer's supposed witchcraft, but arson, assault, and attempted murder as well" (353).

insofar as it signals a departure from what would have been expected at the time.[111] This subjective stance, however, is something of a double-edged sword: if Sawyer has the rights of a subject of the state, the Justice's words imply, she is also subject to its regulations.[112]

Though the Justice's investigative approach certainly differs in content and tone from the one the villagers pursue, it is nonetheless marked by a manipulative rhetorical tack that seems designed to solidify the popular narrative of guilt that has already been presented. In contrast to the other characters, who are all defined in terms of their relationships to one another, the Justice represents a more general form of ideological authority as a visiting officer of the Court. He questions Sawyer in tandem with Sir Arthur, the highest-ranking man in the village; the evidenced corruption of the latter, however, implies hypocrisy in the exercise of power that is borne out in the nature of the

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[111] Garrett argues that the play's characterization of a Justice who attempts to minimize the impulse to scapegoat constitutes an "intervention on Dekker's part in the public discourse about witchcraft," and in his edition of the play, Kinney highlights the improbability of the Justice's defense, suggesting that his sympathetic attitude "contradicts historical fact and is highly unrepresentative of justices' opinions at the time. Such sympathy is characteristic of Dekker's thought and playwriting." Ibid., 355; Ford, Dekker, and Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, 77n. Goodcole's pamphlet skims the trial itself, but the reverence he demonstrates for the agents of the court and his evident disrespect and distaste for the witch emerge in his description. It is worth remembering, of course, that Goodcole was writing at least in part to curry favor with his superiors.

[112] Todd Butler's emphasizes that this insistence on her legal personhood is "both a refuge and a prison," carrying with it "the presumption that as a subject she will accept the law's right to judge and, if necessary, to punish offenses." Butler situates this exchange in terms of the "power of formal, legal speech to counteract the more pernicious influence of popular opinion," and though he notes that play itself tends to refute this distinction, I go further in questioning the role the Justice plays in Sawyer's interrogation. Butler indicates that this power hierarchy emerges more clearly in the Goodcole pamphlet, whereas the play tends to trouble it. He suggests that public confession is a site at the popular demands that the play tends to privilege can be negotiated relative to a legal discourse. Butler, "Swearing Justice in Henry Goodcole and The Witch of Edmonton," 140.

Justice's questioning.[113] Parlaying his defense of her into a suggestion of intimacy and trust; first he sends away the would-be vigilantes, leaving only himself, Sir Arthur, and Sawyer. He tells her: "Here's none now, Mother Sawyer, but this gentleman, myself, and you. Let us to some mild questions; have you mild answers? Tell us honestly and with a free confession, we'll do our best to wean you from it, are you witch or no?" (4.1.70-3). The Justice's moderate tone can be read as an extension of his treatment of Sawyer as a suspect deserving protection, he embodies a judiciary tendency, revealed in the archives, to use sympathy and presumed privacy in an effort to elicit confidences—taken as confessions— of witchcraft.[114] Garrett emphasizes the "private, sympathetic space" that the Justice's words create. She does so to differentiate between his "relatively solicitous" approach and Sir Arthur's "verbal harassment."[115] The sense of "space" suggested in his mode of address is compelling, but I frame it instead in terms of the rhetorical construction of a figurative zone of confession, in which she might confide her guilt to a judicial authority (instead of spiritual confidant). His frame threatens to circumscribe her

[113] Sawyer herself speaks to this hypocrisy: when Sir Arthur claims that in response to the poor treatment she has received, she sold her soul to the devil, Sawyer replies … "By what commission can be send my soul on the devil's errand more than I can his? Is he a landlord of my soul to thrust it, when he list, out of door? (4.1.83-5)

[114] As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, however, rhetorical manipulation plays an explicit role in the dialogic construction of witchcraft guilt in the pamphlets from which Dekker drew his plot. The Justice's approach here seems compassionate, but it also recalls the judicial maneuvering recorded in a popular 1582 pamphlet in which the Justice of the Peace opts to speak "privately" with a suspect named Ursley Kemp, whereupon he promises that "if she would deale plainely and confesse the trueth, that shee should have favour." W. W., *A True and Just Recorde, of the Information, Examination and Confession of All the Witches, Taken at S. Ofes in the Countie of Essex*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1014:07 (London: At the three Cranes in the Vinetree by Thomas Dawson, 1582), 2A7v.

[115] Garrett, "Dramatizing Deviance," 352–5. Though Garrett does concede that this pose could be duplicitous, she does not trace the implications of this suggestion for their relative social agency.

confessional agency before she even begins to speak; though he wants a "free" confession, his promise that she will be "weaned" from her witchcraft reinforces the extent to which the narrative of her guilt is already assumed. The therapeutic value he ascribes to such a weaning is dependent on a normative understanding of the socially and spiritually transformative effects of mercy, forgiveness, and salvation—a domain from which Elizabeth Sawyer has been self-reflexively excluded throughout the play.[116]

In Goodcole's telling, Elizabeth Sawyer is "not able to speake a sensible or ready word for her defense," instead issuing a number of "fearfull imprecations or destruction against her selfe then to happen, as heretofore she had wished and indeavored to happed on divers of her neighbors."[117] The play follows the pamphlet in depicting Sawyer's loquacity, but it shifts the focus of her speech substantially. The staged Sawyer does not directly defend herself, but she also refuses to directly confess guilt to men questioning her. Instead, she goes on to trouble the criminal identity category of "witch" altogether.[118]

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[116] Lisa Hopkins suggests that the Justice acts to "interpellat[e] her as a passive subject into an ideological framework which must surely bear a large part of the blame for actions in which she is hardly more than a puppet." This effort and interpellation is striking, I think, but in my reading, Sawyer's subsequent negotiation of her subjective role shows her to much more than a puppet. (Hopkins, "Women" 51
Lisa Hopkins, "Ladies' Trials: Women and the Law in Three Plays of John Ford," *Cahiers Elisabéthains* 56 (1999): 51.

[117] Goodcole attributes this to heavenly intervention: "Thus God did wonderfully overtake her in her owne wickednesse, to make her tongue as the meanes of her owne destruction, which had destroyed many before." Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch*, B.

[118] She offers a fusillade of examples, but for example, she notes, "men in gay clothes, whose backs are laden with titles and honours, are within far more crooked than I am, and if I be a witch, more witch-like" (4.1.87-9). Her illustrative examples continue until she hits on one that (we can reasonably assume unwittingly) corresponds with the illicit triangle of Sir Arther, Frank, and Winnifride. Sir Arhur takes this as a confession, announcing, "by one thing she speaks / I know now she's a witch" (4.1.146-7). His statement, as the audience is well-aware, speaks more to his guilt than hers, a dramatic irony that underscores the hypocrisy embedded in the efforts to secure Saywer's

The exercises of performative efficaciousness that Sawyer experiences over the course of the play afford her new agency in the face of efforts to name her. She answers Sir Arthur's threat to produce those who will "proclaim her for a secret and pernicious witch" (4.1.95-6) with laughter, "at [her] name, the brave name this knight gives [her]—witch!" (4.1.103). In her first scene, Sawyer equated be named as a witch with being one, whereas here, she implies a distance between the social identity suggested in the act of naming and in her agential self.

Sawyer meets Sir Arthur's efforts at conscription with her own subversive resignification, asking, "A witch! Who is not?"; in widening the scope of supposed witchcraft—a "universal name"—she explicitly attempts to divorce it from "scorn" (4.1.103-4). She likens the kind of witchcraft of which she is suspected to other, more normative forms of transformation and persuasion associated with higher rungs on the social ladder—like the application of cosmetics in the art of seduction—in an effort to point out the hypocrisy inherent in her treatment. Sawyer's arguments produce a level of potentially transformative "decontextualization and denaturalization," processes of

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confession. Garrett aptly describes this moment as a "a vigorous critique of deviance and corruption among the ruling classes and of the social prejudices that target her or 'any lean old beldam' for suspicion and abuse." Garrett, "Dramatizing Deviance," 352. Sawyer's repeated claim in response to accusations that she is a witch that she is "none" implicitly reminds us that her subjectivity is only intelligible through the paradigms of witchcraft. She is so thoroughly identified with the crime by those around her that the repeated demands for her confession issued by authorities and neighbors seem excessive, except insofar as they reflect a faith that confession would help reinforce the discursive predominance of the discursive field threatened by the supernatural speaker. Todd Butler also traces the role of confession in the shifting social positions held by the plays respective criminals, saying "Thorney and Sawyer move from suspect to criminal, availed only of the opportunity to confess, an act which itself simultaneously reiterates the justice of the legal process and secures a final transformation of self from abject criminal to recipient of divine grace" (129).

linguistic reconfiguration that Judith Butler associates with Derridean reinscription.[119] Her examples are consonant with those used by learned witchcraft skeptics like Scot, but in putting them in her voice and linking them to a prospective confession, Dekker and his fellow playwrights give these critiques added valence and new urgency. Sawyer's speeches here are also indicative of a linguistic agency that helps make sense of her seemingly nonsensical mocking remark to Anne Radcliffe that she is "a lawyer" (4.1.182). This statement, coming on the heels of her encounter with the Justice and Sir Arthur, implies legal authority that speaks both to Sawyer's demeanor during her past exchange, and to her relationship to Radcliffe, whom she has commanded Dog to curse; in aligning herself, even mockingly, with normative justice, she highlights her own agency in seeking out the death of a social foe.[120]

The reappropriation of the speaking position afforded by the demand for confession constitutes an act of powerful resistance on Sawyer's part, but the play also implies that she has unrealistic faith in her linguistic autonomy. In a conversation with Dog following her interrogation, Sawyer elaborates on the statements she made in the previous exchange that implied a divorce between reputation and subjective role, this time specifically in terms of her own confessional agency. She claims that she will confess nothing, "and not confessing, who dare come and swear I have bewitched them?" (5.1.65-6). The very real agency she locates in silence as a response to the confessional demand betrays a slippage between her interpretation of confessional autonomy and the

[119] See Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 144–5.
[120] The play undermines this moral logic through its sequence: the indignant stance she takes in her interrogation was pitiable when she first expressed it near the beginning of the play, but it comes to carry its own hypocrisy when Sawyer commands Dog to kill Anne Radcliffe *after* her conversation with the Justice and Sir Arthur.

purposes of the audience demanding the confession of her—it is not intended for the latter to clarify the specifics of her crime, but rather to signal her submission to the processes of justice and populace trained to expect and demand confession. The Dog himself underscores the extent to which her linguistic efficacy has depended on his intervention when he abandons her.[121] In a visual signal of the split between them, Dog changes color from black to white; now, instead of acting as her agent and conspirator, he aligns himself more closely, but parodically, with the Justice and Edmonton villagers. He demands her confession, saying, "Thy time has come to curse, and rave, and die. / The glass of thy sins is full, and it must run out at gallows." (5.1.63-4).[122] By framing her forthcoming speeches thus, Dog denies her authority as an agent of performative witchcraft, casting her curses as incoherent ravings instead of spells, and in referring to her sins, gestures to her reinscription into the rituals of normative Christian ideology. That the transformed Dog is the one giving voice to these sentiments illuminates the hypocrisy embedded in the expectation that she will (and should) confess at the gallows.[123] In spite of her volition, Dog predicts this confession to be an inevitability, assuring her, "ere the executioner catch thee full in's claws, thou'lt / confess all" (5.1.72-

[121] This is powerful on the level of emotional loss as well, which forms a serious blow to her performances of defiance. Goodcole indicates that the devil is inspired to leave her because she is discovered, a shift he links to the thatch-burning test the villages put her to (A4v).

[122] The Dog's language is recalled in Ford's later play, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore,* in which the scorned and termagant Hippolita is told by the lover who abandons her that she ought "learn to repent and die" (2.2.99). The shift from black to white resonates, as I note elsewhere in the chapter, with Frank's own repentance, which follows this scene.

[123] Sawyer insists, in spite of her erstwhile familiar, that she will "muzzle up my tongue from telling tales" (5.1.70), a vow that speaks to the appeal of confession—in that she needs force to prevent herself from engaging in it—and also to her continued faith in her ability to control a body that has, for much of the play and (one imagines) her life, been subject to others' control.

3). This statement can be received not only as a prediction, but also as a performative mandate that ensures her participation, and because the play omits the trial verdict, this promise from Dog serves as her de facto sentence.[124] The language of inevitable seizure in his statement serves as a reminder that Sawyer has never been able to wholly escape ideological interpellation, despite recourse to the imagined alternate space of magic, while also alluding to the extent to which Dog himself has trapped her.

Despite the performative disempowerment clearly signaled by Dog's abandonment, with the final scene the play presents a form of [non-]confessional agency in Sawyer's efforts to shape the perfunctory public confession demanded of her.[125] The relationship between play and source text enriches my argument: in Goodcole's account, the condemned, penitent Sawyer participates in the conversation from which Goodcole himself draws the gallows confession he reads for her at her execution.[126] In the pamphlet, Sawyer claims that she confesses, "hoping to avoyd shame," a move that seems to work: she goes on to say, "I doe it to cleere my conscience, and now having done it, I am the more quiet, and the better prepared, and willing thereby to suffer death."[127] The play, in appropriating the substance of Goodcole's interrogation, changes mode of compliance that its narrative relies on. Its gallows confession is marked by

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[124] This serves as a powerful, but darkly comedic, animation of King Lear's act 4, scene 6 observation that "a dog's obeyed in office."

[125] While the inspiration for the Sawyer plot was gleaned from a pamphlet centered on her pre-execution jail interview, that part of the theatrical character's story is elided entirely, so that her final statements are framed by the presence of a hostile on-stage audience.

[126] See Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch*, B4.

[127] Ibid., D1v. The play retains a similar speech, rendering it in verse and framing it as more bitter than poignant: "I was well resolved to / To die in my repentance. Though 'tis true / I would live longer if I might, yet since / I cannot, pray torment me not, my conscience / Is settled as it shall be" (5.3.41-45). Her clearness of conscience is equivocal and causally dissociated from speeches of repentance.

different dynamics of agency—even though the telos of both page and stage confession is the exclusion of the witch from a space of communal forgiveness.[128] In the playwrights' version, even at the gallows, Sawyer resists providing her audience with a clear and submissive reconstruction her guilt, seeming to recognize that her gallows speeches are less about her own salvation and more about her own role in an economy of social power.[129] She exposes this divide when she complains that she has "scare breath enough to say [her] prayers" and would rather not spend it in crowd-pleasing "bawling" (5.3.48-9). This dismissive characterization exposes the perfunctory nature of the confessional demand placed on her, one that throws into sharper relief the excesses of Frank's confession immediately following.

Sawyer's gallows speech further illuminates the artifice associated with the generalized demand for her repentance and confession when she appropriates the language of final confession to express regret about her relationship with the devil, rather than sorrow for the social harms she has inflicted. This grudging performance of repentance is prompted, in fact, by the repeated efforts of her audience to expand the realm of her guilt to encompass additional crimes. A performative signpost of confession

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[128] Goodcole writes that Sawyer hears confession read back, and then says "I here doe acknowledge, to all the people that are here present, that it is all truth, disiring you all to pray unto Almightie God to forgive me my greevous sinnes." Sawyer agrees that she will be saved "By Jesus Christ alone," but while Goodcole suggests that she is a powerful example, but does not grant or describe forgiveness for the witch (D2-D2v). He puts devout words in her mouth in his retelling, and while they could be invention on Goodcole's part (in addition to the possibility that they were really spoken), Marion Gibson suggests that they could also have been "carefully rehearsed catechism" intended to be performed for public consumption, and event that would, per Martin's arguments, have been taken as a testament to Goodcole's skill as chaplain. Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 314.

[129] In the original pamphlet, Sawyer confesses to some crimes, but not others, suggesting that she seeks to simultaneously access a conventional, socially legible role, while still resisting assenting to the judicial narrative around her.

frames her final lines: “bear witness. I repent all former evil; / There is no damn conjuror like the devil” (5.3.50-51). The exhortation to her audience to “bear witness” commands attention—in part because it formally works to signal the beginning of confession.[130] In uttering those words, she situates her speech as one that the audience, including the one offstage, need be accountable to and implicated in; in associating it linguistically with her own testimony, she (if only figuratively) invokes the responsibility which ought to sit with her confessor(s).[131] This demand for social recognition is paradoxical, in that her consenting to the popular demand that she “repent” frames her execution, and the enthusiastic and un-cowed reaction of her on-stage audience, which punctuates the statement with a mass call for her to be carried away to death, does not suggest a tremendous amount of authority behind her gallows speech. Her short statement of repentance coerced and prescripted as is, however, is significant insofar as it allows her to signify in terms of multiple modes of social subjectivity. The bitterness she expresses being abandoned by Dog speaks more to a social regret than to the renunciation of evil that it appears to be. For Sawyer the final gallows confession is simultaneously a personal reiteration of the ultimate failure of the supernatural performativity she attempted to

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[130] Byville notes that with this statement, she is also testifying. Byville situates the confessional dynamic of this scene to witchcraft drama more generally: “Sawyer's confessional appeal to "bear witness" anticipates the dominant note struck by modern witchcraft drama, in which the key speech acts are not supernatural performatives, but rather the social and judicial speech acts of testimony and confession: the witch's infernal *precor* is replaced by the merely human *testor* and *confiteor*” (25-6). For insight on the relationship between Sawyer’s submission to a ritual she has theretofore identified as oppressive and conceptions of agency, see Elaine Scarry, “Consent and the Body,” *New Literary History* 21, no. 4, Papers from the Commonwealth Center for Literary and Cultural Change (1990): 867–896. More recently, Kathryn Schwarz has built on this conceptual framework to more fully mine the paradox of willing consent in the early modern period. See Schwarz, *What You Will*, 79.

[131] As J. Hillis Miller has described, Derrida associates performative utterances in toto with testimony, or “bearing witness.” Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 135.

access, but also an exercise in linguistic power in which she lays claim to the ability to speak relative to, but not strictly in service of, the discourse demanded of her.

Insofar as it is intended to justify and punctuate a social exclusion that is, at this point (and, to some extent, throughout the play) a foregone conclusion, her confession "works," and she is enthusiastically led away to her death. Though the gallows confession serves as a platform from which she can speak in a public context, this platform does not allow her to reshape her fate—instead, it allows her to provocatively address the on- and offstage audience from within it, reframing its terms.[132] In regard to Sawyer's plotline, the witch is dangerous precisely because rituals of re-inclusion don't and can't work for her. The social effects and implied agency in her gallows speech differ markedly from Frank's. Legal condemnation and execution do not serve as social equalizers, and whereas Frank's various relationships are cast as repaired through his personal articulation of responsibility, the villagers demand Sawyer's public confession to reify her social exclusion. The strains of resistance to power within her confessional speech, however, remind us that the pernicious social dynamics she came to self-consciously emblematize remain. In her effort to diffuse not only responsibility for the crimes committed in the play but also the social constitution of witchcraft itself, Sawyer presents a challenge to the notion that the forces she represents can be contained in her punishment.

[132] The sympathy with which she has been rendered invites the audience to view her final speeches differently from the way in which her on-stage audience seems to. Garrett notes that this sympathy is in and of itself noteworthy. Garrett, "Dramatizing Deviance," 328.

Conclusion

To illustrate the tensions this chapter has identified in the processes of confessional closure explored in *The Witch of Edmonton* and to highlight some of their potential ramifications, I turn in conclusion to the brief picture of the interpretive choices of a 2011 performance of the play. This staging, by New York's Red Bull Theater Company under the direction of Jesse Berger concludes with the staged executions of both Elizabeth Sawyer and Frank Thorney, departing from the play's text, which shifts them offstage.[133] The remaining characters remain onstage, watching the silent spectacle first of Thorney's hanging, then of Sawyer's burning at the stake. The different modes of execution, though not historically consistent, spectacularize the differing receptions the two figures received in the last scene. In particular, the stylized but intense manner in which this iteration of Sawyer writhes in anger and pain serves as a graphic illustration of what is at stake for a woman implicated in witchcraft, whereas Thorney's hanging is relatively peaceful and purposeful.[134] In her review of the play, Bethany Packard suggests that the production makes much of the way the play both begins and ends with Winnifride.[135] Packard notes, "while the concluding executions could have drawn the production's focus away from Winifred, they ultimately intensified the audience's sense

[133] Many thanks to Deborah Wolfson, Assistant Director of the Red Bull Theater, who kindly went back to the original blocking notes to help refresh my memory of the way the final moments of the play were staged.
[134] In the early modern period, convicted witches in England were hanged rather than burned. In a question and answer session after a January 2011 performance, Berger noted that he chose to represent her as being burned because it produced a more dramatic visual effect, and to differentiate her fate from that of Frank Thorney, who has just been hanged onstage.
[135] Packard, Bethany, "Review of The Witch of Edmonton, Presented by Red Bull Theater at the Theater at St. Clement's, New York City, January 29," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 15, no. 3 (2011): 15.

of her plight."[136] As the lights go down on Sawyer in the production's final moments, a bright spotlight briefly illuminates Winnifride's upturned face as the ominous bark of Dog fills the theater. Then the theater goes dark and the play is over.[137]

This staging gives a new valance to Winnifride's status at the end of the play, casting a bleaker shadow over its conclusion. In the final scene, she moves to distance herself from Frank's crimes, noting with relief—and perhaps a measure of persuasive guilelessness—that her soul is free "both from consent, foreknowledge, and intent" of crime (5.3.13). Later, she situates herself in terms of the communion of redemption associated with Frank's penitence, suggesting that her own sin, "by [her] sorrow / Is clearly canceled" (5.3.96-7). This production highlights the way the play itself calls this hopeful sentiment into question. Berger moves her epilogue up in the play, placing it before the staged executions, so while in the play's final speech, Winnifride reiterates the "modest" hope offered in the wake of the tragedies, the ominous focus on her in the play's final moments suggests that the fissures in the community present at the start of the play also persist in some form through the end of the play. The threat of poverty and lack of communal affiliation that shadows Winnifride's trajectory through the play is analogous the forces that shaped Sawyer's inhabitation of witchcraft. This production throws Winnifride's role at the end of the play into bleak relief, suggesting that she might well be the community's next witch. This view of the play's ending implies that malefic force, supernatural or otherwise, that has unfolded cannot be fully contained and domesticated, in spite of attempts on the part of high ranking survivors to move on in a

[136] Ibid.
[137] Berger notes that the laughter of the dog and Winnifride's visibly pregnant form are designed to subtly evoke a connection between potential evil and the baby itself (a la *Rosemary's Baby*, for example)

mended social sphere. As the Justice himself points out at the play's end, "harms may be lamented, not redressed" (5.3.169)—lamentation, however, invites a strategic misremembering in service of a narrative of closure. The communal repudiation of Sawyer and forgiveness of Frank help reassert order, but redress evades the capacity of performative ritual.

CHAPTER IV

RIDDLING SHRIFT: AURICULAR AGENCY AND THE CONFESSING BODY

> If knowledge is power, knowledge of secrets—of that which is consciously held back from knowledge—is the supreme and vertiginous power, offering the confessor a particular kind of dominance in regard to the rest of humankind.[1]

Othello: By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts!
Iago: You cannot, if my heart were in your hand;
Nor shall not, whilst 'tis in my custody.[2]

The power of the confessional utterance depends on the intra- and intersubjective effects attributed to these narratives of guilty disclosure. In this chapter, I shift from exploring those effects in terms of the dynamics of communal rituals of public confession in order to focus on the role of secrets and privacy in the confessional exchange. In the quotation above, Peter Brooks explores the configurations of power that characterize the private confessional exchange.[3] We might amend Brooks' aphoristic reminder that "knowledge is power" to restate a concept articulated in the first chapter of this dissertation: knowledge is a product of power.[4] The subjective experience of the power that shapes the confessional exchange is reliant on the symbolic structures of its

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[1] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 89.
[2] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (London: A&C Black, 1996), 3.3.164–166.
[3] He is speaking directly to an attitude toward Catholic auricular confession that postdates the early modern plays that are the focus of this chapter by several centuries, but these dramas illuminate a mode of confessional subject formation that is likewise driven by the constitutive intersections of knowledge and power that Brooks explores.
[4] Brooks explores the various complexities of the power/knowledge relationship as pertains to confession in a historical context as well as a contemporary problem; he traces back to Lateran IV's institutionalization of mandatory confession a sense of self as "a subject traversed by knowledge as power." Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 99.

discourse, which sustains the model of conventional, predictable efficacy through and against which subjects come to inhabit legibly "confessional" roles. In this chapter, I trace the performative modes and power dynamics associated with the transmission of secrets through readings of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) and John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633). Loosely speaking, these plays mark the chronological span of this project, and while I don't read them as tracing a teleological process, between them they illuminate a persistent anxiety about the fragmentation of confessional subjectivities that runs through early modern drama. Auricular confession figures into both plays as a motif and a plot device, but efficacious shrift is continually deferred. *Romeo and Juliet* manifests the privileged currency of the confessor's role while exposing its inefficacy: plots stem from, rather than remain contained within, the space of this private audition. The play spotlights a dislocation of confessional authority that *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* manifests on a visceral level as it presents competing approaches to intersubjective epistemological power staged around the concealment and revelation of secrets.

The second epigraph, from *Othello*, helps illustrate the stakes of the quest for confessional authority: it, like the play it helped inspire, is propelled by confessions offered, hinted at, imputed, and demanded. The exchange above is a useful starting place because it so powerfully attests to the tremendous symbolic power that adheres to the subject's imputed capacity for secret narratives, a multidirectional power that can be leveraged against others *or* constituted as a liability. Othello invokes a supreme authority to intersubjective knowledge, eliding the process of interlocutory revelation altogether, but this address exposes the anxiety that attends to a posture of confessorial agency marked by a constant need to cite itself. In turn, Iago's reply serves as an important

reminder of the power of the secret keeper— a power that resonates both in his "custody" of an internal narrative symbolized in the heart and in its doubled inaccessibility. Iago bodily withholds his heart from Othello, but even if he didn't, his heart would fail to signify meaningfully.[5] The excess of Iago's refutation of Othello's access to the secrets of his heart is striking: his basic taunt (to invert and paraphrase), "You can't see it, and even if you could, you wouldn't understand," evokes what Stanley Cavell describes as the persistent "unknowableness from outside" that plagues the experience of intersubjective relations on the Shakespearean stage.[6] Furthermore, Iago's response foregrounds the continual deferral of confessional disclosure that runs through these plays, a deferral that hinges on the limitations of meaningful signification when it comes to confession and applies to both attempts to coerce it (as Iago suggests) *and* to the fantasy of complete willful disclosure.[7]

As the displacement of secret thoughts onto the heart demonstrates, efforts to know, or convey oneself to, the "outside" other are often figured in corporeal terms. I use my reading of *'Tis Pity* to put pressure on this breakdown in the signifying structures of confession: narratives of confessional subjectivity lend themselves to somatic symbolization, but these bodily signifiers of inaccessible secrets are in turn texualized. Drawing on the theories of scholars such as Shoshana Felman and Judith Butler, I show how the bodies produced by the discourse of confession expose the irreducible

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[5] A study of the relationship between early modern emblems of the secrets of the heart and the discourse of confession could augment this argument in interesting ways.
[6] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 29.
[7] The concept very concept of complete subjective disclosure could, in a sense, be interpreted in terms of the Lacanian symptom: "that which was foreclosed from the Symbolic comes back in the Real of the symptom."

instabilities and opacities of the subjectivities that discourse attempts to articulate. In pursuing these claims about confessional subjectivity this chapter responds to a long-running scholarly conversation about the dynamics of the relationship between subjectivity and interiority as they are explored on the early modern stage. The concept of interiority imputes to the self a capacity for emotional experience, self-reflexivity, and subjective memory that stands apart from (but is not wholly unrelated to) the outward performances upon which social subjectivity is based. Katharine Eisaman Maus describes early modern subjectivity as being defined in part by this imagined relationship between one's sense of personal inwardness and outwardness—the latter realm of being theoretically "falsifiable" and "unsubstantial" in relation to the former.[8] My discussion of power and confessional communication brings this dynamic into conversation with a concept drawn from Butler's reading of Althusser, addressed in the first chapter of this dissertation, that the idea of a social subject presupposes guilt.[9] Processes of confessional interpellation as they appear in play like *'Tis Pity* demonstrate the dislocations of its operation, while still operating in relation to the presumption of guilt that Butler's argument illuminates. This interplay catalyzes the tensions among the mechanisms of ideological control over confession.

[8] See Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, 2–27.
[9] The logic of interpellation reveals, she says, that, "to become a 'subject' is, thus, to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent." Butler, "'Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All'," 16. Butler interrogates the threads of psychoanalytic thought in Althusser's argument, emphasizing that, "for Althusser, the efficacy of ideology consists in part on the formation of *conscience.* (13; emphasis hers)

Elizabeth Hanson has argued that Renaissance literature reveals a strong "tendency to construe other people in terms of secrets awaiting discovery."[10] The ontological and teleological assumptions of Hanson's formulation provoke some questions of my own: To what extent is confession inevitable, in particular in terms of the paradigms of dramatic form? What does this suggest about the agency of the confessor? What agency attaches to the possession of a secret, and how are those secrets rhetorically constituted and extracted or shared? Finally, what does it mean to posit a full confession? These questions get to the heart of what it means to be a "confessing subject."[11] Confession, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, is a mode of speaking subjectivity and as such functions in terms of the idea of audition. As Roland Barthes reminds us, this implicates both the speaker and the listener—as he says, "listening brings two subjects into relation," a process that works even in a crowd or onstage. He continues, "the injunction to listen is the total interpellation of one subject by another: it places above everything else the quasi-physical contact of the subjects (by voice and ear):

[10]Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2. Her aims in making this claim are explicitly historical; this tendency, she argues, grew during the early modern period as a symptom of broader "epistemic change," the nature of which she explores through genealogical study. She builds on the work of scholars like Catherine Belsey its exploration of the development of modern subjectivity and a Foucauldian approach to the interworkings of power and knowledge in that formation. Hanson's arguments ultimately tend toward an investigation of the production of subjectivity through technologies of state control; Lorna Hutson offers an intriguing counterpoint to the privileging of the power of the interrogator suggested in Hanson's formulation in her exploration of the influence of early modern forensic rhetoric on the presentation of character on the Renaissance stage, a dynamic which she suggests produces a more diffuse form of epistemological authority. Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 64–103.

[11]In the context of my literary material in this chapter, this is something of a pun; it is, however, unintentional.

it creates transference."[12] Barthes' reference to transference resonates in my reading of the self-reflexive inhabitations of paradigmatic spaces of confession that appear in plays like *'Tis Pity.*[13]

Though Iago wields the secrets of his seemingly impenetrable interiority as a weapon, the play also suggests, through Desdemona, that the imputed capacity of others to hold unknown secrets can be a source of vulnerability. The tension between agency and vulnerability that characterizes the possession of secret knowledge animates this chapter. As *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrates, the dislocated authority of auricular confession blurs the semantic distinctions among subjective categories like confidant, co-conspirator, and confessor, each of which imply a different taxonomy of agency, authority, and culpability. The troubling of these categories extends into *'Tis Pity*, only with higher stakes, as the body produced by confessional discourse is implicated in these contests for authority, rendering the secret-keeper vulnerable in visceral ways. Both of these plays invoke auricular confession to develop the plot, as a means of staging self-reflection and establishing normative moral stakes, and to explore the possibilities of recuperative expiation. Auricular confession as an efficacious illocutionary ritual, however, registers in terms of its conspicuous absence on stage. This absence frames contests for confessional authority that are bound to expose its epistemological instability, the irreducible extent of what one does not or cannot know about the secrets of others, or even oneself. Efforts to viscerally manifest this power, which play out in

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[12]Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Howard, Richard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 251.

[13] Transference refers, as I have noted, to the Lacanian concept of the relationship between analyst and analysand through which signification emerges via an intersubjective dynamic.

gendered terms, reveal the inherent the limitation of such an approach to intrasubjective regulation.

Plotting the "Father Confessor" in *Romeo and Juliet*

After the elimination of an institutional demand for it, auricular confession remains a powerful and dynamic symbolic structure on the Renaissance stage. I have explored this dispersal throughout the dissertation, but here (perhaps perversely) I return to the theological realm of confession in a more specific way. This may seem to enact a centralization of institutional confession, but I would like to suggest that the persistent interest in the confessional (in)efficacy of scenes of auricular address that crops up throughout dramas from the period reflects a persistent interest in reimagining intersubjective power in terms of a range of models of authority. In returning to the concept—but not, as this chapter makes clear, the ritual fact—of the auricular confession in this final chapter, I want to undermine any sense that the discursive migration to which I have referred as a teleological end spelling an irrevocable break from legibility in terms of a cultural origin. Rather, I see a persistent palimpsestic interplay between these realms.

The theatrical appropriation of this cultural construct hinges on the tension between disclosure and privacy, and ideological and personal power/knowledge at its heart. The language patterns and power dynamics of confession remain associated with privileged authority, but theatrical representations, in pressing the flexibility and

permeability of its figured boundaries, probe its limits and underlying logic.[14] Brooks gestures to the tantalizing allure that private disclosures such as these retain when he describes "the secret transaction carried out in the closed space of the curtained and grilled confessional box," and though the "box" to which Brooks refers emerged as a result of, and not prior to, the Reformation, the sense of a spatial and social delineation of a privileged site of secret confidence was in broad circulation already.[15] Friars, long conventionally associated with confession, appear on the Renaissance stage, but as one of Shakespeare's most active friar figures, Friar Laurence of *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) makes clear, the nature of the "transaction," to use Brooks' evocative term, of the confessional is subject to redefinition.[16] Against a cultural context that troubles the capacity of a single subject to embody divine confessional agency, Shakespeare's friar illuminates both the authority of the office, and the vexed intersection of human agency and absolute moral authority located in it. *Romeo and Juliet* invokes "shrift" on numerous occasions, but the act itself is never seriously pursued. Romeo, more so than Juliet,

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[14] As Anthony Wayne Lilly points out, "despite the historical shift away from private confession to a priest, religious confessional dialogue is, if not explicit, often encoded within this ostensibly secular dialogue." He gestures, for example, to the appropriation of words like "contrition" and "penance" in secular scenes of confession. Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England," 222.

[15] Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 89. He also describes the scene of more generally as one that issues from "a closed and protected space." The "confessional box as it Brooks describes it, and as it persists in the cultural imaginary, did not emerge fully until the middle of the sixteenth century. However, the association of private, privileged confession with a correspondingly private, privileged physical space resonates in texts from the period in a manner that reinforces a strong cultural link beyond the architectural development of the church confession box, making a useful metaphor, if not an actual fact, of the history of English auricular confession much before the Reformation. See Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, 82.

[16] I base the date I offer for this play on this study: John W. Draper, "The Date of Romeo and Juliet," *The Review of English Studies* 25, no. 97 (January 1, 1949): 55–57.

clearly has a long history of confiding his secrets in the Friar, but it is equally clear that these narratives are offered in furtherance of, rather than to atone for, their content. When the Friar cautions his pupil that "riddling confession finds but riddling shrift," (2.2.56), he unintentionally highlights the tension the play surfaces between the formal discourse of confession that prescribes his relationship with Romeo and the slippages in authority at work in their embodiment of that relationship. The friar's tendency to make plans on behalf of the wayward couple, rather than hearing about them within the regulatory structure of his confessional office underlies Gillian Woods' intriguing suggestion that "confession enables the plot" of *Romeo and Juliet*.[17] This phrasing invites another question worth expanding on: How might "confession," in terms of formal ritual (the mode Woods suggests) rather than, for example, confession*s* or confess*ing* work to enable?

The confessional exchange, itself consistently deferred and fragmented, is deployed instead for its symbolic value; the *paradigms* of confession as a zone of privilege, disclosure, audition, and covert agency frame the Friar's role in the play. *Romeo and Juliet*, like *'Tis Pity She's a Whore,* and a host of thematically related works*,* makes use of an Italian setting that facilitates an approach to the staging of disclosure informed by and making use of the confessional.[18] On the early modern stage, however,

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[17] Woods, Gillian, "New Directions: The Confessional Identities of '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*," in *"Tis Pity She's a Whore: A Critical Guide*, ed. Lisa Hopkins (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 118.

[18]The dynamics of masculine confessional control that emerge in this section, and later in the chapter, resonate through a host of other plays related in theme and setting including tragedies such as *Othello, The Changeling, The Duchess of Malfi, The White Devil,* and, in a different register, *Measure for Measure,* which explicitly moves to investigate slippages among modes of epistemological authority—religious, state, and domestic. Though *Measure for Measure* is set in Vienna, the other plays I reference are set in

the form of "confession" with which religious authority was once associated, as a mode of speech consubstantial with repentance and met with a corresponding performative act of absolution, fails in its conventional illocutionary efficaciousness. In fact, though friars show up with some frequency on the Renaissance stage, I have yet to recognize any instances of intentional, authorized, and efficacious religious confession onstage.[19] This omission is a telling one, suggesting an anxiety about stakes of attempting to stage a ritual associated with such illocutionary power, but perhaps also revealing a skepticism about the validity of a secret ritual of absolution. Friars seem to work the way they do to move the plot forward, stage conflicts of authority, and offer scenes of staged verbal self-reflection and disclosure in a way that makes manifest the exploration of a mode of confession *not* associated with a predictable kind of intrasubjective spiritual transformative power.

On the early modern stage, confession remains, in Woods' words, "a sacramental imperative for Catholic characters"; she cites an example from Webster's *Duchess of Malfi,* one that is more illuminating, I suggest, than Woods herself implies.[20] Cariola's

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Mediterranean Catholic countries—*Romeo and Juliet*'s Verona, *'Tis Pity'*s Parma, and in the coda, *Othello'*s Venice and Cyprus, are, for example, in Italy. This setting is associated in the theatrical imagination of the period with excess plotting, secrecy, and intrigue. It is also a place and time in which auricular confession is a viable means of exploring secrets; the association of this drama with both an Italian setting, and a past (possibly pre-Reformation) era helps spotlight confession as a key form of communication within it.

[19]As I noted in the introduction, *The White Devil* describes a form of confession, and other plays toy with it, but penitential confession in a straightforward capacity is avoided.

[20] She makes this observation in the context of *"Tis Pity*, arguing that Ford's play is all the more notable for its interest in the theological elements of auricular confession. Ford's engagement is indeed notable, but it seems to me that she to some degree flattens the role of the friar figure and confessional speech in other play in service of this point. Woods, Gillian, "New Directions: The Confessional Identities of 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," 118.

plea to her murderers, "if you kill me now/ I am damned. I have not been at confession / This two years" (4.2.243-245), manifests the confessional demand and indicates that its salvific power remains legible. The confessional obligation registers, however, in terms of its lack: Cariola raises the point in reference to her lapses. Deferred, elided, appropriated, or feigned, theatrical instances of auricular confession signify most powerfully in the unpredictable realm of the perlocutionary, the capacity of speech acts to, as Austin puts it, "produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of its audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons."[21] Austin foregrounds the importance of convention in securing the necessary intelligibility and authority conditions of the *illocutionary*, but as Stanley Cavell persuasively argues in his reading of Austin, the perlocutionary depends on convention as well: for perlocutionary effects, for example, comforting, persuading, frightening, intimidating, etc, the parties involved must share a related, if not wholly consonant, understanding of what a speech act in context ought to, or could, imply.[22] To extrapolate from Cavell's assessment, perlocutionary force works insofar as it is intelligible in terms of the symbolic systems that organize and implicate affect in subjective relationships. This is significant for us here in that the persistent axiomatic intelligibility of confession informs the stakes of the fractured iterations I describe. The passionate utterance, that branch of the perlocutionary that Cavell describes in terms of its intrasubjective demand, also applies here: in invoking the affective and spiritual demands of the confessional obligation, Cariola issues an implicit request for a validating response.[23] Cariola's mention of shrift is offered up as a

[21] Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 110.
[22] Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow*, 172–182.
[23] Ibid., 185.

performative, intended to persuade Bosola to prolong her life through this invocation of a higher spiritual imperative. Bosola's terse reply, "When?", seems to register the intelligibility of this demand—or of Cariola's failures in the face of it. This scene also reflects the tenuousness of the demand implied in the intersubjectively referential passionate utterance—it is subject to refusal. Indeed, Cariola is not successful, and she is killed regardless or her pleas.[24]

Friar Laurence, in *Romeo and Juliet*, is characterized in relation to the residue of the cultural expectations dictating the proper office of the confessor. His meddling, his council, his plans, and his failures all resonate in relation to an emblematic role that, both in the reception of the play and within the play itself, evinces the persistent legibility of the sanctity of the confessional in a post-Reformation England even as it manifests the diffuse effects and insurmountable limitations of that power. Given these tensions, it is not particularly surprising that the Friar provokes a broad range of interpretive reactions from critics: He has been described, among other things, as "bumbling," "manipulative," "wise" and of "unquestioned" integrity.[25] Marjorie Garber condemns the Friar as being

[24] As Leah Marcus indicates, this could be taken as an expression of shock at her long absence from confession, but it could also impatience at the executioner's delay. Bosola's comment immediately she is killed, about her safe "credit," is interesting insofar as it imputes a confessorial bond to both death and the executioner's relationship to his object. John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Leah Sinanoglou Marcus (A&C Black, 2009).

[25] Anthony Wayne Lilly reads him as "bumbling and ineffectual," a characterization that he suggests resonates with a broader resistance in early modern theater to taking seriously the staging of auricular confession, a stance somewhat at odds with the contentions of Beckwith and Ruth Nevo that he is a figure of self-conscious moderation aimed at countering the effects of destructive impetuousness. Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England," 220; Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 76; Ruth Nevo, "Tragic Form in Romeo and Juliet," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 9, no. 2 (April 1, 1969): 250, doi:10.2307/449778. Holland's characterization of the Friar as a man whose "integrity is unquestioned" with good but "inadequate" intentions largely accords with

marked by a subjective stasis that reveals the threat of an embodiment of self-aware spiritual agency divorced from divine efficaciousness when she suggests that "within the context of Shakespeare's plays, though, the Friar's plan is an aspect of his own vainglory, an opportunity for him to preside over and perform, a naturalistic resurrection."[26] Garber's assessment of the Friar's personal agency in terms of his religious office echoes critiques common in early modern anti-Catholic texts. The conventional connection between friars and confession subtends a characterization of occupants of that office in terms of their potential for the misuse of power associated with confession for subterfuge and moral corruption more generally.[27] A primary source for Shakespeare's play, the

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that of Martha Tuck Rozett, who first describes him as "wise and manipulative," but later indicates that his plan to "plan to extricate the heroine" from her problems is thwarted by the fact that he is an "ineffectual manipulator; she links his role to a familiar comic type associated with pomposity and a lack of efficaciousness." Martha Tuck Rozett, "The Comic Structures of Tragic Endings: The Suicide Scenes in Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (July 1, 1985): 155–6, doi:10.2307/2871190; William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Peter Holland (New York: Penguin, 2000), xl. The sense to which the Friar can ever be expected to extricate Juliet from the debacle in which she finds herself is called into question by the feminist reading the play that locates the tragedy in the destructive powers inherent to patriarchal order. Marjorie Garber indicates that his limitations stem in part from stasis—he is "established as a fixed type"; a condition she also attrbutes to the Nurse. Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Random House Digital, Inc., 2005), 196. On a lighter note, but not less suggestive of the narratives of reception associated with the play, a recent musical comedy, *The People Vs. Friar Laurence, the Man who Killed Romeo and Juliet*, puts his culpability center stage, exploring, albeit through pastiche and parody, the extent to which he can be seen as innocent or well-meaning in the tragedy. The play is described in a *Chicago Sun-Times* review as ""load of laughs." Ron West and Phil Swann, *The People Vs. Friar Laurence, the Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 2010).

[26] Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, 208 She notes that the sleeping potion is commonly deployed in later comedies, but in these it tends to signal "a change in the status of knowlege and understanding."

[27] This criticism took on, at times, a particularly anti-fraternalist tone, which surfaced a particular antipathy for the figure of the friar-confessor. In Protestant theater, Sarah Beckwith notes, "friars are conventionally associated with pretense, disguise, and deceit," qualities that manifest themselves in particularly troubling ways through their role in

1552 narrative poem by Arthur Brooke, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet,* reflects this characteristic presupposition. In the preface Brooke condemns the lovers for "neglecting the authoritie and advise of parents and frendes, conferring their principall counsels with dronken gossyppes, and superstitious friers (the naturally fitte instrumentes of unchastitie) [and for] using auriculer confession (the key of whoredome, and treason) for furtheraunce of theyr purpose."[28] Shakespeare offers a rather more sympathetic version of the Friar, who is generally well-meaning and sympathetic; furthermore, characters in the play, including figures of familial and state authority, evince respect and due reference for him and his role.[29]

Brooke's suspicion of auricular confession reflects the fundamental Protestant critique that the ritual blurred the personal authority of the priest with the divine authority of God. The substance of his condemnation, however, manifests a different form of dangerous fraternal agency: as "principall counsel" to the lovers, along with the nurse, the Friar supplants what Brookes suggests should be the rightful supremacy of the

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eliciting and responding to confession. Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 75. Beckwith's literary arguments focus specifically on forgiveness in late Shakespearean drama, and consequently, she traces a disappearance of the friar linked to the Duke's appropriation of the role in *Measure for Measure*. The friar does not, however, disappear from the early modern stage, as my reading of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* demonstrates.

[28] The poem itself offers a rather more sympathetic depiction of the Friar than that suggested in the preface, suggesting that its strong words may have been at least partly a posture to remain on the good side of Protestant critics. Arthur Brooke, *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 238:04 (London: In aedibus Richardi Tottelli, 1562).

[29] This trait in Shakespearean characterization of the friar is often invoked in biographical criticism aimed at his own religious inclinations, particularly amidst scholars interested in the links between the playwright and recusant Catholicism. That thread of interpretation is beyond the scope of this investigation, but for more on the connection, see Peter Milward, *Shakespeare's Religious Background* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1973), 76.

"authoritie and advice of parents."[30] In effect, however, the yoking of the Friar with the Nurse, both in Brooke's poem and in much of the scholarly corpus, exemplifies the cultural transformation of the fraternal role; the friar is traditionally a solitary figure of study and shrift—and to some degree, Friar Laurence fits that mold—but he is also recast as nursemaid and childish confidant. Shakespeare's Friar refutes Brooke's condemnation of his office in one crucial regard: far from being a proponent of unchastity, he demonstrates an active support for and commitment to the continuance of chaste marriage. This pursuit, however, exposes the vexed scripts of moral authority in the play, undermining paternal, and eventually and by extension, regal rule. Coppélia Kahn cites Hartley Coleridge in describing the troubling "paternal despotism" that emerges in efforts to regulate the feuding society; amidst the dysfunctional patriarchal order, she posits the Friar as an alternate father figure for Romeo "outside that system."[31] Sarah Beckwith situates the Friar as a benevolent alternative to that symbolic realm altogether, arguing that the figure in Shakespeare tends to "benignly circumvent the problems of paternal authority."[32] Friar Laurence's goals are benign insofar as they are well-meaning: he

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[30] The "frendes" to which Brookes refers seems to indicate an extension of paternally sanctioned sociality. As I have already suggested, for example, the Friar functions more as a friend than as an efficacious confessor.

[31] Coppélia Kahn, "Coming of Age in Verona," *Modern Language Studies* 8, no. 1 (December 1, 1977): 13–14, doi:10.2307/3194631. Hunter and Lichtenfels refer to the Nurse and the Friar as "agents of the young people" without qualification, a generally apt attribution that signals the Friar's loss of confessional control. Lynette Hunter and Peter Lichtenfels, *Negotiating Shakespeare's Language in Romeo and Juliet: Reading Strategies from Criticism, Editing and the Theatre* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009).

[31] In her influential feminist account of the extent to which the dictates

[32] Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 76. Beckwith makes this claim to frame her own arguments about the deployment of the figure of the friar in the Duke's abdication and disguise in *Measure for Measure.* I note Beckwith again, as a scholar who works through questions of confessional efficaciousness and performative

agrees to help Romeo only because he hopes, "this alliance may so happy prove / To turn your households' rancour to pure love" (2.2.91-92). The transformative effect traditionally attributed to the agency of the father-confessor is no longer confined in this formulation to the goals of regulatory/salvific shrift. Friar Laurence's inclination to exercise an authorial agency in the plot that exceeds his office and corresponds to a private (if public-spirited) agenda allows Romeo and Juliet to address him with their secrets not as a confessor but as a co-conspirator bound to keep their secret. Though his goals are generally consonant with a patriarchal society privileging chaste marriage, the Friar's actions show that the "circumvention" of a regulatory apparatus, *particularly* in service of its own ends, comes at a price.[33]

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agency that are consonant with my own. I recognize the converges of structural and thematic elements that underlie them, I question a number of her conclusions. She reads Shakespeare's depiction of Friar Laurence, along with the friar in *Much Ado About Nothing*, in a benevolent light that is, at its roots, consonant with my own, but she attributes to both a curative effect associated with a church "unsubordinated to the state and capable of acting quite independently of the state's jurisdiction," a claim that seems at odds with the dynamics of the play itself, not least when Friar Laurence confesses to, and is pardoned by, Escalus at the end of the play. She also notes these friars are "trusters of time," which, while certainly true of Laurence becomes problematic in light of the clear suggestion in the play that time, or subjects in relation to time, ought not be trusted. Timing gone awry structures the suicides in the tomb, and the Friar himself first arrives too late, then leaves too soon, to prevent the tragedy he has set in motion. Rozett reads the Friar's fearfulness in this scene in a darkly humorous light that suggests the comic roots of the character as a stage figure Rozett, "The Comic Structures of Tragic Endings," 155. Both the temporal ineptitude and the fearfulness suggested in this scene undermine the posture of sorrowful, but noble, contrition that he adopts at the play's end.

[33] In her influential feminist account of the extent to which the dictates of normative gender roles prescribe the tragedy, Coppélia Kahn notes, "the marital bond," associated on a symbolic level with membership in society in Shakespeare's plays, "may tragically conflict with paternal allegiance." Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 82. The marital bond is associated with Friar, as well as with the lovers, not only in his participation in subterfuge to achieve it, but also in his authority to carry it out through marrying the pair.

Especially in the absence of the institutional sanction for that form of self-authorizing performative agency, the discourse of confession emerges as a dislocated technology of heteronormative power structures in two interrelated ways: confessor figures are authorized in terms of a network of masculine inhabitations of ideological power, and husbands, fathers, and the lovers alike appropriate the language of the confessional to assert their own intersubjective authority. Juliet gestures to the link between the regulatory power of the father and the spiritual authority of the Friar, the "ghostly father" when she announces she is going, "Having displeased my father, to Laurence' cell / To make confession and be absolved" (3.5.234-5).[34] This conflation of spiritual reconciliation and filial piety relies on the metonymic assumption that confession itself hinges on that which displeases the father. Whereas the logic of auricular confession ties absolution in the confessional to the divine Father, this line implies a causal link between Capulet's displeasure and Juliet's trip to the Friar's cell. Confession signifies in terms of the father, but it does so in new and potentially uneasy ways: the role is authorized by its association with the symbolic concept, or name, of the Father, which Lacan positions as the very "basis of symbolic order;" subtending the function of normalizing ideology through which subjectivity emerges.[35] Juliet's lines imply a symbolic link between the confirmation of paternal authority and the Friar's expiation, but in this line she refutes the regulatory efficaciousness to which she alludes, as does the play more generally. Juliet uses the promise of shrift as a cover story for the continuance

[34]She delivers this line to the Nurse, who has just advocated for Juliet's acquiescence to her family's desire for a marriage arrangement with Paris. It signals a break between Juliet and her former ally; from this point, both Romeo and Juliet rely on the confidence of the Friar.

[35]See Jacques Lacan and Bruce Fink, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 64.

of her plans to marry Romeo *against* her father's will. On a structural level, marriage replaces confession in the play as a transformative ritual, and Friar Laurence pursues it as a telos of Romeo's disclosure of illicit desire as an alternative to efficaciously eliciting repentance.

The social privilege and the presumed neutrality of the space of spiritual confession enables the plots in one especially practical way: Friar Laurence's cell appears to be the only socially sanctioned space available to both Romeo and Juliet. Even Juliet, who is afforded very little social independence by virtue of her gender and age, has protected access to it. Shrift, however, is but a means to an end, facilitating, if not openly endorsing, the kind of dangerous license that Brooke feared. Juliet must, Romeo reminds the nurse, "devise / Some means to come to shrift" (2.3.169-170) so the two can meet; a utilization of confession that suggests that the duplicity associated with conventional opacity extends from religious figures to infect the confessants as well.[36] Though it is conflated in the popular imaginary with abuse or appropriation, the confessional relationship retains its privilege.[37] An exchange between Juliet and her eager fiancé Paris

[36]Woods highlights the ideological tensions embedded in a plot that substitutes a ritual forbidden in the local context of the plot—marriage—for a ritual viewed with suspicion in a post-Reformation context when she concludes that through Friar Laurence, "Catholic assumptions about confessional scheming… ambiguously translate into romantic plots that prize chaste marriage." Woods, Gillian, "New Directions: The Confessional Identities of '*Tis Pity She's a Whore,"* 118.

[37]The obvious social currency of the symbolic power of the relationship between confessor and confessant in the play resonates with Peter Brooks' reiteration of the persistent assumption that "bearing one's soul to [confessors including the priest or the psychotherapist] is good for the individual's spiritual or psychic well-being, and thus, as a result, society as a whole." The easy slippage he allows between practitioners of the confessional box and the analyst's chair betrays the fact that he speaking from a modern vantage point, but the sense that confessional speech might be mobilized toward social good in ways other than through shrift emerges in the play as a possibility, only to be revoked in practice. Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 81.

outside the Friar's cell manifests both the currency of this privilege and the masculine anxieties it provokes:

> Paris: Come you to make confession to this father?
> Juliet: To answer that I should confess to you.
> Paris: Do not deny to him that you love me.
> Juliet: I will confess to you that I love him.
> Paris: And will ye, I am sure, that you love me.
> Juliet: If I do so, it will be of more price,
> Bring spoke behind your back, than to your face. (4.1.22-28).

Paris' general tediousness and presumptuousness emerge in this scene all the more clearly because of his effort to control Juliet's speaking subjectivity, prescribing not only her affection but also its confessional signification.[38] He demonstrates the persistent desire in husbands and lovers for control over feminine subjectivity that *'Tis Pity* will excavate (literally and figuratively) in more detail. This exchange exposes a contested hierarchy of inter- and intrasubjective epistemological authority over knowledge, power, and articulation. Paris eventually accedes to Juliet's insistence on a confidence with the Friar that supersedes Paris' own epistemological rights as husband-to-be, forbearing to "disturb devotion" (4.1.41). In displacing the direct question of her love, and concomitant devotion, into confessional language, however, Paris associates this form of utterance with socially sanctioned truth while also implicating the Friar in a triangulated communication of love, obviating the immediacy of the bond he tries to assert.

Juliet's "confession" of love for the Friar is part of a pattern of evasive answers that call into question Paris's own interrogative authority, and further, it doubles down on the stakes of the bond depicted between confessor and confessant. The somewhat

[38]Kahn notes that Juliet has a tendency to deploy equivocation in situations in which the regulatory structure disallows the truth she might speak. Kahn associated her embrace of the possibility of death with increased linguistic resolve. Kahn, "Coming of Age in Verona," 16.

paradoxical suggestion that words of affection would mean more delivered in secret to the Friar than they would to Paris himself evinces the power of the transferential bond, emblematic, Lacan suggests, of the manner in which "man's desire finds its meaning in the other's desire."[39] Dramatic inhabitations of confessional relationships reveal the intersubjective, as opposed to merely symbolic, relations between confessor and confessants that inevitably emerge in intimate spaces of disclosure. Transference, along with counter-transference, helps illuminate the stakes of that bond for confessional subject formation. As Jean Laplanche explains, the two forces illuminate a dynamic *relationship* between, to use the terms specific to psychoanalysis, analyst and analysand, necessitating a recognition of the fact that the subjectivity of the analyst, or to appropriate the term, the confessor, affects the processes of the exchange.[40] The Friar, whose plans subvert the paternal authority in favor of marriage, comes to stand not only as an alternative father figure, but, also, at moments, as competitor to or substitute for the husband. This dynamic emerges first in the implicit contest for confessional authority between Paris and the Friar, but comes back in a more subtle way in the play's final scene to signal the failure of the Friar's attempted marriage plot. When Juliet awakens in a tomb that spatially recalls the Friar's cell and asks, "Where is my Romeo," the first word of response is the Friar's "I" (5.3.150-1).

As Martin Wiggins has identified, depictions of confessors expose anxiety that the aural power of the confessor stood to make them accessories, though perhaps unwilling ones, in all manner of crime and immorality which could be restrained or punished if it

[39]Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 58.
[40]Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 1st ed. (W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), 92–3. Laplanche points out that this can occur either consciously or subconsciously.

were only known about.[41] I advance the question of the Friar as an accessory to suggest that Shakespeare's play illuminates the threatening ends of the Friar as a supplement to patriarchal authority.[42] The supplement, for Derrida, "adds only to replace"; in adding to the structures of authority in Verona secured and challenged on the grounds of kinship and patriarchy, even with the political aim of solidifying that structure, the Friar manifests its insufficiency.[43] The supplementary value of the Friar resonates generally in terms of his doctrinal role, and is further complicated in *Romeo and Juliet* by the fact that he frames his plots less in terms of spiritual good and more in terms of his own political goals and the manipulations of his young interlocutors. Laurence is successful in his aim, but not through the means he so laboriously intends—rather, the *failure* of the Friar's plots produces the scene of reconciliation (albeit still politicized and competitive) between the families at the play's end.[44]

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[41] Martin Wiggins, "Introduction," in *"Tis Pity She's a Whore* (London: Methuen Drama, 2003), 28.

[42] Robert Appelbaum has discussed the relationship between the agential constructions of the Friar and Prince in lights of what he sees as the play's "compromised paternalism." He discusses the Friar as a "self-appointed supplement to Prince Escalus in his aim to bolster the social order as well as to minister to it. But the friar is in many respects the play's most salient example of a man who gets it wrong, who fails to achieve his objectives, although he ultimately finds that his one objective of reuniting the Capulets and the Montagues has been achieved for him, partly as a consequence of his own mistakes." Robert Appelbaum, "'Standing to the Wall': The Pressures of Masculinity in Romeo and Juliet," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (October 1, 1997): 267, doi:10.2307/2871016.

[43] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 145–6. Indeed, all manner of expressions of authority tend to be ineffective in the play plagued both by insufficiency and belatedness. See Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, xxxv.

[44] Tempting though it might be to attribute the suicides at the play's end wholly to the machinations of their misguided advisor, as Carla Freccero has incisively pointed out in a recent queer reading of the play, the play animates "the death drive at the heart of erotic politics." On a structural level, she assesses the play's refusal to allow "futurity and maturity" to its protagonists. On a symbolic level, the refutation of self-exploration seen in the play's obviation of confession seems to bear a productive connection to this mode

Like most of the plays discussed in this dissertation, *Romeo and Juliet* ends with a scene of confession; what is peculiar about it, though, is that it is delivered by the "ghostly confessor" himself. Faced with the tragic failure of his machinations intended to reunite Romeo and Juliet, he stands before the survivors and provides a thorough narrative of the events that produced the tragic outcome still visible on stage. This is not the first time in the play a character stands before the a recognized authority to explain acts of violence; Peter Holland has identified the structural parallels between the Friar's speech in act five and two previous explanatory speeches offered by Benvolio (in 1.1 to Montague and 3.1 to the Prince and both houses). The Friar's speech includes a litany of first person actions, both material and performative: he admits, for example, "I married them," "gave I her… A sleeping potion," "I writ to Romeo," "All alone… Came I to take her," and "I entreated her come forth," all of which serve to underscore his dynamic personal role in the tragedy.[45] Holland suggests that whereas Benvolio had "little personal stake in his accounts," Friar Laurence performs a recapitulation driven by guilt.[46] The Friar does leave himself open to guilt, but he posits it in conditional terms, leaving it to his auditors to determine "if aught in this / Miscarried by [his] fault" (5.3.266-7). The public narrative of explanation and culpability that Laurence offers resonates in terms of the cultural and theatrical paradigm of ameliorative public confession explored in the previous chapter, but in this case, the public *mea culpa* intersects with another confessional paradigm defined more in terms of shared secrets

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of queered fatalism. Freccero, Carla, "Romeo and Juliet Love Death," in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Madhavi Menon (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 304.

[45] The speech continues from 5.3.229 – 5.3.269.

[46] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, xxxix.

than in public narratives. In publicizing the secrets of the dead lovers, the Friar is going against the confidentiality associated with his office. The Prince, rather than the Friar, offers the version of onstage absolution, pardoning him on the basis of his reputation as a "holy man" (5.3.270). In assuming the authority to hear and pardon, the Prince retroactively reinforces the confessional nature of Laurence's speech, while the Friar-confessor's role as public confessant throws into vivid relief the stakes of his agential role in the lovers' secret plots, which produced the spectacle of death presented onstage.

The Friar calls attention to his own conflicting approaches to confessional subjectivity in the way in which he frames the explanatory narrative. He stands, he announces, "both to impeach and purge, / Myself condemnèd and myself excused" (5.2.225-6).[47] These lines suggest parallel channels of confessional agency, and their implied temporal and causal configuration indicates that Friar Laurence has already acted, in essence, as his own confessor, and *only* having done so submits to the secular authority of his auditors. His role within the play up to the point of his final speech suggests an understanding of confession as a largely empty signifier, constantly deferred and displaced from the paradigm of efficacious penitence and morally transformative effects. As we have seen, however, signifiers of confession abound in early modern theater, and confessional speech operates on a number of valances apart from the presumption of heavenly authority. In announcing and privileging his capacity to "excuse" himself for the failures of his confessional role, *Romeo and Juliet's* Friar animates the irreducible instabilities associated with attempts to inhabit the symbolic role of the confessor. This is particularly resonant in light of a cultural landscape in which the

[47] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*.

ability to authorize confession, and invoke it for absolution is appropriable by virtue of the unpredictable effects of potentially self-authorizing performative agency.

Refuting the Confessional in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633), written almost forty years after *Romeo and Juliet*, echoes the earlier play's plot of doomed lovers pursuing an illicit desire, confiding only in a friar and a maid.[48] As I suggested in the previous section, the friar's very presence helps foreground the semiotic and social structures through which confession comes to function in the play as a symbol and a mode of utterance. This play, however, explores the possibility of efficacious confession only to defer in relation to a larger plot that hinges on the discontents of knowing secrets, and raises the stakes on the friar's potential as a competing confessor to the lover or husband. Whereas Friar Laurence's plots aim to join two families through a socially problematic dynastic alliance, Friar Bonaventura of *'Tis Pity* attempts to keep a family apart: the incestuous love between sister and brother Annabella and Giovanni at the center of the play's plot emblematizes its thematic interest in the scandal of inwardness and horrors of revelation.[49] Like

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[48] *'Tis Pity She's a Whore,* arguably the last major tragedy before the closing of the theaters, and certainly one of the most famous from the Caroline era, was published in 1633 and first performed by Queen Henrietta's Men sometime in the four years previous. Ford's first extant work is *The Witch of Edmonton*, focus of the last chapter, to which he contributed the bulk of the Frank Thorney subplot: the interest in illicit love, morality, and conscience evidenced in that work extends to *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, but the later play demonstrates a more extreme interest in scenes of confession, and furthermore, in the ways in which those exchanges make use the imputed authenticity of the body.

[49] Judith Haber points out the resonances between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Measure for Measure* in light of a third play that I have mention in this chapter, though to lesser extent, *The Duchess of Malfi.* She suggests that Giovanni attempts to "enact a fantasy of absolute union" that she ties to Ferdinand's role in The *Duchess of Malfi*, which she indicates is itself in part a revision of Romeo's role in *Romeo and Juliet*. Though Haber

Othello, another Shakespearean play to which it is often linked, *'Tis Pity* puts pressure on the conditions for agency and intelligibility in the circulation of secrets and the modes of their disclosure or discovery.[50] Confession, as an intersubjective mode of address and as a cultural ritual, pervades the play and is bookended by scenes of guilty disclosure. From the start, characters in the play construe confession in visceral terms, as critics such as Michael Neill, Carla Mazzio, Anthony Wayne Lilly, and Jennifer A. Low have demonstrated. The play's treatment of the exposure of secrets and bodily subjectivity manifests what Neill labels a deep-seated "anxiety about the maddening opacity of the human body."[51] The figurative somatization of confessional subjectivity is violently

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indicates that the connections among these plays are not often the subject of critical investigation; I think *The Duchess of Malfi* is a play that indeed exists in fascinating relation to the two I discuss more fully here. Judith Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 102.

[50] See Wiggins, "Introduction," 5–6. Wiggins also lists Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605) and *Antonio and Mellida* (1600) and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1586) as antecedents. The spectacle of gruesome and incomprehensible confession that Hieronimo pursues bears a particularly interesting thematic resonance to this scene. A number of things point to the play's nature as a period piece, set in the mid-sixteenth century: for example, though guns were frequently present in dramas of the period, in *'Tis Pity,* they are absent in favor of knives and rapiers. Martin Wiggins also notes the reference made to a codpiece; an article of clothing that was decidedly out of fashion by the time Ford was writing. Wiggins notes that Ford's decision to set the play in the past was probably at least partly rooted in the tendency in Renaissance literary theory to associate comedic plots with fiction and tragedy with real events. Setting his play in the past helps obscure its unreality. Though the Italian setting makes auricular confession, and the friar figure, a viable means of staging self-reflection, the play's historical setting could help reinforce the connection for the audience. Ibid., 7. All citations from the text are from this edition.

[51] Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 135; See also 102–200. This is a wide-ranging exploration of the way death is works in tragedy. The second chapter of the book speaks specifically to the way anatomy and mortality operate in relation to one another in the period, especially given developments in dissection and medicine in the period. His attention to the "emerging discourse of interiority" that presents the human body as a "container of 'secrets'" is particularly compelling given my own interest in the discourses of confession, and in particular with the ways in which anxieties about the secrets within

literalized in the play's gruesome climax, when Giovanni appears before a horrified court (and, also, we might imagine, audience) with the heart of his sister/lover Annabella impaled on his sword. The heart, projected throughout the play as the object of confessional desire and the locus of subjective truths, is revealed only to be exposed for the "impenetrable enigma," to quote Neill once more, that it always has been.[52]

The efficacy of confessional exchanges is limited by anxiety about the intrinsic insufficiency of language to communicate feeling, but the literalization of bodily tropes intended to supplement for that insufficiency ultimately proves to compound, rather than correct, the problem. I posit that the enigmatic aspect of the heart is the very point—reflective of subject positions that cannot be completely shared, and by the same token, controlled. In her reading of speech act theory that synthesizes the theoretical approaches of J. L. Austin and Lacan, Felman emphasizes the extent to which subjectivity is only as meaningful insofar as it can be expressed in language.[53] For confession, as for performative language as Felman describes it, the referent is produced by language as its

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people play out in intersubjective arenas. Such discussions of subjectivity that center on the fissures of corporeality and visibility resonate with arguments made by Michael Schoenfeldt, who has described the early modern evolution of a powerful tendency to "locate our psychological inwardness in corporeal terms;" I am interested in the extent to which the productive conflation of signifying systems manifested in this rhetorical move comes to shape the theatrical imagination of confession in the early modern period. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*, 8.

[52] Neill argues that the his particular scene of dismemberment takes to its "frenzied extreme the anatomical will-to-knowledge that informs the bodily dismemberments of the Renaissance stage; but what it discovers is only an impenetrable enigma." This quality makes *"Tis Pity*'s scene of corporeal disclosure a particularly violent manifestation of the "anatomizing gaze and its complementary fascination with both psychological interiors and the secrets of the social body" that he associates with earlier plays like *Othello* and Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling.* Neill, *Issues of Death*, 373, 168.

[53] See Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 50–60.

own *effect.*"[54] This play explores the referent of confession in terms of the embodied guilty subject. The conventional frame of utterance that produces it is subject to prescription and manipulation, and in this case that struggle plays played out in terms of the textualized/visualized interior body. The contests of intersubjective control over the hermeneutics of the confessing body play out on gendered lines: as Judith Haber says argued, the play offers a space of masculine control that "it critiques from within"; she locates a "fundamentally fantasmatic" quality in its treatment of tragic masculinity.[55] I build on the presuppositions of this argument as I interrogate the tensions that emerge amidst within its depiction of a social hierarchy dominated by male confessors. This builds on the dynamic that emerged in the previous chapters investigation of *The Witch of Edmonton*, but in whereas the previous chapter explores the othered female witch in relation to the male bigamist/murderer, the following reading interrogates the discourse of patriarchal confessional authority as it coalesces around a hyper-domesticated embodied female subject. The invocation of the interlocutory expectations of auricular confession along with the description of particularly embodied mode of understanding confession at the start of Ford's play frames its broader preoccupation with the irreducible failure of fantasies of subjective epistemological control.

The concerns about what can be hidden, what can be seen, and what can be meaningfully signified that reverberate through the play underscore the bait and switch of its stagings of auricular confession. Three scenes, including the one that opens the play, begin in the context of confession to Friar Bonaventura, but they all pick up immediately

[54] Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*.
[55] Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England*, 105.

after it has apparently taken place, starting with the Friar's reactions.[56] Though Lilly has made note of the role of these scenes in establishing the motif of confession in the play, he implies that the "real work of the play's intervention in the discourse of convention" is elsewhere, in the dynamics that emerge between Annabella and the competing wills to confessional authority manifested in Giovanni and Soranzo, her alternate love interest and eventual husband.[57] In this chapter, I build on Lilly's discussion of the significance of those heteronormative relationships for the discourse of early modern confession, but I suggest that the Friar and his role in scenes that probe the efficacy, boundaries, and intra- and intersubjective ramifications of confessional disclosure are inextricably bound up in the play's broader exploration of the ends of epistemological subjective control. The belated framing of these scenes of auricular confession has a somewhat paradoxical set of effects: it lends a sense of privilege to a confessional speech, and suggests anxiety about the staging of the auricular ritual. It also, however, signals an evacuation of its transformative efficacy. Near the end of the play, the Friar successfully hears Annabella's confession onstage, but he does so not in his recognized role as confessor, but rather as an unauthorized auditor of her reflections. In shifting the focus of the confession exchange to its aftermath, the play renders the Friar less as a symbolic figure and more as a subject implicated—often, he suggests, against his will—in secret intrigue and sin.

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[56]The scenes are 1.1, 2.5, and 3.6. The Friar's name, which loosely translates to "good fortune" reads somewhat ironically; in the context of the play, it emphasizes the Friar's connection to luck and chance, rather than to heavenly will. In terms of the Bonaventura's disappearance from the end of the play, it also reinforces the role of his own self-interest in his actions as confessor.

[57]Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England" (Tufts University, 2007), 279.

In opening immediately *after* Giovanni's confession, the play works to reproduce in its audience the same desire for and anxiety around the epistemology of secrecy that traverses the play. The incestuous desire that he has, presumably, just revealed has to be belatedly reconstructed through the reactions of the confessant and Friar, through the latter's horror and the former's rhetorical explication of a moral paradigm justifying incest as natural, acceptable, and idealized.[58] By declining to stage the moment of confession itself, the play reinforces the privilege of its claim to privacy. These structural lacunae spotlight the potential threat of their content, incest itself, to speaking subjectivity. The incest prohibition functions for Lacan less as a literal, physical injunction than as a mode of understanding the symbolic instantiation of subjectivity, but this play literalizes the relationship between the two, positing incest as a topic that evades linguistic communication doubly—both because of the fundamental moral and social unspeakability that Bonaventura attributes to it, and because it represents a desire that exceeds meaningful signification.

The Friar's first lines evince the unsettling power of this type of disclosure, and in addition, position him as a rather contradictory confessor: he is admonishing Giovanni to stop speaking.[59] His vocal effort to contain Giovanni's speech goes against the logic of

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[58]For example, he claims that their shared parentage makes them, "each to other bound / So much the more by nature (1.1.30-31).

[59]His first line "Dispute no more in this," reflects Giovanni's tendency to approach confession as an intellectual exercise, and the question of incest a topic for academic disputation. Wiggins explains that this is indicative of the play's reflection of a more prevalent intellectual conflict in 17th century England between Christian doctrine and secular humanism. Wiggins, "Introduction," 12–16. This same conflict informs Gillian Woods' approach to the play, as she uses the recurrent scenes of confession to explore the play's modeling of the intersections of relationships among characters and between specific characters and concepts of the universe and God. Woods, Gillian, "New

confiteri, or the confessional mandate that speakers verbally expose themselves fully; this effort to halt speech is in tension with Giovanni's suggestion that he has confessed completely—together they frame the play's persistent implication that efforts to inhabit the paradigmatic roles of confession are always both insufficient *and* in excess of the demands of the ritual. The Friar's reluctance to hear confession evinces anxiety about the power of the verbalization of certain sins; he indicates that outside the proper context of redemption, the expression of incestuous desire is itself dangerous (rather than a precondition of salvation), as when he cautions, "Heaven admits no jest" (1.1.4). Furthermore, his resistance to Giovanni's narrative reflects his own implication in the confession as its auditor. Accordingly, he goes so far as to reject audition altogether, telling the young man, "I may not hear it" (1.1.12). Later, when Giovanni has—apparently, though the audience again does not hear the scene of admission[60]—told the Friar of the realization of his relationship with Annabella, he replies:

> Thou hast told a tale whose every word
> Threatens eternal slaughter to the soul;
> I'm sorry I have heard it. Would my ears
> Had been one minute deaf before the hour
> That thou camest to me!" (2.3.1-5)

Directions: The Confessional Identities of '*Tis Pity She's a Whore,"* in *"Tis Pity She's a Whore: A Critical Guide*, ed. Lisa Hopkins (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010). She argues, "In form and function, this first confession stages the play's central conflict of will and repression." I follow her in insisting on the extent to which the dynamics established in this scene reverberate throughout the play, but I hope to trouble the distinction she makes between will and repression in her reading of the scene in showing how both characters are implicated in, and to some extent refute, the norms of the exchange.

[60] In repeatedly positioning the audience in terms of what they do not hear, Ford reinforces the titillating elements of the desire for knowledge already suggested in the play's subject matter.

Bonaventura's lines fail to distinguish clearly between the threat to the speaker or the listener manifested in the utterance; his emphasis on his role as the subject, the "I" of the act of audition betrays the suspicion that Giovanni's words could have a dangerous effect on the man who hears them: it is unclear, by the Friar's words, which "soul" is threatened by the disclosure. The Friar's agency is circumscribed by the privacy associated with his office—he has no recourse to purge himself of information he has described in terms of dangerous disease. This resistance to hearing confession betrays a more pervasive suspicion in the play, and indeed in early modern drama more generally, that the ritual, while powerful, can't work in a manner that efficaciously meets the threat of the sins uttered within its structuring framework.

The Friar offers Giovanni an elaborate script for penitence that matches conventional tropes of confessional embodiment with affective modes. In other words, he offers a mode of spiritual cleansing that depends on embodiment more than on genuine feeling: "fall down / On both thy knees, and grovel on the ground / Cry to thy heart, wash every word thou utters't / In tears, and if't be possible, in blood," (1.1.69-73). The tropes he invokes here and throughout the speech encapsulate those familiar from popularly circulated accounts of confession, and what was by that point a well-established generic lineage for staged penitence. This answer to Giovanni's disclosure is a "prescription" in two senses of the word: he issues, in a tone of command, a specific script for penitential performance, for one, and this performance is figured a curative remedy that will take effect over time.[61] This signals a dislocation of the ameliorative effects of confession

[61]Gail Kern Paster is one of many scholars of late to work productively on the relationship between early modern conceptions of the relationship between emotion and corporeal existence through humeral theory. Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body:*

from the process of ritualized reiteration and audition itself to the private practice of physical penance.[62] Guilt itself remains constituted in a linguistic form, but the Friar renders words in material terms, displacing the foreclosed illocutionary potential of absolution onto the "washing" of narrated sins through physical acts.

The model of confessional efficaciousness that Giovanni presents depends on a fantasy of complete disclosure manifested in material terms that call into question the concept of complete subjective evacuation and interrogation. Foucault describes the organization of modern psychoanalytic confession through its orientation around "the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of confession holds out like a shimmering mirage."[63] Giovanni's approach to confession anticipates the expectation of, and desire for, truth from within, that Foucault describes. Psychoanalysis as a discipline and as a theory privileges in particular the "infinite" nature of this project, as well as emergence of truth amongst but not in the words of confession. By willfully literalizing the project of complete confession in terms of conscious thought and material task, however, Giovanni's confession puts further

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Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage (University of Chicago Press, 2004).The ramifications of convergence the inhabitation of a conventional role, language, and affect resonate with work by Lynn Enterline on the connections between affect and personation in terms of public personation, rhetoric, and character in the early modern grammar school. Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), See 26–29.

[62]Foucault has argued that traces of the physical understanding of penitence that predated the coalescence of verbal confessional practice linger within it. Michel Foucault and Jeremy R. Carrette, *Religion and Culture* (Taylor & Francis, 1999), 155. The emphasis The Friar places on the putative power of exhaustive verbalization over actual penitence for the reframing of transgressive desire indicates that he believes the mode, rather than the content, of confession to be the functional part. In doing so, it reflects the persistence prominent Anti-Catholic criticism of absolution: that could be secured with the empty performance of the ritual.

[63]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin Group, 2008), 59.

pressure on its efficacy. He claims that he has: "Emptied the storehouse of my thoughts and heart / Made myself poor of secrets, have not left / Another word untold which hath not spoke/ All what I ever durst or think, or know" (1.1.13-16).[64] His insistence on the completeness of his disclosure reinforces the audience's exclusion from that scene, just as the conspicuous absence of the speech from the diegetic frame highlights the impossibility of such a narrative accomplishment.

The image of the empty storehouse, "poor of secrets" that Giovanni uses to explain his confessional subjectivity also reflects reinterpretation of the possibilities for performative confessional efficaciousness: the imagery of his description offers a fantasy of the exportation or transmission, rather than expiation, of his guilty secrets to the Friar's keeping, and that this transactional exchange itself should result in "comfort" (1.1.18). Giovanni seems to willfully misconstrue the comfort that he equates with thorough *pro forma* performance of the confessional ritual, and in this he seems to be Romeo's confessional descendant, appropriating the curative associations with confession to the ends of confirming, rather than containing, his illicit desires. As Woods suggests, Giovanni's conditional participation in the confessional ritual demonstrates an extent to which he is "ontologically stuck,"[65] and inhabitation of the confessional mode serves essentially as an experiment that confirms its inadequacies and accordingly sanctions the

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[64]Compare to Charles Courtney's rather more fleshly description of the evacuation of the heart in confession: "My heart through flesh shall issue sweating griefe, / and scald my bones with salt and brinish tears" (D3). Charles Courtney, *The Life, Apprehensio[n,] Arraignement, and Execution of Char[les] Courtney* (London : Printed [by W. Hall] for Edward Marchant, 1612).

[65]Woods, Gillian, "New Directions: The Confessional Identities of '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*," 24–25. Woods contrasts confession in this play with that in *Romeo and Juliet*, saying that where Romeo and Juliet use it strategically, both Giovanni and Annabella are prone to engaging in it on a theological level. As Giovanni's scenes with the friar show, however, he is a somewhat problematic and strategic user of it himself.

alternate paradigm through which he frames incestuous desire.[66] The impasse of the complete yet hollow confession reveals a facet of the workings of ideology articulated by Slavoj Žižek: "the aim is here to justify the means."[67] Giovanni pressures the very process itself in service of his own ideological agenda, signaling a collapse of the *jouissance* of confessional subjectivity in the terms Žižek lays out for the stakes of ideological meta-cognition: for the subject, he says, "as soon as they perceive that the *real goal is the consistency of the ideological attitude itself,* the effect is self-defeating."[68] Giovanni dismisses the cultural prohibition against incest that frames and necessitates its confessional disclosure as such as a "peevish sound" and "a customary form" (1.1.24-5).[69] These attributes extend to how he seems to perceive confession itself: despite his purported embrace of the disclosure component of confession, he rejects the necessity of repentance altogether. When Bonaventura cites "repentance… and [being] sorry for thy sins" as the requested "cure" to bring Giovanni "ease," the confessant replies, "O, do not speak of that, dear confessor" (1.1.46). The "dear confessor," in whom Giovanni continues to confide, offers a space for Giovanni's own argumentation and self-reflection; for the purposes of staging and thematic characterization, the relationship

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[66]Giovanni generalizes his love to that state which "all men" are entitled to pursue. In attempting a redefinition of the standards of transgression, Giovanni reflects a refutation of the standards on which the idea of efficacious confession, to which he himself refers, is based. As he pursues it, confession is a rhetorical, not a spiritual, exercise, and his subjective stance in the exchange is determined accordingly.

[67]Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Verso, 1989), 84.

[68]Ibid., 84, emphasis in original. Kathryn Schwarz offers a succinct encapsulation of this dynamic, noting Žižek's insistence that for ideological subjects, ignorance is bliss." Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 126.

[69]When I say "frames and necessitates," I am referring to the fact that were it a socially appropriate form of heterosexual desire, it would not require "confession" in the same way. He might be said to rhetorically "confess" or reveal his love to his beloved, for example, but he would not need appear to a friar as a confessant.

between the two manifests a bond cemented by potentially dangerous secret-sharing but absent transformative moral or subjective change.

Interpretive Agency and the Female Confessant

As the interactions discussed above between Giovanni and the Friar suggest, confessional subjectivity emerges in the play as the product of a signifying system organized around the terms of textualized embodiment. Efforts to signify one's inner secrets betray the asymptotic relationship of what can be confessed through the body or in language in relation to imagined referent. Foucault and Butler both show how, just as subjectivity is a product of discourse, so too is the body.[70] Bodies do exist in their messy materiality, a quality that is central to theatrical representation—both early modern and contemporary productions of the play have been known to use real animal hearts for Annabella's in the play's last scene, embracing a gruesome find of somatic verisimilitude. The body comes to signify, however, as Judith Butler suggests, as an "effect of a dynamic of power." As I have explored throughout this project, confessional subjectivity is delineated in terms of a network of related power structures; *'Tis Pity* implies a production of the gendered confessional body that is bound up in the discourse of heteronormative patriarchal power.[71] This emerges vividly in act two, scene five, when

[70] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 26–29; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 2–10. The following quotation by Butler is from page 2 of this text.

[71] Woods argues a thematically related point, but she situates the transformative power of discourse as a belated phenomenon rather than a constitutive one when she suggests that "the physical dimensions of many forms of penance translate actual bodies into metaphorical vehicles." Woods, Gillian, "New Directions: The Confessional Identities of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*," 131. Woods suggests that play's broader interest in the relationships among individuals and between individuals and the universe, nature, and God are articulated through the recurrent trope of confession which is offered as a mode

Giovanni explicitly positions himself to Friar Bonaventura as keeper of Annabella's confessional subjectivity, which he reappropriates in terms of his own sexual desire. Giovanni imagines her confession as an erotic exercise in a simple future tense that implicitly suggests that what he describes (or even conjures) is an eventuality, rather than a possible version of her confession. He predicts the Friar will observe, "For colour, lips, for sweet perfumes, her breath; / For jewels, eyes; for threads of purest gold, / Hair" (2.5.51-3). His description builds to an implied but deferred description of Annabella's genitalia, conflating confessional interlocution with sexual intercourse, exposing and expanding a prurience embedded in the confessional concept of "baring all." In doing so, he implicates the Friar in his own sexual desire, collapsing their respective modes of knowing and scripting Annabella in a manner that privileges his supremacy in the implicit contest.[72]

Woods has described this scene as indicative of "epistemological fantasy" of secret knowledge of the woman.[73] That this *is* a fantasy is born out in its stark contrast to the confession she actually delivers to the friar. The epistemological fantasy of confessional control is significant insofar as it animates a contest throughout the play for confessional authority, one that tends to play out on women's bodies, and that is not

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of structuring these relationships. She situates this dynamic relative to patterns of attribution of agency to god in the tragic landscape. In her assessment of the dueling versions of confessional subjectivity represented in the two main characters, she concludes that despite his resistance to its moral taxonomies, Giovanni cannot escape religion, whereas Annabella's penitence can't contain her in light of her complex network of affiliations; the result for both, she indicates, is alienation.

[72]He further reconfigures the role of language in confession itself when he indicates that speech will signify in the exchange in terms of aural pleasure rather than productive communication: making the seemingly paradoxical claim that her narrative of profane sexual desire will be "music to the citizens in heaven" (2.5.56).

[73]Woods, Gillian, "New Directions: The Confessional Identities of '*Tis Pity She's a Whore,*" 127.

limited to Giovanni. In his reading of *Othello,* Stanley Cavell meditates on the "violence in masculine knowing," identifying an epistemological problematic" in the link between "the desire of knowledge for possession [and] intimacy."[74] Cavell's point, that a particular kind of heteronormative/patriarchal power struggle for intersubjective control plays out in terms of knowledge and desire, informs the dynamic that emerges among Annabella, Giovanni, and Soranzo.[75] The Friar and the office of auricular confession for which he stands occur in the play in the context of this struggle: Giovanni's erotic blazon of Annabella's confessing subjectivity emerges in challenge to an expression from the Friar of epistemological and moral privilege, when he requests leave "to shrive [Annabella], lest she should die unabsolved." (2.5.146).

Annabella's scene of auricular confession to the Friar structurally recalls the one featuring Giovanni that started the play, a resonance that sets up the differing mode of embodied confessional participation with which she is associated.[76] The stage directions

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[74]He situates both in terms of "the problematic of property, of ownership as the owning, or ratifying, of one's identity." Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 10. The gendered problematic that Cavell identifies also emerges in interesting ways in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi.* A play that, like *'Tis Pity She's a Whore,* evinces a sustained fascination with questions of concealment. The Duchess' secret marriage forms an alternate zone of domestic confidence and authority to the one her brothers work to police. The Duchess is particularly notable for the active role she takes in trying produce and protect her confessional subjectivity.

[75]Allison Findlay notes the distinction between male and female experiences of religious/social interpellation in her feminist reading of the play, demonstrating that "Annabella is constructed as a figure of desire and of sacrifice by the men around her." Alison Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (John Wiley & Sons, 1999), 25.

[76]When Annabella *does* confess to the Friar, it is prompted by the dictates of her body in a rather different way than the one Giovanni suggests. Their illicit union has led to a pregnancy, and Annabella in anticipation of an ill-fated attempt to cover the origins of the pregnancy through marriage to Soranzo. Her family moves to have the Friar perform the wedding under the presumption that she suffers from the "fullness of the blood" supposed

indicate that in terms of her personification of the visible signifiers of repentance, she is a much "better" confessant than Giovanni—they are in Bonaventura's private study, and she is in a physically subordinate position, kneeling before him, weeping and wringing her hands in a demonstrable show of repentance. This tableau reflects the gendered configuration of confessional power that differentiates Annabella's subjective trajectory over the course of the play from Giovanni's and situates the Friar amidst, rather than against, the various confessors who work to author Annabella's confessional embodiment:

> I am glad to see this penance, for believe me,
> You have unripped a soul so foul and guilty
> As, I must tell you true, I marvel how
> The earth hath borne you up. But weep, weep on:
> These tears may do you good. Weep faster yet,
> Whiles I do read a lecture. (3.6.1-6)[77]

Whereas the Friar rejects audition altogether in Giovanni's disclosures of incest, Annabella's is a source of satisfaction that, the Friar suggest, registers in terms of his own experience of audition. Confession continues to be figured in physical terms, but in contrast to Giovanni's "empty warehouse," Annabella's confession "unrip[s]" a "foul and guilty" soul, imagery in tension with the "gladness" it provokes. Her successful performance of repentance lends guilt a perversely attractive air. In further contrast to her brother, the Friar casts Annabella's repentance as a kind of "spectator sport"; whereas he

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to afflict virgins. Giovanni mentions that he might "absolve her, whether she live or die," (3.4.29-30), echoing a conflation of marriage and shriving also suggested in *Romeo and Juliet.* This continues on a structural level, as Annabella's private confession immediately precedes her wedding.

[77]The Friar goes on to illustrate a frightening vision of hell inspired by Thomas Nashe's *Pierce Penniless*. John Ford, *"Tis Pity She's a Whore*, ed. Martin Wiggins, NMS Ed. (London: Methuen Drama, 2003), 111n.

sent Giovanni to a private room for his regimen of salvific weeping, Annabella is encouraged to perform her supplication in direct response to his words. Confession is once again gendered in terms of embodiment, and the Friar's insistence on proximity suggests a level of visual enjoyment in the surveillance of the penitent female body. Friar Bonaventura associates his words with visibly demonstrable effects, reflecting Gail Kern Paster's observation that for characters in the early modern period, "emotional and physical transformations are ontologically inseparable."[78] He manifests this ontological interrelation in terms that also refute separation of the interior and exterior of the body saying, "methinks I see repentance work / New motions in your heart" (3.6.31-32); in other words, he attributes visible repentant transformation to her heart, an emblem of *interior* authenticity.

As I have suggested, the complexities of confessional communication in this play emerge in terms of textual signifiers for bodies produced by confession. The epistemological contests involved in this dynamic play out largely on one body in particular—that of Annabella—leading both Giovanni and Soranzo to articulate their intersubjective relationships to (and authority over) her in viscerally coercive terms. Throughout the play, characters situate the heart as an emblem of meaningful subjective interiority that is, or would be, capable of communicating secrets in terms of an intelligible signifying system, if only the other had access to it.[79] This is in keeping with a

[78]Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), 61.

[79]The association between the heart and spiritual and affective authenticity was well established in this period, as was the emblematic utilization of the heart in ways that explored its capacity for agency. For example, the phrase "heart's knees," or more commonly, "the knees of my heart" is something of a rhetorical commonplace in early modern confession. It appears, for example, in a prayer for the health of Queen Mary's

prevalent Renaissance topos associating the heart with emotion, authenticity, and secrets.[80] *'Tis Pity* uses this cultural construction of the heart to frame it as, as Lilly describes it, the heart is "a material gateway to immaterial evidence," which he situates in terms of confessional discourse.[81] In the play's early scenes, both Giovanni and Soranzo evokes its efficacy as "material gateway" in textual terms in addressing Annabella as the surface on which a confession that evades communication—of the depth and authenticity of love—might be written. These romantic confessions through the somatic language of the heart echo through the rest of the play; both men who figuratively expose their hearts to Annabella earlier in the play later threaten/undertake to violently access hers.

The heart figures in these early scenes as a marker for the sign that evades normative modes of signification; when Giovanni finds himself struggling to confess his

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child in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1586) and in Nicholas Breton's 1597 prayer book *Auspicante Iehoua Maries exercise*, and in both of these earlier examples it is an expression of extreme supplication before God's mercy. Nicholas Breton, *Auspicante Iehoua Maries Exercise.*, Early English Books Online (At London : Printed by Thomas Este, 1597., 1597). Heywood also evokes the rhetorical trope in *A Woman Killed With Kindness:* in her final speech of contrition to her husband, Anne offers an evocative bit of figurative language: "On my heart's knees/ My prostrate soul lies thrown down at your feet/ To beg your gracious pardon" (17.90-2).

[80]For an elucidation of the significance of the heart in terms of tactile sensation, see Mazzio, Carla, "Acting with Tact: Touch and Theater in the Renaissance," in *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). In a more recent book, Mazzio explores the cultural connections between the heart and authenticity in terms of religious debates, recounting Protestant indictments of Catholic prayer that denigrated it as mere mumbling, inauthentic insofar as it is "dissociated from the heart" (33). The heart resonates in Counter-Reformation Catholic discourse as well; as Scott Manning Stevens argues, in this era, the "physical heart of Christ" came to be thought of in new ways, as a "symbol of his humanity." Stevens describes the significance of figurative links between the heart and conceptions of personhood in a historical context in which scientific discourse increasingly located selfhood in the brain. David A. Hillman, Carla Mazzio, and Stevens, Scott Manning, eds., "Sacred Heart and Secular Brain," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (Routledge, 1997), 263–4.

[81]Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England" (Tufts University, 2007), 280.

long-contained desire for his sister, Annabella, he offers her his dagger, instructing her, "rip up my bosom: there thou shalt behold / A heart in which is writ the truth I speak" (1.2.205-6).[82] This fantasy of legible interiority collapses speech and writing, deferring content altogether—he has not yet confessed much of anything to Annabella beyond platitudes. This conflation of significatory modes reflects Derrida's refutation of the metaphysical privileging of speech over writing as indicator of truth; Derrida's argument, "writing is not a sign of a sign, except if one says it of all signs, which would be more profoundly true" bespeaks a conception of an infinite deferral of symbolic meaning that resonates throughout the play's treatment of confessional articulation.[83] In pairing his reference to the legibility of his heart with the presentation of the dagger, Giovanni evinces a literal approach to this symbolic system that is in tension with the register on which it signifies, a tension that is animated by Annabella's reaction to the same rhetorical maneuver from Soranzo later in the play. When he proposes marriage to the reluctant object of his affection, he bolsters his claims with reference to his admiration, intended to signal authentic desire and emotional supplication.[84] He begins, "Did you but see my heart, then you would swear—" whereupon Annabella cuts him off with a dismissive rejoinder: "That you were dead" (3.2.23-4). Her literalization of his romantic metaphor, which stands in contrast to her reaction to Giovanni's use of the same trope,

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[82]This scene immediately follow that in which he described his subjective state in to the Friar in terms of its evacuation through confession, representing a stark shift in his somatic subjective representation.
[83]Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (JHU Press, 1998), 43.
[84]Unbeknownst to Soranzo, Giovanni is a witness to his confession, and her comments on the exchange throughout. In doing so, Giovanni asserts power over the proceedings for the audience and further undermines the symbolic authority Soranzo works to exert as husband to Annabella. This staging also recalls the use of interpretive surveillance in *Othello*, though it resonates less in terms of paranoia than its theatrical antecedent.

reveals a selective refutation of the textual signification of the heart. In doing so, she evacuates emotional value of the romantic confession, reinforcing both the biological impossibility and the semiotic meaningless of the heart made visible.

Annabella's ability to "make or break," so to speak, the confessional metaphor suggests an interlocutory agency that much of the play, and many critical readings of it, tend to gloss over.[85] As Low points out, the male characters in the play are so consistent with their rendering of Annabella as an object of, and receptacle for, their own erotic desires that "they almost render the heroine a mere plot device."[86] Like Low, I am interested in exploring the more complicated representation of the female *habitus* at work in the play. *'Tis Pity* often suggests that female bodies are particularly apt vehicles for confessional objectification, but Annabella's speech and body alike produce traces of resistance to predicable conscription that suggest that such objectification can never be meaningfully completed.[87] Evidence of this emerges, I argue, through the play's depiction of a female confessant who internalizes, rather than only physically embodies, her confessional subjectivity.

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[85]See, for example, the above references to readings of Findlay and Strout that interpret Annabella's trajectory in terms of her submission to normative social pressures.

[86]Jennifer A Low, "'Bodied Forth': Spectator, Stage and Actor in the Early Modern Theater," *Comparative Drama* 39, no. 1 (2005): 10. Like Neill, Low pursues the container imagery of the play, using it to highlight the tension between the tendency of male characters to see her as an eroticized object and the play's frequent attempts to stage her inwardness.

[87]Her earlier response to Giovanni's description of his inscribed heart reflects this tension: she situates her reciprocation in a like corporeal mode, admitting that her "captive heart had long resolved" (1.2.241). Her "captive heart" prompts competing potential interpretations: its suggests her subordination to Giovanni's desire, and the phrasing foreshadows the liberation of said heart that he will pursue after he kills her. At the same time, however, the resolve of her heart, which she suggests preceded his revelation, highlights her own subjective agency, and her heart, captive within her body, promises no corresponding legible expression.

The pleasure the Friar articulates in light of Annabella's confession, though tied to the play's overall configuration of the female body as a spectacle of embodied (im)morality, is also a reflection of pleasure at penitence. The legibility and purported authenticity of her confession in this scene is constituted, however, in the Friar's words: the diegetic belatedness of Ford's framing of the confessional scene shifts the expository emphasis from the confessant to her confessor, and, accordingly, it reveals as much about his will to confessional agency as it does occlude the stakes of her own participation in the ritual.[88] Critics, including Findlay and Nathaniel Strout, have suggested that Annabella's performance of confession, though seemingly appropriately executed, is undermined by being occasioned not by the remorse that is central to the ritual, but rather by gendered social pressure[89] Their emphasis on the situational quality of her acquiescence to the expectations of confession is reinforced by her continued tendency after this point to behave in ways that suggest that she has not, on a subjective level, embraced the moral strictures fixed in her confession.[90] She speaks very little in the scene, and generally in platitudes, responding with exclamations like, "Wretched creature!" and "Mercy, O Mercy." These answers, through their very minimal nature,

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[88]It can be further interpreted in terms of the previously discussed concept of counter-transference.

[89]The two tend toward a similar point, but they locate the agency behind it rather differently: Findlay suggests that Annabella cannot resist the exertion of patriarchal power in the threat of hell, while Strout argues that Annabella's sincerity is conditioned by her own desire for conformity and community. Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama*, 28; Strout, Nathaniel, "The Tragedy of Annabella in '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*," in *Traditions and Innovations: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1990), 173.

[90]Readings of the play tend to question the implications of Annabella's confirmation to the Friar that she feels content, having confessed; it is interpreted variously as signaling her submission to confessional ritual or to undermine its presumed authenticity in light of the vague clichés of her short responses.

suggests that she is, in comparison to her brother, more thoroughly interpellated into the discourse of confession and the corresponding subjective stance. The framing of the scene, which once again elides Annabella's actual confession, suggests a form of successful confession exchange (as measured by the Friar's reactions) that involves the confessant saying as little as possible. This dynamic invites us to question what can be known about confessional disclosure and by extension about other subjects through what the auditor/spectator/interpreter observes.

When Annabella first undertakes socially authorized shriving, she embodies the model passive penitent. This offers a striking point of comparison for Annabella's second performance of confession when she, in the play's final act, undertakes to articulate repentance on her own terms. In doing so, she evinces a sense of her own speaking subjectivity that has been elided in other characters' representations of her. Annabella's active role, preceding the Friar in the scene and inaugurating her repentance in terms of personal moral authority, revises the script for confession established over the course of the play. For the first time, a version of formal confession appears onstage, but Annabella initially situates herself *both* confessor and confessant—resituating the incestuous relationship in which she participated in terms of normative condemnation. This confession blurs the lines between the sacramental auricular repentance that the play has toyed with throughout and potentially offering a self-authorized embodiment of intrasubjectively efficacious confession.[91] She enters the stage alone and begins to admit to her sins and acknowledge her sorrows and regrets; this scene is notable as her only

[91] Stegner argues, "the Protestant internalization of confession reflects the Christian tradition's privileging of interiority rather than exteriority in matters of faith because of the potential for outward dissimulation." Stegner, Paul D., "'Try What Repentance Can': Hamlet, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority," 109.

soliloquy, signaling (but not promising) a privileged form of immediacy between the audience and a character who has otherwise been marked in large part by her male mediation. Annabella addresses time itself, and figuratively situates her speech in relation to a legal audience, pitting her conscience against her lust, "With depositions charactered in guilt" (5.1.10). As Woods has aptly suggested, in this speech, "Ford redraws the distinctions between will and submission," as Annabella authors her participation in the confessional ritual that demands self-renunciation.[92] Annabella's confession in soliloquy illuminates the dynamics of Berger's "imaginary audition," simultaneously narrowing the physical setting of confession to her own conscience—in keeping with the Protestant model of personal intra-subjective confession (though hers is articulated in legal rather than religious terms)—and opening it up to the theatrical audience. Berger's theory helps illuminate how Annabella's words function as confessional even when she is the only one on stage: they are shaped to the ear of an imaginary listener conflated with the audience itself, making it clear that she has internalized the conventional structure of the scene of confessional address.[93]

The arrival of the Friar onstage shifts the agential dynamics of this scene.[94] That she doesn't know he is there serves to reinforce the apparent of sincerity in her

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[92] She situates this claim in contrast to a critical lineage reading this confession as a representation of Annabella's ultimate submission to normative social values. Woods, Gillian, "New Directions: The Confessional Identities of '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*," 128. Kathryn Schwarz has probed the complexities of this interplay between will and compliance in a thorough study of the interrelation that illuminates the contradictory logic of a cultural model of prescribed choice. See Schwarz, *What You Will*.

[93] Harry Berger, Jr., *Imaginary Audition*, 45–46. This scene also resonates with Lacan's discussion of the "dimension of dialogue," wherein one's *inner* thoughts are shaped the ear of a figurative listener. Lacan and Fink, *Écrits*, 96..

[94]The Friar's fortuitous appearance at just the right moment n this scene reflects his name's implicit suggestion of "good fortune." John Wilks has argues that the appearance

confession, but the Friar's presence as a visible auditor for the audience has a powerful effect, manifesting a more complicated dynamic of confessional authority.[95] The Friar's arrival coincides with her uttering of the words "I confess," (5.111). Annabella enacts, in citing the language of confession to an authorized party, a kind of unwitting authorization of an audience she does not know she has. His office, in turn, gives him the power to authorize her speech in normative terms, though in so doing, he coopts and overrides the mode of discursive authority suggested in Annabella's own intrasubjective dialogue of confession and judgment. As Butler reminds us, however, the one's relation to one's self coheres "in the context of an address to another. So the relation is disclosed, but it is also, to borrow from Foucualt's work on confession, *published*, brought into the realm of appearance, constituted as social manifestation."[96] Butler's point helps narrow down a question at the heart of this play: who controls confession, and by what means is it authorized? Amidst the dislocated office of auricular confession that Ford's play stages, the Friar's audition in this scene functions as a privileged social, rather than spiritual, audition. The Friar's self-reflexive approach to hearing her confession illuminates the dynamics aspects of listening, reinforcing that it is, as Barthes describes, "a psychological act" that makes an implicit demand on the speaker that operates in relation his own unintentional interpellation into the scene of confession. In keeping with the Friar's

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of the Friar at this opportune moment reflects a providential intervention reminiscent of Calvinist theology. His argument is persuasive, but it serves to emphasize the uneasy interplay of religious forms in play in the drama. John S. Wilks, *The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1990), 260.

[95] The synesthetic incongruity of that construction underscores the conceptual complexities of staging listening, a critical realm that is the subject of a very interesting recent edited collection. See Luary Magnus and Walter Cannon, eds., *Who Hears in Shakespeare?: Auditory Worlds on Stage and Screen* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2011).

[96] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 131.

tendency to privilege his affective relationship to confessional disclosure, declares in aside that heaven ordained him to hear her confession and minister to her, and casts her verbalization of inner torment "music to the soul" (5.1.30). Though the Friar's speeches render him a dynamic listener, he also privileges Annabella as the source and target of her speech, telling her he is glad of, "This free confession 'twixt your peace and you" (5.42). This scene suggests a kind of dual mode of confessional intelligibility, inflected by a joint participation in the discursive structures of confession secured by a joint interplay of auditory and confessional agency.[97]

In this scene, Annabella embodies the capacity of the confessing subject to signify on multiple planes. Findlay suggests that in this scene manifests the subsumption of Annabella's rebellious impulses to the Friar's ideological power.[98] Indeed, Annabella's performance of repentance and repudiation of lust seem to signal accession to the normative authority suggested in the Friar (and in Soranzo, whose manipulative rhetoric seems to provoke this speech).[99] However, as I noted above, this scene is Annabella's one and only soliloquy, and in the midst of a play that situates disclosure in terms of authorized confessional space, matrimonial/romantic coercion, and rhetorical manipulation, her willing assumption of the subjective role associated with penitent

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[97] Ellen Spolsky's investigation of what she calls "cognitive hunger" in interpretations of religious texts informs this point: she explores suggestions that imagery works in productive conjunction with verbal signs that are less readily assimilated by the human mind. See Ellen Spolsky, *Word Vs. Image: Cognitive Hunger in Shakespeare's England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[98] Alison Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (John Wiley & Sons, 1999), 30.

[99] As a counter to Findlay's claim, one might turn to Judith Butler's reading of confessional speech, inspired by Foucault's later writings: confession compels a 'manifestation' of the self that does not have to correspond to some putative inner truth, and whose constitutive appearance is *not* to be construed as mere illusion." Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 112, emphasis in original.

confession is significant. As Kathryn Schwarz has demonstrated, "will is not simply the mechanism for a single choice between submission and rebellion, or for a sustained refusal to engage at all."[100] In occupying this confessional space, Annabella animates the paradox of "free confession" so central to the discourse of penitence. In doing so, she lays claim to a mode of confessional subjectivity not defined in terms of external somatic assessment, and subject to her own interpretation.

Furthermore, from within this performative space, she negotiates its boundaries in a manner that suggests that this manifestation of repentance is, while not necessarily an illusion, a version of confession that corresponds with private interests that exceed the scope of the confessional role. Annabella appears on-stage with an important, but opaque, prop, a paper, "double lined in tears and blood,"[101] that supplements her confessional speech. As Woods and Lilly alike have noted, Annabella makes her repentance conditional, predicating it on the appearance of someone to deliver the letter. Whereas Lilly suggests that this indicates a reluctance to "confess completely," Woods indicates that Annabella's cooptation of confessional paradigms indicates achievement of "a level of repentant confidence unbound by confessional conventions."[102] I agree with the sentiment of Woods' point, but suggest that Annabella, in this scene, exercises a confessional agency that operates in terms of these conventions but reshapes them. The

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[100] Schwarz, *What You Will*, 9.

[101] Lilly suggests that these tears are not just for Giovanni's repentance, but tears of sorrow that they have been found out. Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England," 283. The letter in blood also plays a role in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, in which Bel-Imperia writes a letter in her blood that exposes the murderers of Horatio.

[102] Ibid.; Woods, Gillian, "New Directions: The Confessional Identities of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*," in *"Tis Pity She's a Whore: A Critical Guide*, ed. Lisa Hopkins (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 129.

scene between Annabella and the Friar offers a negotiation of the conflicting dynamics of confessional autonomy staged throughout the play. The Friar's audition allows him to act as an agent of Annabella's self-authored repentance in more ways that one—he is her auditor, but also her messenger, echoing Friar Laurence in his willingness to intercede between separated lovers.

The Penitent Body as 'Inarticulate Oracle of Truth'

Annabella's attempt to embody a kind of agential penitence in her balcony soliloquy-cum-confession is in tension with another way in which her confessional body is figured as simultaneously of her and out of her control. By the end of the play, her pregnant body evinces a form of confessional agency that exceeds hers to explain or defend herself in words, and this in turn sparks a literalization of the converging signifiers of the somatic and semantic that have figured in the play's contests for confessional control. Giovanni and Soranzo both demonstrate—along with other male authority figures at the end of the play—a desire for control over the confessional subject as a body they can read, and situate, on their own terms, rather than as a speaking body.[103] Soranzo purports to read Annabella's pregnancy on her body even beyond the belly, accusing her, "thy brazen face maintain'st thy sin" (4.3.5). As he lays claim to a knowledge about her that obviates her own authority, his demands verbal confirmation reflect, more than a need for knowledge, the desire for the symbolic control associated with eliciting confession. Annabella's response, "What needs all this, / When 'tis

[103] Haber points out, despite the focus on the "unity of the doomed couple," the play's approach to consummation and death is largely something that happens 'between men.'" Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England*, 105. This homosocial contest animates the paternity question that underlies Soranzo's interrogation.

superfluous? I confess I am" uses her body's own guilty legibility to mitigate the supplicatory resonance of giving into his demands for knowledge (4.3.25-6). Annabella has little control over what which her body discloses, but her refusal to disclose the baby's paternity—information she *can* keep secret—represents a powerful exertion of will to personal confessional authority. Throughout the scene, Soranzo directly demands Annabella's speech, and she resists in a variety of ways: first she directly refuses confessional audition, telling him, "you will not hear, / I'll speak no more" (5.3.34).[104] The threat of silence signifies in this interlocutory context as a direct rejection of Soranzo's discursive authority; in other words, she threatens silence as a form of performative speech.[105] It's an tactic of resistance that she evokes, but does not pursue—she moves on to evade directly answering Soranzo's questions with praise of the father of Soranzo's legal "heir,"[106] and then moves on to answering his threats in Italian songs—opting for a different mode of articulation altogether.[107] Though she doesn't pursue it in

[104] Though early modern texts often suggest the virtue of silence for a woman, and indeed, Vasques, Soranzo's assistant, praises her for it, in this case the cultural imperative for quiet women is in direct conflict with the will Soranzo attempts to assert over her linguistic capacity.

[105] For more on the ways of understanding silence as a speech act, see Medina, *Speaking from Elsewhere*, 172–173.

[106] Annabella exploits a more pervasive cultural anxiety about the instability of paternity; in this case, Soranzo knows the baby isn't his, but nonetheless wants to exercise his authority as husband to know and police paternity. Her refusal to name the father reflects a power we've seen at work in previous chapters— that of silence in the fact of the inquisitorial demand. Her pat refusal, "I'll speak no more" (4.3.34), echoes Iago's taunting refutation of confession at the end of *Othello*.

[107] David Schalkwyk describes song relative to performative utterances as relatively public and impersonal. Schalkwyk, *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays*, 125. This seems to be an apt assessment of Annabella's use of it here. It's worth comparing this scene, though, to Desdemona's mournful songs near the end of *Othello.* As in this scene, they allow for an alternate mode of communication in a situation that evades straightforward conversation. Their subjective stakes, however, register very differently.

practice, the threat of silence is the most potentially dangerous of these responses, illuminating the limits of intersubjective epistemological coercion.

Soranzo's articulation of his violent desire to spectacularize and extract confession manifests a will to the power of the confessor that is usually silent, conferred by institutional structures or naturalized social hierarchies. In articulating the terms of his will to power as knowledge, he is confronted with the ultimate unenforceability of his stance. His demands for knowledge escalate into threats of physical harm, reflecting the long-standing association between confessional inquisition and bodily torture.[108] His threats of physical coercion to induce her to tell him the truth frame a threat of physical confessional power that would obviate her verbal acquiescence altogether. This transition hinges her insistence that he "shall never know" the baby's father, to which he responds, "Not know it strumpet! I'll rip up thy heart / And find it there" (4.3.53-54).[109] To assuage his anger through revenge Soranzo needs the name of his rival; the more general threat of "never knowing," however, is tied to larger issues of intersubjective control. The stark brutality implied in this mode of interpretive capacity over the intangible and inaccessible depends, as others have before in the play, on a fantasy of the heart's legibility, but its very ferocity betrays the limitations to the thwarted confessor: at the center of his threat is

[108] He begins with threats that invoke the physical to leverage her verbal cooperation before he collapses the distinction altogether: "tell me your lover, or by truth / I'll hew thy flesh to shreds" (4.3.57-8).

[109] In this he echoes Alsemero in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, when he tells his lying wife, "Let your sweet tongue / Prevent your heart's rifling—there I'll ransack / And tear out my suspicion (5.3.37-40). This particular formulation is especially intriguing because it imputes his suspicion, not "the truth" onto her heart, indicating that she has already essentially been found guilty. Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. Michael Neill (London: A & C Black, 2006).

the simple truth that though he *can* kill her, her physical body will not tell him anything but what he can impute to it.[110]

Inspired by his servant, Vasques, he eventually switches tactics, adopting an intentionally manipulative rhetoric that invokes the normative affective dimensions of their marital bond; this opens Annabella up in a way his threats could not. As she herself claims: "These words wound me deeper than your sword could do" (4.3.129). From a confessional standpoint, this "wound" is more significant than any physical one. Insofar as the passionate utterances of his interrogation bespeak a desire not just for knowledge, but for recognition, as Cavell suggests they would, then in acknowledging his power to affect her through words, she is opening up a space of intersubjective linguistic exchange that she has denied him throughout the play. His final reflection on the topic, however, made after he as manipulated Annabella into a more penitent mode, "I'll make her tell, or-" indicates a privileging of his will to force speech over hers to agree to offer it. In a way, he does induce her to "tell," but not to him, as her confession to the friar immediately follows this scene. The stopped short "or," however, is perhaps the most important indicator of the approach both Giovanni and Soranzo take to wielding confessional authority, exposing the incomprehensible signifiers it depends on.

The objectification of confessional interiority reaches its gruesome apotheosis when Giovanni undertakes the literal excavation of Annabella's heart that brings to its

[110] Annabella reinforces the challenge to his authority manifested in her refusal to confess when she resorts to a non-conversational linguistic field—song—highlighting his inability to police the boundaries of the inquisition. In telling him, in dialogue and in song, that it would be sweet to die for love rather than confess, she signals the evacuation of the ideological control underlying his assumption of confessional authority, temporarily reversing the power dynamics associated both with her gender and normative moral guilt.

incomprehensible extreme the conflation of bodily emblems and meaningful signification.[111] Giovanni attempts to show public mastery over the body of the female confessant, inside and out; a mastery whose basis in fantasy has already been spelled out in his erotic blazon of Annabella's confessing body. Giovanni's insistence on a physical and imaginary confessional autonomy that extends to his sister and her sexualized body refutes her efforts to exercise of confessional self-authorship; when the Friar delivers news of Annabella's repentance, Giovanni rejects it as the false product of "religion-masked sorceries" (5.3.28).[112] He repudiates Annabella's letter, first saying, "she writes I know not what," and then claiming it is "but forged" (5.3.33, 39). He acts on its contents, however, enacting a plan to thwart Soranzo's discovery. It seems that his rejection is based at least in part on what it suggests about Annabella's subjective social autonomy; in repenting, Annabella betrays the incestuous *folie à deux* that Giovanni is invested in sustaining, not least because of the mastery over Soranzo and other male authority figures that it entails.[113] This desire for spectacular mastery informs the gruesome display of Annabella's heart that he puts forth at the play's end. This scene has been the locus of

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[111] Susanne Wofford has written about way bodily fragmentation and social fragmentation intersect in the later tragedies in her essay, "The Body Unseamed: Shakespeare's Late Tragedies." I see interesting resonance between the way Othello's subjective fragmentation hinges on his anxieties about bodily coherence and intelligibility and the trend she identities in subsequent plays. See Susanne Wofford, "The Body Unseamed: Shakespeare's Late Tragedies," in *Shakespeare's Late Tragedies: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Wofford, Susanne (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hill, Inc, 2006).

[112] This association reflects, of course the commonly made link between Catholicism and witchcraft.

[113] The play echoes (and perverts) the ending of *Romeo and Juliet* in the death of its central couple to avoid punishment or separation. It also echoes *Othello* in Annabella's death, in her marital bed "with a kiss", but as Haber notes, this location is also signficant in terms of Giovanni's ongoing contest with Soranzo, in that he preempts the latter's plan to kill Annabella in their wedding bed. Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England*, 105.

much critical consideration of the play;[114] Neill, for examples, describes this moment as a literalization "of the play's recurrent figuration of the body as a container of emotional secrets waiting to be 'ripped open.'"[115] Neill's wording is evocative, recalling the Friar's own description of the soul Annabella "unripped" in confession; it also, however, suggests a teleological impulse toward revelation in discovery that the play pursues, but ultimately tends to refute. In a play that obsessively locates socially-constituted interiority in the heart, Giovanni's literal excavation of his sister's seems to situate him as the consummate confessor, just as it indicates a comprehensive subjective control over her.[116] This dynamic is complicated, though, by the extent to which Giovanni simultaneously

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[114] Low, for example, describes Annabella's stabbing as a moment in which "her interiority is turned inside out," She indicates that the play suggests that Annabella's body, not her soul, matters to Giovanni." Jennifer A Low, "'Bodied Forth': Spectator, Stage and Actor in the Early Modern Theater," *Comparative Drama* 39, no. 1 (2005): 14. Maus' arguments about the inscrutability of interior spaces are they are figured in the early modern period is also a useful accompaniment here. Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, 4. Mazzio indicates that Giovanni's appearance onstage with Annabella's heart exemplifies a concern that plays out in early modern tragedy more generally involving abstract questions of "what the heart might hold, can hold, and if the heart can be held or beheld." Mazzio has identified a shift in the figuration of the heart in the play from the domain of signification to that of what can be touched or sensed. This shift plays out in the rhetoric of confession in the drama. The romantic discourse of the first part of the play depends on bodily emblems to metaphorically guarantee confession; in the second half of the play, the confessional capacity of the body comes to figure in more literal ways. Mazzio, Carla, "Acting with Tact: Touch and Theater in the Renaissance," in *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 184.

[115] Neill, *Issues of Death*, 136. He compares Giovanni to a deranged anatomist, whose appearance in the play both serves to explode the tension produced by obsessiveness of the heart imagery throughout the play and to insistently illuminate the links between the anatomical theater and the dramatic stage.

[116] Martin Wiggins points out in his edition of the play the fact that her heart is literally pierced emphasizes a phallic mastery that extends her body and soul. Martin Wiggins, "Introduction," in *"Tis Pity She's a Whore* (London: Methuen Drama, 2003), 30. Giovanni emphasizes his own agency, both physical and ideological, when he emphasizes to those present that "These hands have from her bosom ripped her heart" (5.6.59).

reappropriates and evacuates the role of the confessant in his final scene, which he frames by calling his "last and greater part" (5.5.107). In this scene, he announces both his illicit relationship with his sister and the fact that he has killed her, in speech peppered with performative oaths: he "vows" and "swears" that the heart is hers.

Giovanni's insistence that his audience behold the spectacle of her heart, held forth as in its gruesome materiality as "oracle of truth" (5.6.52) is met with rage and incomprehension, undermining the fantasy that the heart might be capable of signifying in a coherent confessional manner. An onlooker terms it "strange riddle," a phrase that bespeaks the implication that such a display *ought* to signify, in spite of the intentional obfuscation paradoxically suggested by the material object.[117] Lilly suggests that this scene represents the *only* true confession in the play because it pairs a verbal account of crimes with the physical presence of the heart, which has, he argues, been figured as the site of linguistic evidence of subjectivity.[118] While this trope of the evidentiary heart has, indeed, been central to the play's symbolic signification of interiority, I argue that in attempting to manifest the connection between referent and sign, he evacuates its affective meaning and symbolic intelligibility.[119] Annabella has already pointed to the essential opacity of the heart as a referential signifier, but Giovanni literalizes this point.

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[117] The symbolic significance of the "impenetrable enigma," to return to Neill's phrase, of Annabella's heart has often been the target of critical inquiry. As Subha Mukherji puts it, it is "a comment on the impossibility of possessing the inalienable core of another's being." She later suggests, however, that in this play, it features as a "statement about human love," a suggestion that departs from the focuse of this inquiry. Mukherji, *Law and Representation in Early Modern Drama*, 158.

[118] Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England," 280–283.

[119] Haber suggests throughout the play an interest in attaching signs to referents, an endeavor prone to exposing their emptiness. Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England*, 113.

In the final moments of the play, the heart figures as a manifestation of the confessional body that exceeds the discourse that produces it.[120] This excess resonates in terms of Felman's work synthesizing psychoanalysis and performativity: as she points out in both realms, "an utterance is always, irreducibly, *in excess* over its statement." The confessional referent in *'Tis Pity* functions like the constantly deferred convergence of the mathematical asymptote: the imagined authentic essence of the speaking subject and the textualized corporeal body through which that essence can be imagined can, it seems, approximate each other, but never signify meaningfully. Giovanni's display, in conjunction with Annabella's letter, suggests this continued deferral of meaning. His claim that his own heart remains "entombed" within Annabella's, is suggestive: even amidst the symbolic evacuation of the heart he enacts through producing it, inaccessible intrasubjective meaning is displaced into a newly delineated inner space. Annabella's letter, produced, delivered, and renounced, emblematizes the play's tendency to depict confession as jointly textual and physical, and yet ultimately inaccessible.

While, at the end of *Romeo and Juliet*, the Friar remains to deliver the sad explanatory tale, in *'Tis Pity,* the Friar absconds, abruptly disappearing from the play, and taking news of Annabella's repentance with him. His departure is in some ways representative of the role he plays in a broader theatrical context, coming near the end of a host of plays that grapple with the dispersal of institutional confessional authority. The public account of the preceding tragedy offered in the final scene comes instead from Vasques, who is in turn reporting the confession of Putana, Annabella's maid and de facto confidant. Vasques has elicited the story from the old woman through rhetorical

[120] Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 52.

manipulations that inform his master's similar attempts with Annabella.[121] Though Vasques frames their exchange in terms of Putana's ability to protect her mistress, her revelation of secrets has shockingly brutal effects for its teller. A group of banditti appear, and Vasques orders that they gag her and put out her eyes, depriving her of the ability both to perceive and speak. Putana's knowledge is valuable to the men in charge but deadly to the woman who possesses it. At the end of the play, Vasques explains that pending the confession of the primary actors, she was "kept alive, to confirm what Giovanni's own mouth" had spoken. (5.6.128), but thereafter, her death is assured. That she has kept alive for this purpose is interesting in and of itself, suggesting that the truth-value of Giovanni's confession would benefit from the corroboration of independent testimony. At the end of the play, the female secret keeper is dehumanized to the level of pure evidence, and has no recourse to justice, so her awareness of the sins of others only serves to diminish her agency.[122]

'Tis Pity enacts an exploration of the ramifications of a cultural role of confessional authority characterized by ineradicable power and irreducibly unstable dislocations. However, as Judith Butler reminds us, when it comes to performative power, "there is no power, construed as a subject, that acts, but only… a reiterated acting that *is* power in its persistence and instability. This is less an 'act,' singular and

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[121] Vasques seeks out her confidence by claiming that his master will only "go near to kill my lady with unkindness" (4.3.181), a line which seems to refer self-consciously to Heywood's play while suggesting a threatening undertone at odds with his attempts to persuade.

[122] Vasques' loyalty, though more active in its application, does not incur the same punishment meted out on the female servants, exposing a latent misogyny when it comes to the keeping of secrets in these plays—whereas the male characters tend to be expected to keep them, female confessors—even unwitting or unwilling ones—tend to be punished for exposure to knowledge that threatens the patriarchal order.

deliberate, than a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive structures of power."[123] The play concludes with an aggressive reiteration of a misogynist normative structure that, in the closing line spoken by the Cardinal (5.5.169), casts judgment on Annabella and reconstitutes her as the play's titular whore: as Martin Coyle suggests, it renamed the play's central sexual transgression, shifting the focus from incest to prostitution.[124] While Giovanni's performative claim of confessional mastery over Annabella satisfies a paradigm of confessional embodiment that operates in gendered terms, the characteristic incoherence of Giovanni's performance undermines a discourse of power that depends on the jurisdiction over confessional authorization. The Cardinal's post mortem sentence, that the body of the woman "chief in these effects" be publicly burned for "examples sake." (5.6.139-41), reiterates the connection made throughout the play between physical disclosure and penance and the embodied female subject. Ambiguities in the text, however, expose the instability at work within the operations of normative authority. The Cardinal does not specify *which* woman he is talking about: though Annabella can be persuasively argued to be the "chief" woman in the plot, the line is delivered immediately after Vasques relates Putana's fate, opening up the possibility that "these effects" might signify on a more local register. The modes of confessional subjectivity, particularly as pertains to female subjects, that emerge through the climactic acts of both Giovanni and the Cardinal both imply a hollowing out of

[123] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 225.
[124] The latter transgression is culturally assimilable in a way that incest can never be. See Coyle, Martin, "The Tragedies of Shakespeare's Contemporaries," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Tragedies*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean Elizabeth Howard, vol. 1 (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 41. The title of the play compounds the sense generated by the presence of her disembodied heart in the climactic scene that her guilt is more of a problem than her brother's.

confessional subjectivity. This intersection is a significant one, revealing anxieties that attend the ever-shifting models of power at work in social confession, and exposing the instabilities and fantasies that scaffold exercises of normative ideological and confessional power.

The final scene highlights the overwhelming power of normative structures to control the discursive delineation of guilt and innocence. Those maneuvers, however, are contingent on that reiteration and subject to manipulation through the very reiteration of the norms that govern them. The Friar's departure is a reminder that the discourses of confession and absolution are, while defined in terms of conventions of power, also subject to inhabitation through the self-authorizing performative. While on a structural level the play itself perpetuates a narrative of condemnation, it also stages a challenge to it in Annabella's own final words: "Forgive him, Heaven—and me my sins. Farewell, / Brother, unkind, unkind" (5.5.92). Her recourse to the conventional tropes of the deathbed speech belies the significance of her final gesture toward confession in a play obsessed with its manipulations and deferrals. In pleading for mercy on Giovanni's behalf while condemning him as an unkind brother, Annabella demonstrates the discontinuities of confessional subjectivity on its most basic level. Furthermore, in manifesting an irreducible performative confessional agency that is associated with but not, as the play's final scene implicitly suggests, consubstantial with her textualized embodiment, her character reveals the constitutive ambivalence at play in mechanisms of confessional authority.

Coda

Though the discourses of confession can be, and usually are, mobilized to reinforce and perpetuate the normative ideologies and power hierarchies that subtend them, inhabitations of confessional spaces demonstrate the unpredictable modes of agency enabled by and within those structures. Annabella's final words recall those of Desdemona in the play from which this chapter takes its epigraph, and *Othello*'s suffusion with the language, dynamics, and spatial and evidentiary configurations of confession is a topic that a number of critics of the years have remarked on.[125] In these final pages, I draw on the play as a means of evoking some of the essential questions explored in this dissertation, and furthermore, to gesture toward their application beyond the readings already pursued here. Both the plot and characterization of *Othello* are driven in very particular ways by the intersubjective dynamics of secrets both imputed and disclosed, but this preoccupation can also be read in terms of the constitutive dynamics of confessional subjectivity more generally, the inherently mutable intersubjective performative mode that I have traced across a range of texts.

The deathbed scene at the end of the play epitomizes the gendered form of household confession, which grafts the moral authority of auricular confession onto a private heteronormative context, that we have seen traversing the plays discussed in this dissertation. The interrogation in this scene is striking, however, for the manner in which

[125] Lilly makes this point, going so far as to count eighteen confessions that, while neither religious or judicial, contain enough elements of "real" confession to register. Lilly, Anthony Wayne, II, "The Queen of Proofs: Subjectivity, Gender, and Confession in Early Modern England," 272. See also Joel B. Altman, *The Improbability of Othello: Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, 163–182; Michael Neill, "Introduction," in *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, by William Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 132–139.

it exposes the dislocations of power, truth, and epistemology that animate the dynamics of confessional intersubjectivity. When Othello demands that his wife confess her infidelity, the mandate of an honest excavation suggested in the ritual—he bids her to "take heed of perjury" on her deathbed (5.2.53)—is at odds with the rigid prescriptions he brings to bear on his self-assumed role as arbiter of confessional evidence. Othello's pursuit of confession in light of this dynamic is illustrative: the value of the saying of the words implied in confessional speech exceeds the substance of their content, and as Othello himself notes, delineates "murder" and "sacrifice" (5.2.65). Furthermore, the capacity to elicit confession is a constitutive feature of discursive power, provoking the tautological schema wherein Othello's foregone conclusion recasts the wedding bed as a deathbed, while the deathbed (itself recast as a confessional) necessitates a structured reiteration of the prescribed narrative of Desdemona's guilt. The autonomy of the confessing subject threatens to fall out of the equation altogether, as Othello counters Desdemona's denials of guilt with a counter-confession that elides expression, manifested in the symbolically loaded handkerchief. Her final line however, beginning "Nobody. I myself." (5.3.124), answers Emilia's question about the responsibility for Desdemona's death in a manner that exposes the irreducible ambiguities of subjective agency as they accrue in language. Desdemona compounds the irresolvable epistemological conflicts of confession that have been demonstrated throughout the scene, but she does so with a line that succinctly and resolutely demonstrates the unownability of discursive authority as Othello attempts to define it.

Othello, in effect, shifts the terms of the "witch hunt" explored earlier in this dissertation to new terrain: as a Moor, Othello is himself open to suspicion in that realm,

but the gendered dynamics of the English witch hunts extend as well to Desdemona, but the threat of the witch blends with that of the whore. The concept of the witch hunt (if slightly anachronistically applied) bepeaks a dynamic of confessional power and knowledge that constantly shifts, and as animated by the interest in and anxiety about the performative regulation of the secrets of others, and of oneself. Othello's promise early in the play of an "unvarnish'd tale" is a significant reminder that in terms of the social subjective terrain of confessional speech, the "varnish" of one's linguistic identity is essentially unfixable, liminal in that is coalesces in context and limned in being subject to articulation and interpretation. Though Othello himself moves to refute subjective confessional agency in falsely conflating it with evidence, the play itself suggests a richness within the epistemological instability surrounding its confessional subjects—what is more, it illuminates the ways in which every subject is always already a potential confessional subject.

Confession relies on the conception of the speaking subject, a phrase that simultaneous gestures to the extent to which subjectivity takes on social legibility through linguistic performances, and also captures the constructed nature of the dramatic identities that I use it to describe. The principles of social hierarchy on which confession can be taken as a regulatory ritual are subject to disruption though the manipulation and strategic utilization of confessional rhetoric across a range of social interactions. An exploration of the instability of confessional subjectivity does not entail a refutation of its structures altogether; rather, it suggests that within intelligible discourses, there is an interplay among the various registers on which subjectivity and agency can signify. Confessional discourse tends to be deployed in ways that confirm and reaffirm

normative, and more specifically heteronormative, configurations of intersubjective hierarchies. The dynamics of conscription and agency embedded in my discussion of confession are not, however, to be taken as teleologically opposing forces—the subject does not emerge when one of them wins out, so to speak. Instead, I argue that confessional subjectivity emerges through their irreducible constitutive interrelation. These literary representations demonstrate how texts inevitably, and in myriad ways, illuminate a simultaneous multiplicity of subjective identifications. This form of performative confessional subjectivity exposes the constitutive uncertainties that animate dynamic matrices of social and agential power.

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