

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

Reading

Shakespeare's Dramatic Language

A Guide

Adams, Hunter, Magnusson, Thompson & Wales

READING
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DRAMATIC LANGUAGE
A GUIDE



THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

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DRAMATIC LANGUAGE
A GUIDE



Edited by *Sylvia Adamson, Lynette Hunter,
Lynne Magnusson, Ann Thompson
and Katie Wales*



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Kastan, David Scott, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1982)

Focusing on Shakespeare's history plays, tragedies, and romances, this book explores the relationship of the form of dramatic action and assumptions about historical time. In the ways in which the plays of each genre shape their stories, Kastan finds evidence of their distinct, though provisional, conceptions of time as the fundamental dimension of human experience.

Rees, Joan, *Shakespeare and the Story: Aspects of Creation* (London: Athlone Press, 1978)

Rees explores the relationship of story to play, focusing on the ways in which Shakespeare organizes his plots as evidence of the operation of his creative imagination. For Rees, always the most interesting aspects of the plays are those which threaten the narrative framework, where the energy of a character, for example, disrupts the shape of the story and forces Shakespeare to discover the deepest logic of his material.

Wilson, Rawdon, *Shakespearean Narrative* (London: Associated University Presses, 1995)

Wilson is interested in both Shakespeare's command of narrative conventions and his exploration of narrative functions. Applying the concepts of recent narrative theory to Shakespeare's plays, he analyses the narrative acts in the plays in terms of the conventions that structure them and the effects they produce.

PERSUASION

Lynette Hunter

People tend to think persuasion is about logic. This is a generalization, but many of us would recognize saying 'that's not logical' before dismissing someone's opinion. By 'logic' we usually imply a fairly formal structure, where an argument proceeds from point to point to a conclusion – this is rational logic. Sometimes the argument claims that 'if' this event and that event come together, 'then' such and such will result – this is syllogistic logic. At the same time we know logic isn't everything, otherwise how could we choose between two perfectly formed newspaper reports leading to different points of view? We are aware that logic can abuse the situation, and many would also recognize saying 'you can rationalize anything', when logic is misapplied.

With more experience we learn more about how to assess the ways we are persuaded, and course we become more sophisticated in our own skills for persuading other people. One of the things we quickly learn is that the character or projected image of the speaker is central to persuasion. It is far easier to believe a story we are told by someone we trust, than someone we do not know, who comes perhaps from a different background, different perspective, who may be a known liar. But it is perhaps less easy to put our finger on just what happens to us when we listen. For example, when people make a connection between the events of the Jewish Holocaust in World War Two and a contemporary event, whatever we have emotionally and intellectually invested in the Holocaust (or not) is called into play.

With literature we depend on genre, such as science fiction, realism or poetry, to alert us to both the position of the speaker/writer and our own position in response. We get clues from whether the writing is comic or documentary (*style*), and whether it sets out to teach, to pass an opinion or to entertain (*register*). From an early age we also learn an immense amount about language and other systems of communication such as fashion. Sarcasm is the root linguistic weapon of school-children, who learn how to mock others before moving on to the more subtle effects of irony. Advertising continually teaches us about all kinds of techniques and strategies: perhaps most centrally it focuses on how to trick the mind into making positive connections with the items it is promoting, frequently through pun and word or image association. These techniques of communication have structures that affect us in ways that are like, but not the same as, those of logic. While we do not often think self-consciously about how language structures our arguments, someone educated in the sixteenth century would.

Between 1510 and 1517 John Colet and Erasmus, a scholar from the Netherlands, established St Paul's School in London, which became a model for grammar schools throughout the country over the next hundred years. Central to the education offered was the system for the study of persuasion that they and their slightly earlier colleagues in other continental countries had rediscovered in the fifteenth century: classical rhetoric, mainly from the Roman writers Cicero and Quintilian but also from the Greek philosopher Aristotle. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of these writers for sixteenth-century England, Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Their contribution is analogous to, say, Newton's work on gravity, Euclid's on geometry, Einstein's on relativity. All male children who went to school learned the elements of rhetorical persuasion from the age of six to twelve, and sometimes fourteen, with a few continuing their work at

university. There's considerable evidence that sixteenth-century education, with rote-learning on a massive scale, was highly successful.

Just as we do today, they learned about how the speakers present themselves (*ethos*), the effect on the audience (*pathos*), and register, style and genre. They learned a considerable amount about formal logic, but much more about the other devices and techniques, which were called the 'figures', and which for many, drove the entertainment industry of the time. What this chapter will attempt to do is look at scenes from three plays by Shakespeare and explore the methods of persuasion being used. I am particularly interested in looking at how the figures acquire persuasive force and become just as important as formal logic in structuring our ideas. But first I'll turn to more formal kinds of reasoning and look at *Measure for Measure*, before briefly exploring the persuasive power of figures in establishing ethos or character in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and finally examining the use of ethos and pathos in *Julius Caesar*.

Measure for Measure is a textbook study for formal reasoning. The Duke does it by the book, Isabella is more flexible, and Pompey makes fun of it. Other characters in the play also develop aspects of logic in different ways. When the Duke persuades Claudio, who is about to be put to death for getting his betrothed pregnant, he starts his speech with the proposition 'Be absolute for death' (3.1.5), proceeds with 'Reason thus ...' (6) and continues:

either death or life

Shall thereby be the sweeter. Reason thus with life:

If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing

That none but fools would keep. A breath thou art,

Servile to all the skyey influences

That dost this habitation where thou keep'st

Hourly afflict. Merely, thou art Death's fool;

For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun,
And yet run'st toward him still. . . .

Thou'rt by no means valiant;

For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork

Of a poor worm. . . .

Thou are not thyself;

For thou exists on many a thousand grains

That issue out of dust. Happy thou art not;

For what thou hast not, still thou striv'st to get,

And what thou hast, forget'st. Thou art not certain;

For thy complexion shifts to strange effects

After the moon. . . .

What's yet in this

That bears the name of life? Yet in this life

Lie hid moe thousand deaths; yet death we fear

That makes these odds all even.

(5-13, 15-17, 19-25, 38-41)

Why should Claudio embrace death? First, because to do so makes both life and death sweeter, and second because if life is lost, you lose only that which fools would keep. What then follows is a series of syllogisms explaining why life is something only fools would keep. In fact, these are a special kind of syllogism, called an **enthymeme**. If a syllogism works to a formula, 'If that and that, Then this', 'If A + B, Then C', an enthymeme is the word given to an argument where one of the terms is missing, 'If A and ?, Then C' is the most typical. Because there is a missing term, the argument of each example depends on the listener filling the gap. For example, 'Thou'rt by no means valiant; / For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork / Of a poor worm' (1.5-17): here the listener makes the logical third term 'If you fear a worm, then you are not valiant'. What is interesting about the process is that each syllogism comes to depend on a figure to make sense. Sometimes it's a metaphor, as with the first argument that

begins 'A breath thou art . . .' (8), sometimes a paradox, as in the second argument, 'Merely, thou art Death's fool; / For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun, / And yet run'st toward him still' (11-13). Other figures used to complete the logic are *pun*, *allegory*, *simile*, *allusion* and **personification**.

A logical argument such as the Duke's, that strings argument after argument, is called a **sorites**. A sorites often repeats a word at the beginning or end of each clause, and here the phrase that keeps the list together is 'thou art'. We know that the argument is finished when the Duke generalizes out to 'we' (38-41). The arguments in themselves would be fairly simple to counter, but the length of the list makes it difficult to do so. It is not only the sorites but the display of argumentative breadth and persuasive skill of the speaker that is daunting, and remember, the Duke is disguised as a friar at this point, and carries with him all the respect due to spiritual guides. So as well as formal logic, he is playing upon his ethos as a trusted figure.

Claudio says of Isabella, his sister, 'She hath prosperous art / When she will play with reason and discourse, / And well she can persuade' (1.2.181-3). It falls to her to persuade Angelo, the Duke's literal-minded deputy, not to kill her brother for his crime, and this she attempts to do in two detailed scenes at 2.2 and 2.4. Her first argument begins plainly, indeed too simply, and when rebuffed, Lucio has to urge her to continue. The second plea she makes,

I do think that you might pardon him,

And neither heaven nor man grieve at the mercy

(2.2.49-50)

establishes her key terms of 'mercy', 'heaven' and 'man', to which Angelo adds 'power'. She proceeds logically through these terms, demonstrating the way power and mercy should work:

No ceremony that to great ones longs,

Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,

The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,
 Become them with onc half so good a grace
 As mercy does.

(59-63)

Then power and judgement:

I would to heaven I had your potency,
 And you were Isabel! Should it then be thus?
 No; I would tell what 'twere to be a judge,
 And what a prisoner.

(67-70)

And concludes with the example of Christ who brings together judgement and mercy:

Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once,
 And He that might the vantage best have took
 Found out the remedy. How would you be
 If He, which is the top of judgement, should
 But judge you as you are? O, think on that,
 And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
 Like man new made.

(73-9)

She doesn't explicitly comment on Christ's power, but implies that of course his power is far greater than Angelo's and yet he can show judgement and mercy while Angelo is 'tyrannous' (109). At this point her careful reasoning explodes into metaphors:

Could great men thunder.
 As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be quiet,
 For every pelting petty officer
 Would use his heaven for thunder; nothing but thunder.
 Merciful Heaven,
 Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt

Splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
 Than the soft myrtle.

(111-18)

She continues by accusing Angelo of being the 'proud man, / Dress'd in a little brief authority, / Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd', the 'angry ape' who 'makes the angels weep' (118-23).

To understand the kind of persuasion Isabella uses we need to recognize that there are two main kinds of 'figure': devices that play with transferring semantic meaning from one word to another, and those that play with the conventions of grammar and sentence structure. These are often named as the *tropes* and *schemes*, respectively. One of the factors that makes Isabella seem so logical is that she rarely uses tropes. Only at crucial points where she is driven to extremes does she let go into an image like that of the 'angry ape'. Even at these points, she invests the **metaphor** with a literal intensity that implies that she might actually believe the connection between the image and the reality it describes. Yet throughout her speech, reasoning is informed by the schemes. The appearance of careful balance and thoughtful reason is sustained by the figure of **isocolon** that balances phrases of equal length, giving them an equal argumentative weight (see lines 60-1 above). At several points in her argument she mixes up pronouns, in an attempt to get Angelo to identify with Claudio's predicament, and to think through his new role as law enforcer. This technique, **enallage**, becomes central to the interaction of the two characters. One of her more telling strategies is to call upon authority outside her own argument, not only by referring to Christ, but also in her use of proverbs and adages (128-9, 131-2). The strategy is vital because her argument is based on getting Angelo to recognize that it is precisely because he depends on his own authority that he is making an error of judgement. He needs to recognize the limits to that authority.

In her second argument two scenes later, there is a difference in the way she deploys the key terms. Once more she sets these up at the start with 'I am come to know your pleasure' (2.4.31) and 'Heaven keep your honour' (34). While the key terms of the first argument had stable meanings, here they do not. Both 'pleasure' and 'honour', in the light of Angelo's threat, are terms both of respect and of sexual reference. The unintended pun, an *antanaclasis* where, in repetition, a word shifts from one meaning to another, is available to the audience but possibly not to Isabella. When she does suddenly understand that Angelo is proposing that sex with her will save her brother, her explosion into metaphor (again with that edge of literalism) 'Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies, / And strip myself to death as to a bed / That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield / My body up to shame' (101-4), is the more forceful if the audience has taken her ethos to be 'the innocent'.

After her metaphoric outburst (101-4) she generalizes from Angelo's platitude that all women are frail (123), finally saying that she is but herself, 'I have no tongue but one' (138). This odd statement implies not only that she is certain of herself, that she speaks only the truth, but that there is no double meaning in her words. This extraordinary unselfconsciousness gives the audience an idea of Isabella's own limitations. At the same time, it demonstrates that in asking Angelo to imagine himself as another person, central to her previous argument, she has released in him something he cannot control. Indeed she says, 'Let me entreat you speak the former language' (139). Their remaining exchanges are carefully logical, but note how the key terms reappear: Angelo confesses his 'love' and asserts his sincerity with 'on mine honour' (146), while Isabella, left on her own at the end of the scene, speaks of her brother's 'prompture of the blood' or sexual passion, as well as his 'mind of honour' (177-8).

Isabella's two arguments locate some of the central issues of the play: human and divine power, mercy, judgement, passion,

conduct, honour – and their limits and extents. Yet her method of persuasion, her rhetoric, also makes an unselfconscious argument about her character, for she does not include herself in the criticism she makes of others. At the end of the first argument she says her prayers will save Angelo, thus assuming a divinity or perfection of her own that is unintentionally parallel to his own self-regard. And she doesn't notice the slippage in the words 'honour' and 'pleasure' used with their sexual meaning by Angelo, when she reapplies them to Claudio, someone she loves. Her belief that she speaks only the truth blinds her to her own inconstancy.

Immediately preceding these scenes, in 2.1, the audience is treated to Pompey's great parody of legal logic. It's a warning of what is to come. The scene starts with Elbow, who accuses Froth of harassing his wife. Elbow is important to the parody of persuasion that follows because he speaks in malapropisms, referring to the two accused as 'notorious benefactors', meaning 'malefactors'. Pompey's key device, to take literally anything that is said, is the opposite of malapropism, but he also displays a keen command of a range of strategies. He uses the technique of repeating a word to link sentences together into a sorites: even though they are the weak phrases 'being then', 'telling you then', 'very well then', they carry him from establishing the ground, to cross-examining Froth, to establishing Froth's character, to his summing up. The repetition of 'I beseech you' in his culminating argument, which he takes over from Elbow himself, makes it seem as though he is agreeing with him:

ELBOW I beseech you, sir, ask him what this man did to my wife.

POMPEY I beseech your honour, ask me.

ESCALUS Well, sir, what did this gentleman to her?

POMPEY I beseech you, sir, look in this gentleman's face. Good Master Froth, look upon his honour; 'tis for a good purpose. – Doth your honour mark his face?