

Towards a Grammar of Theatrical Blindness

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Dissertation submitted for the degree of DPhil in Classical Languages and
Literature

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Word count: 77,442 (excluding bibliography)

Abstract

Since the fifth century, the theatre has been a place for seeing. In spite of this, blind figures repeatedly appear on the stage, from Oedipus, Polymestor, Tiresias and the Cyclops to Shakespeare's Gloucester, Beckett's Hamm, Friel's Molly Sweeney and Kane's Ian. These blind characters have an important role to play in articulating the task of the spectator, both in their aural and imaginative construction of the fictional world in pre-naturalistic theatre, and also in their ability to see through the dramatic illusion in later drama. These scenes of blindness and blinding also have consequences for reception studies, since the relationship between them is not straightforwardly a textual reception history. Instead, these blind characters and the scenes in which they appear are read as what Deleuze and Guattari term an 'assemblage': a heterogenous multiplicity that is produced at the moment of reading / watching with reference to other scenes of blindness and blinding.

This thesis sketches out a grammar for such an assemblage, and each chapter focuses on a rule in this grammar. When read as part of an assemblage of blindness, blind characters always have a special relationship with death (Chapter 2), showcase their own performance (Chapter 3), undermine the fictional setting that has been established onstage (Chapter 4), have access to a kind of superhuman knowledge (Chapter 5) and alter the position of their spectators (Chapter 6). Each chapter is structured around a particular moment when the theatre's interest in blind characters resurges, as a response to changes in the social, cultural or scientific understanding of vision and visual impairment. In each chapter, the grammar that is outlined in Chapter 1 with reference to

ancient plays returns to the fore, but is refracted through the historical period
back on to the grammar of the assemblage.

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Acknowledgments

I am hugely grateful to my supervisor, Professor Fiona Macintosh, whose very earliest discussions with me are at the heart of this project, and without whom I would never have begun writing it, let alone made it this far. Her discussions with me have improved almost every word in this thesis, and any errors that remain are, of course, my own. I am deeply indebted to so many other members of the Oxford Classics Faculty and the Faculty of English, and I thank particularly Professor Stephen Harrison, Dr Margaret Kean, Dr Felix Budelmann, Professor Jaś Elsner and Professor Gregory Hutchinson for their comments on drafts of chapters at the transfer of status and confirmation stages. This thesis was completed with the financial support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council and St Hilda's College, Oxford, to whom I am very grateful.

At an early stage I was given the opportunity to present part of this thesis at a conference organised by the 'Postclassicisms' network in Cambridge. Many of the suggestions I received in response were extremely formative, and I would like to thank in particular Dr Constanze Güthenke, Professor Brooke Holmes, Professor Simon Goldhill and Professor Tim Whitmarsh. I am also grateful to everyone at the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, including Dr Claire Kenward, Professor Oliver Taplin and Dr Justine McConnell.

I am very lucky to count among my friends and colleagues so many people who have done so much to improve my work. Dr Peta Fowler and Dr Lynn Robson have tirelessly supported me, and have never yet said 'no' to reading a chapter or discussing an idea. Dr Emma Cole and Dr Lucy Jackson both read chapters at opposing ends of this thesis, and their suggestions and support have

been invaluable. Several wonderful friends have had chapters thrown at them throughout this process, and all of them have been so generous with their time and encouragement. Thank you in particular to Edward Edgcumbe, Ben Llewelyn, Tobi Ogiogwa, John O'Rourke and Tamanna Rahman for your advice, intelligent suggestions and encouragement, and for changing various chapters for the better.

For Mum, Dad and Tom: thank you for everything.

And, for Grandad: who probably still doesn't think 'girls' should go to university.

Note on Texts

Quotations from Greek and Latin texts are taken where possible from Oxford Classical Texts (Oxford), and otherwise from the Loeb Classical Library (Massachusetts). English translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. References to plays by Shakespeare are to the Arden III edition (London). Abbreviations used for classical texts are taken from *Liddell and Scott* (for texts in Greek) and the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (for texts in Latin). The editions of all texts used are included in the bibliography.

Introduction:

Seeing and not seeing in the theatre

When Sarah Kane's *Blasted* opened at the Royal Court Theatre upstairs in 1995, its 'in-yer-face' violence and harsh modernity shocked critics like Michael Billington and Jack Tinker, who infamously branded it "a disgusting feast of filth".¹ More recent scholarship on the play has sought to redeem *Blasted* from these accusations of offensive newness with an appeal to ancient influence. Aleks Sierz commented that the blinded Ian who adorns the cover of the playtext of *Blasted* "could be Oedipus, Gloucester or Hamm", setting Ian's blinding at the centre of a tradition that includes not only Beckett and Shakespeare, influences Kane readily admitted, but also Sophocles, or Seneca.²

That blindness could establish a work's position within a literary tradition in this way was apparent to ancient imitators of Homer. Dio Chrysostom recalls a visit to Borysthenes where he meets Callistratus, a young poet who tells him that he and his friends see blindness as a necessary attribute of those who wish to compose Homeric poetry. The young poets, he reports, are engaged in a curious kind of fandom: not only do they refer to Homer's poetry throughout their own verses, but they are blind themselves (εἰσὶ πάντες οὔτοι

¹ Tinker, 'This Disgusting Feast of Filth', *Daily Mail*, 19 January 1995; Billington,

² Sierz (2001), 10. Ravenhill called Kane a "a contemporary writer with a classical sensibility" in Ravenhill, 'Obituary: Sarah Kane', *Independent*, 23 February 1999. By the time of the revival in 2001, critics followed suit, and began to see the merits of Kane's first play. See Taylor, '*Blasted*: In Praise of a Disgusting Feast of Filth', *Independent*, 26 October 2010.

τυφλοι), and believe it impossible to become a poet without being blind.³ These young poets, according to Callistratus, believe that their blindness stands as proof of influence, and signals their position within a particular literary tradition.⁴ Just as Callistratus' friends hope that their own blindness will allow critics to see Homer's influence on their poetry, Sierz sees in Ian's theatrical blinding a tradition that extends back in time through Bond, Brenton, Beckett, Pinter, Shakespeare, Seneca and Sophocles.

However, the idea that Kane's Ian was a version of Sophocles' (or Seneca's) Oedipus is not an articulation of a reception history. Though a chain of receptions may tentatively be reconstructed between Sophocles and Kane via Ted Hughes' 1967 *Seneca's Oedipus*, any such link must be actively constructed by the spectator, rather than lying latent in the text.⁵ However, unlike Oedipus in both Sophocles and Seneca's plays and Beckett's Hamm, Ian is not blinded offstage, but onstage by the soldier. For Kane, this blinding is no classicising gesture.⁶ Her own resistance to reworking classical texts is well known from her reaction to the Gate Theatre's suggestion that she rewrite a Greek tragedy for their European classics season, which led to her composition of *Phaedra's Love* in 1996. Kane commented:

³ D.Chrys.Or.36.10.

⁴ Milton would make the same assumption later in *Paradise Lost*, 3.34-6 where the poet places himself through his blindness into a tradition of blind poets both mythical and historical.

⁵ See Slaney (2009) for such a chain. For the notion of a 'chain of receptions' see Martindale (1993).

⁶ See Saunders (2002) on *King Lear* as the model for this onstage blinding rather than Oedipus, though Kane refused to acknowledge this. See especially Saunders (2002), 6: "I was doing a workshop with this person who script-edited it, and he said 'Right, I'm going to the toilet, and when I come back tell me what the title of the play is you're going to write'. I knew it was about someone who got drunk a lot, so he came out and I said 'I'm going to call it *Blasted*'. It was only kind of when I got to the fourth draft I suddenly thought 'Of course, it's the blasted heath!'. And by the time I was already reading *Lear*, and it was beginning to influence it, but it was just sheerly coincidental..."

So in the end it was the Gate which suggested something Greek or Roman, and I thought, 'Oh, I've always hated those plays. Everything happens off-stage, and what's the point?'.⁷

My concern here is less to scrutinize Kane's notions of classical influence than to examine further the idea that a 'chain of receptions' lies passively within the work (and makes demands on its author), rather than being activated by the spectator at the point of reading or viewing.⁸ That the term 'reception' implies a passive metaphor of influence has been problematic at least since Goldhill's protestation that the word is

too blunt, too passive a term for the dynamics of resistance and appropriation, recognition and self-aggrandisement that makes up this drama of cultural identity.⁹

Receiving is a metaphorical verb that effaces its subject: someone who receives a letter in the post does not actually do anything. The recipient may be deemed to receive the letter at various points in the transaction (when the letter leaves the postperson's hand, hits the doormat, is opened, read or understood, for instance), but the verb contains only an illusion of activity. By contrast the nexus of blind characters at the centre of Kane's *Blasted* was clearly activated by the spectators of the production in 2001 but not those of 1995, who played an active role in "the drama of cultural identity" that Goldhill identifies at the heart of encountering ancient texts in post-classical contexts.

The metaphor of reception, despite claims of its 'dialogic' nature, is also one structured by the linearity of literary history, moving from past time to

⁷ Interview with Nils Tabert cited in Saunders (2002), 72. Kane would go on to read Seneca's *Phaedra* because she had enjoyed Churchill's version of it, and would later direct *Woyzeck* in the Gate's Büchner season in October of 1997. See Saunders (2002), 71ff on *Phaedra's Love*. For further Chapter 6 on Kane's *Blasted*.

⁸ Martindale (1993), 7.

⁹ Goldhill (2002), 297.

present time.¹⁰ Even Nietzsche's famous attack on positivism in *We Philologists* does little to disturb this linearity. Nietzsche brings a kind of presentism to the argument ("antiquity has in fact always been understood from the perspective of the present - and should the present now be understood from the perspective of antiquity?"), but he relies no less on a model that presupposes a singular line as a connector between two fixed points than Martindale with his chain and later Silk, Gildenhard and Barrow with their concept of a tradition.¹¹

Aristotle Knowsley's early seventeenth-century *Oedipus*, like Kane's *Blasted*, is a play that has suffered from being read according to this metaphor of reception that privileges the linearity of literary history. The play and its neglected relationships with Greek tragedy are discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, but there is one particular relationship that cannot be explained through a reception model of influence. Six years after the production of Knowsley's *Oedipus* at Berwick Grammar School, the date 26 December 1606 is entered into the Stationer's Register. The play that is recorded on this date also, like Knowsley's *Oedipus*, features a prominent blinding scene and appeals to a personified Nature figure. However, this play is not (ostensibly) a play about Oedipus at all, but Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which bears an uncanny resemblance to Knowsley's *Oedipus*.

It has become the refrain of reception studies that "meaning is made at the point of reception".¹² However, when Yale's Elizabethan Club bought the

¹⁰For claims that reception is 'dialogic', see Hopkins (2010), Hardwick and Stray (2011), 5 and Martindale (2013), 177. The majority of this interest in the 'dialogic' nature of reception studies comes about in response to the opposition between 'tradition' and 'reception' as metaphors for the discipline. Cf. Budelmann and Haubold (2008) on the use of the term 'tradition'.

¹¹Martindale (1993). Silk, Gildenhard and Barrow (2013).

¹²Repeated throughout Martindale (1993) from Jauss (1970) and Iser (1974).

manuscript of Knowsley's *Oedipus* in 2011 in celebration of the centenary of its foundation in 1911, the play was relatively unknown. It had been transcribed in the 1960s by Ivor Collins and Derek Shorrocks, but had been the subject of very little work by classicists or early modernists.¹³ Any plausible reading / reception of this *Oedipus*, then, inevitably involves *King Lear*, which forms part of the cultural apparatus with which the reader decodes the play. The horizon of expectation of the reader, if not of the text, includes the action of *King Lear*.¹⁴ The metaphor of reception is inverted, here, and with it the linear descent of literary history, perhaps best expressed by the example of a famous metaphor in *King Lear*: "As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods. / They kill us for their sport".¹⁵ These metaphorical schoolboys of *King Lear* appear in Knowsley's *Oedipus*, where there are actual schoolboys onstage, who hope that the deaths from the plague will continue so that they can continue their sport rather than return to their studies.

For reception studies, however, this is problematic: a reception scholar could construct a chain of subterranean receptions that linked Shakespeare with the performance of Knowsley's *Oedipus* at Berwick Grammar School, but this would be an authorial fiction, not a reception history.¹⁶ Establishing the influence of Knowsley's *Oedipus* on Shakespeare's *King Lear* would involve constructing a plausible persona for Shakespeare to allow a possible intertext; it would not involve examining any meaning made at the point of reception of the play. The

¹³ See Yale Elizabethan Club's description of the manuscript: <https://elizabethanclub.yale.edu/oedipus-manuscript>, and its entry in Wiggins (2012), vol. 4, 186-8.

¹⁴ See Whitmarsh (2006) for the *Vera Historia*'s foreshadowing of its own reception.

¹⁵ *King Lear*, 4.1.41-2

¹⁶ For 'subterranean' receptions see Hall and Macintosh (2005) and Revermann (2008), 178.

tyranny of literary history's forward motion occludes the actual moment of reception here, one in which it is *King Lear* that informs Knowsley's *Oedipus*.

The Knowsley-Shakespeare encounter lies behind the model adopted in this thesis to explain the relationship between scenes of blindness, where the preferred model is an assemblage rather than a reception history. The metaphor of an 'assemblage' is developed by Deleuze and Guattari in their *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *Mille Plateaux* (1980 - the two volumes together make up *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*) and, later, defined as:

... a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogenous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which are important but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind.¹⁷

Deleuze and Guattari begin their *Mille Plateaux* with an account of a book that is also an assemblage, which can only be interpreted by plugging it into a machine that organises its multiplicity of associations:

... when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work. Kleist and the mad war machine, Kafka and a most extraordinary bureaucratic machine... Literature is an assemblage.¹⁸

The importance of these machines in reading an assemblage is apparent from the early reception of *Blasted*. Sierz' list, not of influences, but of texts against which to read Ian's blindness becomes a machine through which *Blasted* can be interpreted.

¹⁷ Deleuze and Parnet (1987), 69, trans. Tomlinson and Habberjam. See Deleuze and Guattari (1980).

¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari (1987), 3 trans. Howard. See Deleuze and Guattari (1980), 4.

Critics undervalued Kane's first play not because they missed the fact that Ian's blinding was inherently Sophoclean, but because they failed to plug the text into the appropriate machine to contextualise its violence. The playwright David Greig wrote to the *Guardian* in 1997, suggesting an alternative machine into which to plug *Blasted*: "What about Beckett, Artaud, Sartre, Heiner Müller, Howard Barker, Genet and almost all Greek tragedy, come to think of it?"¹⁹ Sierz' "Oedipus, Gloucester or Hamm", then, moves away from the influence of individual playwrights and implicitly offers blindness in the theatre as a machine into which *Blasted* can be productively plugged in order to make sense of its 'in-ner-face' violence. Similarly, Knowsley's *Oedipus* cannot, strictly speaking, be read alongside *King Lear* in a reception model because no chronological textual contact can be established. It can, however, be plugged into an interpretative machine that includes *King Lear* and functions as a productive assemblage.²⁰

The machine that Sierz offers does not constitute any convincing argument for the reception of Sophocles or Seneca's Oedipus plays in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*. Proving an intertext cannot be the object of assemblage-thinking, because assemblage-thinking requires the acknowledgment of simultaneous multiplicity.²¹ Ian's blinding is not so much Sophoclean as a simultaneous multiplicity of Sophocles, Seneca, Shakespeare and Beckett. Assemblage-thinking takes the reader's / spectator's own present in Jauss' conception of reception

¹⁹ Greig, letter to the *Guardian*, 24 January 1995.

²⁰ The need to undercut the linear chronology of literary history was asserted in Fowler (2000).

²¹ Müller (2015), 28 provides the most helpful exploration of the application of assemblages to a field of study (in this case, human geography), including his reformulation of Deleuze's definition of an assemblage: "in other words, assemblage is a mode of ordering heterogeneous entities so that they work together for a certain time". See more recent experiments in applied assemblage theory, DeLanda (2016) and Sauvagnargues (2016).

seriously and imagines the relationships between texts as a product of the reader's (or spectator's) own construction.²² It removes the idea - a hangover from source study - that relationships between texts are fixed or linear, and that a canon of texts influential on an author can be established. This thesis takes each scene of blindness onstage to be part of an assemblage, with the diachronic tradition of scenes of blindness in the theatre functioning not as a reception history or a metanarrative (as Bolt imagines²³), but as a machine into which such scenes are plugged.

Towards a grammar of theatrical blindness: defining the machine

If each instance of blindness onstage functions as part of an assemblage and can be plugged into the theatrical blindness machine, then this machine must operate according to a specific coding / grammar in order to be recognisable. In his 1950 commentary on Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Fraenkel contends that "for Greek tragedy there exists also something like a grammar of dramatic technique".²⁴ Fraenkel invokes this grammar in opposition to the linguistic grammar employed by Headlam in his attribution of lines 613-4 to the Herald rather than Clytemnestra. Fraenkel implies that Headlam is plugging these lines into the wrong machine here: into a linguistic grammar machine rather than the machine of dramatic technique.²⁵

²² See Jauss (1970) and Jauss (1982).

²³ Bolt (2014).

²⁴ Fraenkel (1950), 305 on 613f.

²⁵ cf. Headlam (1904).

While Headlam's contention seems to have vanished from modern scholarship on the play, Fraenkel's retort has endured.²⁶ Taplin's 1977 *Stagecraft of Aeschylus* established a 'grammar of performance' in Greek tragedy. Taplin's study is generally credited with the genesis of the 'visual turn' in the scholarship on Greek tragedy, and has lent its mode of reading to a huge number of studies of visual aspects of Greek tragedy, as well as other forms of theatre.²⁷ Although the term 'grammar' has been applied to readings of various types of visual art by analogy with language, the notion of a theatrical grammar is now common, particularly among modern semioticians of the stage.²⁸ Following Taplin, and as early as Bain (1981), this grammar of dramatic technique came to be applied to various dramatic tropes in Greek tragedy - in Bain's case, the giving of orders to mute characters.²⁹ Bain's study establishes "one of these rules in the grammar of dramatic technique", namely that nameless non-speaking characters always carry out orders given onstage with little or no delay.³⁰ This study turns away

²⁶ Raeburn's (2011) 133 commentary on 613-4 does not even suggest to readers that 613 could be attributed to anyone but Clytemnestra. The phrase became a refrain of reviews of Taplin (1977), see for example Griffith (1980), 167; and especially Rehm (2002), 8: "Oliver Taplin's magisterial *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* explicitly addresses Fraenkel's call for 'a grammar of dramatic technique'".

²⁷ Taplin (1977), 2 begins on much surer footing than Fraenkel's tentative suggestion: "these days all but a lunatic fringe of students of Greek drama would accept the primacy of performance". See the description of this turn in Liapis, Panayotakis and Harrison (2013), 5ff.

²⁸ E.g. "the grammar of sculpture" in Saint-Martin (1987), 145; narrative grammar in Barthes (1977); "a fundamental grammar of the cinematic" in Souza (2006) and Colman (2014). See for example Rai and Reinelt (2014), *The Grammar of Politics and Performance* and de Toro (1995), 129 noting that the task of the semiotician is "the formulation of a 'grammar' of the actions...". The phrase is now so ubiquitous that "a grammar of theatre" is listed as an example of the usage of the word grammar by the Marriam-Webster dictionary, though the *Oxford English Dictionary* restricts its usage to the strictly linguistic.

²⁹ Bain (1981), for the relationship between the dramatic grammar and a linguistic grammar. Other studies followed suit: Yoon (2012), constructing the grammatical rules relating to anonymous characters in tragedy. See also Fowler (2000) 275 on the grammar of closure.

³⁰ Bain (1981), 2.

from Bain's concern to establish the rules of a singular grammar of tragedy, and instead develops Fraenkel and Taplin's highlighting of a particular grammar, here used to understand a staged moment.

Fraenkel's distinction between two possible grammars is also a reminder that not all grammars that function as machines are equal. A grammar of theatrical blindness, although necessarily taking account of the changing attitudes to people with disabilities in real life, cannot be used to read blindness in real life.³¹ Rose is realistic about the differences between real and theatrical blindness in her analysis of lived ancient experiences of disability:

Stories about ordinary people with vision gradually fading from cataracts are not the stuff of legend. Similarly the fact that a blind person can live an ordinary life by relying on senses rather than sight is not particularly interesting; divine compensation such as the gift of extraordinary hearing makes a more durable tale. Some blind people were venerated; some were castigated; most went about their business, albeit with more difficulty and physical vulnerability than a sighted person, and are lost from the record.³²

That blindness takes on meaning in the theatre that it does not have in real life is apparent from Rose's consideration of the language used to refer to those who are blind in Greek literature: characters who are both literally and metaphorically blind in tragedy and elsewhere are *tuphlos*, and less commonly *alaos* and *atē* (especially for metaphorical blindness in Homer) are also used.³³

³¹ A grammar of real-life disability would be necessarily ableist: Mitchell and Snyder (2000) call this attribution of meaning to disability "narrative prosthesis". The essays collected in Laes (2017) address some aspects of real-life disability in the ancient world. Stereotypes of disability in film and photography have received much more attention than in the theatre: see Longmore (1985) and Norden (1994) on film, and Hevey (1992) on photography.

³² Rose (2003), 80. The largest distinction here, as Rose points out, is that most fictional blindness is caused by trauma, whereas in real life, both ancient and modern, disease is the most common cause of blindness (see the WHO's *Vision 2020* report, 2007).

³³ Rose (2003), 80-1.

For Rose's real-life considerations, however, there is another relevant term - *amblyōpia* - used in Plato and elsewhere for those who, though not completely blind, do not see well.³⁴ There is not a single use of this term *amblyōpia* anywhere in Greek tragedy, despite tragedy's persistent interest in the troubling of vision by madness, divinities and poor human judgment.³⁵

Tragedy therefore constructs a false binary between sight and blindness that has no place in real life ancient understandings of disability, and locates the moment of blinding at the severance of the reciprocal gaze, as encapsulated in Oedipus' explanation that he blinded himself in order to avoid the reciprocal gaze of his father and mother (in *S.O.T.1371-4*).³⁶ For Oedipus, as for the spectators of tragic performance, blindness is the state both of being unable to see and of being unseen (by his parents, in the case of Oedipus). Blindness therefore presents a fundamental challenge to the reciprocal visual mechanics of the theatre.

Seeing in the *theatron*

In Classics, as well as in Performance Studies, the visual etymology of θέατρον and θέαται is often taken as shorthand for the assumed dominance of vision over

³⁴ Rose (2003), 81, citing *amblyōpia* from *Pl.Hp.Mi.374d2*. See Samama (2017). An analogous distinction might be the definition of legal blindness in the modern world, limited to those with a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in their better eye with correction, or with a visual field of 20 degrees or less in their better eye in the USA. In the UK the Snellen test is used to determine visual acuity, see <http://www.rnib.org.uk/eye-health-registering-your-sight-loss/criteria-certification>.

³⁵ See for example the ways in which madness is understood as a trouble of vision in Padel (1995).

³⁶ Other less permanent methods of ending reciprocal vision are also frequent in tragedy, e.g. veiling as in *E.Heracl.1111-1112* and 1159. Lewellyn-Jones (2005), 82 lists examples of veiling among other expressions of grief in tragedy. For an example of real-life veiling in the theatre see *Hdt.6.67* on the veiling of the Spartan king Demartos. On gazes and their avoidance, and the analogy between vision and touch see Cairns (2005), 123-156.

the other senses in the theatrical experience.³⁷ “By etymology and by practice”, writes Schechner, “a theatre is a place of / for seeing”.³⁸ That vision is necessarily the dominant sensory mode in which to experience the theatre is apparent to Vitruvius, who dates the axiomatic relationship between the theatre and sight at least as far back as the plays of Aeschylus.³⁹ Vitruvius takes the fact that the theatre is experienced visually as too obvious to deserve much in the way of further investigation, an attitude that modern scholarship has shared. Maaïke Bleeker’s *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking* (2008) remains the only monograph on the necessity of seeing for the production of meaning in the theatre.⁴⁰ Bleeker’s interest is a specific shift in visualities in the mid-twentieth century with the instigation of postmodern deconstructive viewing. Notwithstanding this postmodern shift, much recent work in art history and performance studies is based upon the assumption of this relationship, with the spectator’s vision (as opposed to the other senses) separating the theatre from any other kind of performed ritual.⁴¹

Schneider distinguishes theatre from Schechner’s cave paintings, which were both seen and touched, with an emphasis on the distinctly visual theatrical relationship:

³⁷ E.g. Taplin (1978), 1 and Wiles (1997), 207. See also Meineck (2013) on the theatre as a site for viewing. On the etymology see Shipley (1984), 353 and Partridge (1966), 710.

³⁸ Schechner (2007), 10. Cf. Styan (1975), 111: “the act of seeing was not at the heart of this occasion, we can be sure, and the absence of visual detail in Greek tragedy supports this”, countered by Walton (1984), 2: “I hope to show that we cannot be sure”.

³⁹ Vit.7.praef.11; for Agatharchus as the link between sceneography and perspective, see Rouveret (1989) 100-6.

⁴⁰ Cf. Johnson (2012) 76 for this tendency to overlook vision in theatre studies. For the influential separation of 'vision' and 'visuality', see also Foster (1988) and Bryson (1988), 91-2.

⁴¹ See Bennett (1990), and Aston (1991). See also Blau (1990) on the visual distance between actor and spectator distinguishing performance from other forms of experience, and Baugh (2005) on the emergence of a visual scenography.

The *theatron*, on the other hand, is a man-made cave clearly marked 'look but don't touch' [...] The point is that an a-tactile visuality, in tandem with textuality, has offered historians a glass behind which to display the theatre / ritual distinction.⁴²

Outside of Performance Studies, even in volumes dedicated to the sensory turn in Classics, the etymology of *theatron* is taken for granted. In the chapter devoted to blindness in *Sight and the Ancient Senses* (2016), Coo briefly notes the etymology of sight in Greek words for theatre (*theatron*, the place of seeing), spectators (*hoi theatai*, the ones looking) and mask (*prosopon*, near to the eyes), before moving on to a discussion of the blind mask without interrogating this assumption: "The blind characters of ancient Greek theatre present a paradoxical phenomenon: blindness must be accessed by vision itself".⁴³

For Schechner, it is not simply that the necessity of visual engagement separates the theatre from other art forms, but that the idea that the locus of meaning in the theatre is visual distinguishes theatre in an Aristotelian tradition from other forms of performance.⁴⁴ In order to demonstrate this, he opposes the visual tradition of the theatre, resulting from Aristotle's reading of fifth-century tragedy, with the location of theatricality described by Bharata-muni's *Natyasastra*, a founding text in Indian theatre that occupies a position parallel to the *Poetics* in Western dramatic tradition. In the *Natyasastra*, the locus of experience in the theatre is not the eyes, but the *rasa*, a sense linked to the digestive system:

Because it is enjoyably tasted, it is called *rasa*. How does the enjoyment come? Persons who eat prepared food mixed with different condiments and sauces, if they are sensitive, enjoy the

⁴² Schneider (2008), 26; see Schechner (1988) 69-70. Banes and Lepecki (2007) devote their attention to taste, touch and smell on the grounds that the relationship between sight and hearing and the theatre is well-established.

⁴³ Coo (2016), 243.

⁴⁴ Schechner (2007).

different tastes and then feel pleasure; likewise, sensitive spectators, after enjoying the various emotions expressed by the actors through words, gestures, and feelings feel pleasure. This feeling by the spectators is here explained as the *rasa* of performance.⁴⁵

Schechner sees the visuality of Greek theatre as important to the competitive nature of the festival performances, and explains this with reference to the relationship in European epistemological thought between vision and objectivity.⁴⁶ Schechner's conclusion is a modification of the etymological, axiomatic relationship between the theatre and sight that we have seen elsewhere in Classics and Performance Studies. For him it is the Western, Aristotelian theatrical tradition that is necessarily visual:

*Greek theatre, then, and all European types of theatre derived from it, are places of / for seeing and saying. What marks this kind of theatre (and after it film, TV and possibly the internet) is its specularity, its strategies of gazing.*⁴⁷

For Classicists, however, Schechner's conclusion that it is Aristotle who inaugurates a tradition of understanding theatre as a visual transaction is surprising. The most commonly cited truism about Aristotle is that he had no interest in the visual effects of the theatre, an argument made on the grounds of his relegation of *opsis* (usually translated 'spectacle' or, in a more positive sense,

⁴⁵ Bharata-muni, *Natyasastra*, adapted from the translation of Adya Rangacharya (1996), 54-55. The Sanskrit word *natya* is roughly synonymous with 'performance', including dance, theatre and music but is limited to those art forms that have religious or mythical origins. The term *rasa* is a sense that covers smell and taste as well as other physical means of perceiving food in the stomach. On this text see especially Gupt (1994)'s comparison between the *Poetics* and the *Natyasastra*.

⁴⁶ Schechner (2007), 14. Though cf. Phelan (1993), 14 "vision cannot be the guarantee of knowing once one knows that vision is never complete", dating this realization to Newton's discovery of the prismatic properties of light and colour. See also Classen (1998), 143 on the relationship between sight, 'objective' knowledge and power.

⁴⁷ Schechner (2007), 14. Italics mine.

'visuality'⁴⁸) to the bottom of his six constituent parts of tragedy in Book 6 of the *Poetics*.⁴⁹ This understanding that Aristotle had dismissed *opsis* in the *Poetics* was taken to legitimate the study of Greek tragedies as texts rather than as scripts for performance throughout most of their history.⁵⁰

Gilbert Murray asserted in the preface to Ingram Bywater's (1920) translation of the *Poetics*:

... even to accomplished scholars, the meaning [of *opsis*] is often obscure, as may be seen... by a study of the long series of misunderstandings and overstatements and corrections which form the history of the *Poetics* since the Renaissance.⁵¹

For Halliwell, as well as for Billault, Aristotle's attitude is explained by the diminishing role of dramatists in the fourth century; for Taplin, it is Aristotle's vested interest in classifying drama among the *poietike* that causes his resistance to the visual; for Sifakis, a lack of critical separation of tragedy as drama from tragedy as poetry among readers of Aristotle accounts for this; and for Konstan, it is melodrama that is the target of Aristotle's attack, not *opsis* itself.⁵² Meineck sums up the *zeitgeist* of this anti-Aristotelian turn, noting that the relegation of *opsis* in the study of Greek tragedy is the result of "the trauma of translation",

⁴⁸ Meineck (2013) translates 'visuality' and explains the negative connotations of 'spectacle'. In the introduction to Harrison and Liapis (2013), 1, the authors translate *opsis* as 'all non-verbal constituents of ancient theatre'.

⁴⁹ See Chaston (2010), 6: "to privilege the visual in a study of Greek tragedy is to question to some extent Aristotle's relegation of *opsis* in his *Poetics* to the 'least artistic and least essential part of the poetry' with *Poet.* 1450b17". See also Wiles (1997), 4ff, who heralds the publication of Taplin (1973) as the beginning of "a new era".

⁵⁰ The definitive blow dealt to this model of reading tragedy was Taplin (1977). See Wiles (1997), 4, and Poe (1992) and (1993) for his challenge to Taplin. Others had anticipated Taplin less influentially, e.g. Arnott (1959), Hourmouziades (1965), Russo (1962), though cf. the criticisms of Segal (1965). See, more recently, Harrison and Liapis (2013), who cite these, and understand them to be important landmarks in the history of performance studies of ancient drama.

⁵¹ Bywater (1920), 4.

⁵² Halliwell (1998); Billault (2001); Taplin (1995), 95; Sifakis (2013) and Konstan (2013). See also Dingel (1971) on necessary props and Scott (1999) on the necessary place of spectacle in the *Poetics*.

with mistranslations of both *opsis* and *atechnotaton* diminishing the importance of the visuality that elsewhere in the *Poetics* plays a central role in both the production and the experience of tragedy.⁵³

That this relegation of *opsis* to the position of least important element of tragedy is a misunderstanding (and not an understanding) of Aristotle is apparent from the account of Carcinus' failed play:

σημεῖον δὲ τούτου ὃ ἐπετιμᾶτο Καρκίνῳ. ὁ γὰρ Ἀμφιάραος ἐξ ἱεροῦ ἀνήει, ὃ μὴ ὀρῶντα ἐλάνθανεν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς σκηνῆς ἐξέπεσεν δυσχερανάντων τοῦτο τῶν θεατῶν.⁵⁴

The penalty given to Carcinus is evidence of this. For Amphiaros rose [or came back] from a temple. This escaped the notice of one who had failed to visualise the scene, but when it was put on the stage it failed because the audience objected.

There is much debate over what Carcinus' scenographic mistake was here.⁵⁵ Just as Meineck argued of *atechnotaton*, the problem seems again to be one of translation.⁵⁶ The verb ἀνειμι, used of Amphiaros rising from the Underworld, is in Pausanias (1.34.4), but the more widely used Homeric meaning is 'to return'.⁵⁷ What Carcinus actually did here is unclear, but Aristotle does not leave his readers, either ancient or modern, with any ambiguities about what the solution

⁵³ Meineck (2016), 154. See also *Rhet.* 3.1404a15 where it is the fact that acting is understood to be an intrinsic talent that makes it *atechnotaton*, with Halliwell (1998), 340: "what Aristotle clearly means [by *atechnotaton*] is that [*opsis*] is not part of the poet's art, but someone else's". See also *Po.*1448b15-18 on the audience's viewing pleasure and *Po.*1449b31-3 on the necessity of *opsis* to mimesis.

⁵⁴ *Arist.Po.*1455a25.

⁵⁵ See *inter alia*: Else (1957) who imagines the actor playing Amphiaros forgetting where he had exited to; Allan (1971) who attributes the error to unclear scenery; Craik (1980) 167-9: "ce qui choquait était, semble-t-il, que ce tēlos divinisé sortait de terre... alors que les dieux descendent sur terre", agreeing with Margoliouth (1911); Green (1990), 281-5 who thinks Amphiaros was resurrected and should therefore have come from a tomb rather than a temple; Davidson (2003) who thinks Amphiaros could not have come from a temple at all. See also Edmunds (1992) and Csapo and Slater (1995), 303.

⁵⁶ See note 53.

⁵⁷ See Gardiner (1978).

might have been. Carcinus' play failed to make visual sense to the audience because he did not perceive of the play visually (μὴ ὁρῶντα), in the process of writing it.⁵⁸ In order to avoid this kind of error, Aristotle suggests, tragedians ought to be in the habit of keeping the play πρὸ ὀμμάτων (before the eyes) while writing it. The lack of any reflexive possessive pronoun with ὀμμάτων allows the Carcinus episode to function as a corrective to the relegation of *opsis* in Chapter 6 of the *Poetics*: it is not just his own eyes that Aristotle requires the poet to be mindful of in composing his plays, but the audience's as well.⁵⁹

However, it is not to Aristotle that Vitruvius dates the centrality of vision in the production of tragedy, but to Aeschylus' scenographer Agatharchus. This attribution is puzzling, not least because the development of scene painting in the Athenian theatre is traditionally given a much later date than Vitruvius' *Aeschylō docente tragoediam*.⁶⁰ If indeed Agatharchus was the set designer of the *Oresteia*, as Walton and others understand him to have been, then it is clear that Vitruvius allows him to feature here as the agent of both a new kind of scene-painting and a corresponding emphasis on the visual experience of tragedy.⁶¹ In fact Agatharchus' book, as Vitruvius tells us, does not only require that the theatre be understood as an art form that is accessed visually; it also outlines a kind of vision that is specifically theatrical: *uti de incerta re incertae imagines aedificiorum in scaenarum picturis redderent speciem* ("such that from an

⁵⁸ Arist.Po.1455a23-4.

⁵⁹ E.g. Edmunds (1992), 214-29 and Sifakis (2013), 59ff.

⁶⁰ Vit.7.praef.11. For the discussion of the period Vitruvius is designating here see Christensen (1999). On the dating of scene-painting see also Arist.Po.1449a18 and cf. Csapo and Slater (1994), part IV. See also Walton (1984), 37 on the relationship between Vitruvius' attribution of scene-painting to Agatharchus, and Aristotle's attribution of it to Sophocles.

⁶¹ Walton (1984), 38. Granger (1934), vol 2, 71 comments: "the play was the trilogy of the *Oresteia*".

uncertain object, uncertain images may give the appearance of buildings in the scenery of the stage").⁶²

Much attention has been paid to the way in which Agatharcus establishes the role of perspective for later scenographers like Inigo Jones, but there has been much less interest in how this comment is also an anticipation of what would later be understood to be the visual semiotics of the theatre.⁶³ Agatharcus' scenery relies on a process of active spectatorship on the part of the audience: the *re incerta* comes to stand in for the *imagines aedificiorum* not only through the vision of the audience, but by their acceptance of one image as a substitute for the other.⁶⁴ Vitruvius' reading of the visuality of the theatre is not just anti-Aristotelian. He is also gesturing here towards the spectators' active involvement in the creation of meaning in the theatre through a specific mode of theatrical seeing.⁶⁵

How do we see?

The activity of the spectator that Vitruvius takes for granted in his comments about Agatharchus was not restricted to viewing within the *theatron*, but conditioned by early scientific notions of the processes of vision. As Squire notes

⁶² Vit.7.praef.11. Though on the problems of translation in this passage see Byrneat (2017), 57.

⁶³ See Orrell (1985), 33 and Peacock (1995), 57 on Jones and Vitruvian perspective. For this visual semiotics see Alter (1990) and Elam (1980). See also Fischer-Lichte (1992).

⁶⁴ Cf. the formulation of semioticians like Brušák (1938), 62: "while in real life the utilitarian function of an object is usually more important than its signification, on a theatrical set the signification is all important"; see Elam (1980), 7 for an example of the table representing a table as part of a set having the same semiotic function as a drawing of a table (or a *re incerta*) representing a table.

⁶⁵ cf. Ubersfeld (1977) on the role of visual cues in the text. Wiles (1997), 6 reformulates the question Taplin (1978) poses performance, "is it there?" to suit his subjective model of spectatorship, "do I see it?" and the related but separate question, "did they see it?". For the active role of the spectator at the opening of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, particularly relevant to Vitruvius' statements about Agatharchus, its designer, see Meineck (2016)

in *Sight and the Ancient Senses*: "Like it or not, what and how we see must depend upon preconceptions about what 'seeing' entails."⁶⁶ For Smith, as well as for others involved in the recent turn towards a historical understanding of sensory experience, a sense is "a product of place and, especially time".⁶⁷ The active viewing that Agatharchus requires of his spectators according to Vitruvius is underscored by the cultural and scientific understanding of vision in the fifth century. As Zeitlin points out in her discussion of the visual parity in the fates of Hecuba and Polymestor (both have gazed upon the bodies of their own dead children) in Euripides' *Hecuba*:

Vision, we must recall, is always reciprocal in common Greek notions about optics, which hold that light emanates from the eye as well as from the source of light.⁶⁸

Spectators in the theatre are understood to be active participants in the attribution of meaning to the objects onstage precisely because by the fifth century, the scientific process of vision is understood to be active and reciprocal.

This reciprocity, however, is not strictly theatrical. In Book 13 of the *Odyssey*, Athena surrounds Odysseus with a cloud, making him both unrecognisable and temporarily blind to his homeland (οὐδέ μιν ἔγνω).⁶⁹

Frontisi-Ducroux and Vernant note that Odysseus' inability to recognise his

⁶⁶ Cf. Goldhill (2000), 70: "The act of viewing itself is always (to be) constructed in a socially and intellectually specific way, which requires (historical) analysis". For the theorising of this kind of analysis as a 'period eye' in art history, see Baxandall (1972), 29ff and Holly (1996) on 'past looking'. For other histories of looking see Jonas (1966), Lindberg (1976), Jay (1993), Levin (1993) and Darrigol (2012), See also Brennan and Jay (1996) who explore the ways in which Greek optics are influential on later understandings of vision, and Wade and Swanston (2013) on theories of vision. It was Barthes who called for a "history of looking" in *Camera Lucida* (1981), and his remark was part of a sensory turn that by 2014 would enable Howes and Classen (2014), 1 to state as simple fact that "the ways we use our senses, and the ways we create and understand the sensory world, are shaped by culture".

⁶⁷ Smith (2007), 3. See also Howes (1991), Classen (1993), Jay (2011) among others.

⁶⁸ Zeitlin (1996), 189, citing Simon (1988) on the optics behind this assertion.

⁶⁹ *H.Od.*13.187-93.

homeland seems illogical, since he has been from the beginning of the poem "celui dont l'idée fixe était de voir (*ideein*) les siens et sa maison".⁷⁰ The momentary inconsistency is explained, however, by the necessity of reciprocal vision. The act of concealing the hero from others (αὐτὸν / ἄγνωστον) has also blinded his own vision, or, as Frontisi-Ducroux explains in an earlier book: "le voir n'étant pas séparé de l'être vu".⁷¹ Squire begins his introduction to *Sight and the Ancient Senses* with an epigram about visual reciprocity, and Frontisi-Ducroux and Vernant's volume also opens with the image of a mirror, emphasising the importance of reciprocity in the ancient understanding of vision both inside and outside of the theatre.⁷²

This reciprocity is not simply a literary trope, but is grounded in the scientific understanding of the process of vision by the fifth century. The Ebers papyrus is the first known record in the long history of ancient ophthalmology.⁷³ It is fragmentary, and deals with cures for diseases of the eye but - as is typical of Egyptian medical texts - not with the science of vision. For this reason, most histories of the science of vision begin not with the Ebers papyrus but with pre-Socratic philosophy and the popular idea that sight is caused by a visual fire, as in Empedocles' comparison of the eye and a lantern.⁷⁴ The image of a visual fire emanating light that strikes visible objects had a long history of inheritors, including Hipparchus (who imagined vision to work according to an analogy

⁷⁰ Frontisi-Ducroux and Vernant (1997), 13-14. They understand this passage to indicate a kind of blindness: "ils [les yeux d'Ulysse] sont comme aveugles".

⁷¹ Frontisi-Ducroux (1995), 20.

⁷² See Squire (2016), 1. On visual reciprocity cf. also Blondell (2013), 11-12 on female beauty as a problem of reciprocal seeing.

⁷³ See Wade (1998), 2, Nunn (1996), 30-3 and Vogel and Berke (2009), 43-4.

⁷⁴ Empedocles, B84, Diels and Kranz (1951), vol. 1, 342. So Darrigol (2012), 2, for example.

with touch, noting that the fire in the eyes is a 'visual hand'⁷⁵). Even the later atomists, although they dismissed the visual fire image, retained the extramission principle that lay behind it.⁷⁶

The visual fire's legacy was not so much its microcosmic connection with the sun, but the reciprocity that it lent to Greek understandings of vision, with two active seeing parties required even as early as Homer.⁷⁷ In *Iliad* 19, when Achilles sees the arms given to him by his mother Thetis (that the Myrmidons will not look at), his eyes flash with a light from within: δεινὸν ὑπὸ βλεφάρων ὡς εἰ σέλας ἐξεφάανθεν.⁷⁸ In another passage concerned with seeing and not seeing, Zeus consoles Hera that neither gods nor humans will be able to see their encounter because they, like Odysseus when he returns home in the *Odyssey*, will be encircled in a mist impenetrable to the eye (and flame) of Helios, that will render them both invisible and unable to see.⁷⁹

Seeing and being seen, recurring concerns in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are inseparable categories of visual engagement.⁸⁰ Both are figured, as early as Homer's epic poetry, in the image of the visual fire. In his synthesis of the atomists' and Empedoclean understandings of vision, Plato preserves the analogy that we find in Homer between the visual fire and the sun, but uses

⁷⁵ Hipparchus, cited by Aetius of Antioch in Diels (1879), 404. See Darrigol (2012), 3, who discusses these examples.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Lucretius' summarising of Epicurus in *DRN*.4.54-89. See Darrigol (2012), 3-4. The understanding of sight by analogy with touch is important to later anti-theatrical prejudices about viewing in the theatre, on which see Chapter 6.

⁷⁷ On the sun and vision in Greek tragedy, see Chapter 1. Sandywell (1996) 49 argues that "the graphic visual language of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* shaped the fundamental themes and imagery of European self-consciousness".

⁷⁸ Hom.*Il.*19.17.

⁷⁹ Hom.*Il.*14.341ff

⁸⁰ For the *Iliad* as a kind of seeing-space see Clay (2010), 3ff; on eyewitnessing in Homer see Slatkin (2007); on focalisation in the *Iliad* see de Jong (1987); on the issues surrounding divine visibility in Homer see Graziosi and Haubold (2005), 81.

scientific language to articulate a reciprocal understanding of vision that requires active engagement from both the seen object and the spectator.⁸¹ For Plato, the fire (πῦρ εἰλικρινές) flows out through the eyes and collides with the fire issued from the objects of vision, requiring reciprocal participation from both the viewer and the viewed.⁸²

In the theatre, the idea that vision comes about through a reciprocal relationship in which the spectator collaborates with the viewed object has far-reaching consequences. Coo locates this reciprocity at the level of the etymology of the Greek word for mask:

... the word for the mask, *prosōpon* was the same as that commonly used for the face, its etymology suggesting both that which is near to (one's own) eyes, and that which is opposite the eyes (of another).⁸³

Zeitlin remarks on the reciprocity invited by the mask, recalling that the satyrs in Aeschylus' *Theoroi* are concerned both with looking at their own masks and with others' visual identification of the masks with them. She also notes of the blind mask of Oedipus in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*:

... the confrontation of the audience with the rupture of a reciprocal gaze between spectator and actor, by which in the theatrical setting an unseeing figure is a spectacle for others' eyes.⁸⁴

Masks focalise on the eyes of the actor, which form the pupils of the eyes

⁸¹ Pl.*Ti.*45b-d. Plato makes obvious use here of Euclid's rays and other methods of figuring vision, on which see Darrigol (2012), 1-15.

⁸² Pl.*Ti.*45b.

⁸³ Coo (2016), 243. See Napier (1986), 8 and Beekes (2010), 1240. See Segal (1982) 249 on the use of *prosopōn* to mean mask and Goldhill (1986), 261 on *prosopōn* as both mask and face in the *Bacchae*. See Hughes (2011), 166-177 on the complex relationship between seeing and concealing of comic masks.

⁸⁴ Zeitlin (1994), 194-5. See also Calame (1996), 28, Calame (2005), 115 and Meineck (2013), 164, though see also Buxton's challenge in Buxton (1996), 38-9.

of the mask and also enable him to see through it.⁸⁵ In vase paintings the reciprocity between mask and actor are common currency, with masks frequently depicted being held in the arms of partly costumed actors, whose eyes are locked in fixed stare.⁸⁶ Despite beginning her discussion with *prosōpon* as an image of reciprocal, theatrical vision, Coo rejects reciprocal vision in the theatre in favour of a hierarchy of vision with the audience placed at the highest level:

... the tragic blinded mask absorbs the spectator, not so much because it ruptures what was previously a reciprocal relationship, but because it exemplifies the hierarchy of vision inherent in the theatrical experience itself.⁸⁷

Her argument relies on Pollux's description of the blinded Thamyris' mask in the *Onomasticon* (ἡ Θάμυρις τὸν μὲν ἔχων γλαυκὸν ὀφθαλμὸν τὸν δὲ μέλανα), and is in accordance with Lessing's suggestion that the heterochromia in Thamyris' mask was part of a design that would enable him suddenly to go blind onstage.⁸⁸ This kind of active request for visual choices required by the audience serves, Coo argues, to heighten the hierarchical inequality: "the essential tragic

⁸⁵ See Meineck (2017), 168-9.

⁸⁶ The five vases collected in Taplin (2007) 10 - 13 all feature at least one example of an actor and a mask engaged in reciprocal gazing. On masks and reciprocal gazing on the Pronomos vase see Taplin and Wyles (2010). As Vervain and Wiles (2001), 255 point out, vase painters have a vested interest in displaying masks held by actors or balanced on the floor as the mask would otherwise be indistinguishable from the face. On the relationship between the reciprocal viewing of masks and other aspects of visual culture, see Meineck (2011). Carlson (2009) points out that the ships' eyes have holes for pupils like theatrical masks. Ships have eyes in tragedy at *A.Supp.*716-8 and *A.Pers.*558. On this reciprocity of vision more widely see Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006), 24 on spectator vases ("someone is always watching something in Greek pictures") and Ferrari (1986), 11 on the relationship between eye cups and masks of Dionysus.

⁸⁷ Coo (2016), 244ff, 247. Walton (1984), 42 and Meineck (2011), 139-411 place the actor into this hierarchy, noting that the wearing of the mask reduces the actor's field of vision. See Foley (1980), 128 on the hierarchy of vision surrounding Dionysus' mask.

⁸⁸ *Poll.*4.141. Lessing (1790), 104-7. That eyesight could be marked as lost or cured by a change in the colour of the eyeballs in tragedy is apparent from a fragment of the *Phineus*, see *S.Fr.*710, in which Phineus' eyeballs change colour when healing. According to Barasch (2001), 71ff, the Antichrist in early iconography also had heterochromic eyes.

experience of watching a dramatic character who cannot watch you back".⁸⁹

The mask of Thamyris, however, does not so much give superior vision to the audience as require the audience actively to subject their own vision to a kind of blindness in order to reciprocate with Thamyris' lack. Just as the actor must curtail his own vision in the blind mask, so the audience must choose to see only the brighter of the two eyes when Thamyris is sighted, and only the darker of the two eyes after his sudden blindness.⁹⁰ If vision is a necessarily reciprocal process in the theatre, then the effects of onstage blindness are two-fold. The appearance of a blind character onstage dissolves the implicit equivalence between seeing and being seen, and in so doing lays bare the semiotic processes by which meaning is visually made in the theatre. This reciprocal process undoubtedly lies behind the tradition of anti-theatrical prejudice that pre-dates the Early Church Fathers and whose legacy is still felt in discussions about viewing into the twentieth century.⁹¹

Viewing disability: identities in performance

The performance of blindness does not only expose these semiotic processes by severing the reciprocal relationship between spectator and character. In highlighting the spectator's activity in creating meaning in the theatre, it also opposes this active theatrical mode of viewing with the inactive viewing in real life, inviting the spectator to separate blind character from sighted actor. In their book on the dramatic work of performers with disabilities, Sandahl and

⁸⁹ Coo (2016), 246-7.

⁹⁰ For the audience as active responders and co-creators of performance see Roselli (2011), 195. See also Hedreen (2007) on 'involved spectatorship' of art objects.

⁹¹ See Barish (1985), and on the long history of this anxiety see Chapter 6.

Auslander (2005) argue that disability ought to be perceived as an identity in performance in real life, just as gender, sex, sexuality, race and ethnicity have been at least since Judith Butler's "performativity" if not since Erving Goffman's influential formulation of identity as "the performance of everyday life".⁹²

Sandahl and Auslander (2005) begin their book with an interview in which John Belluso, a playwright and wheelchair user, explains his disability as a performed identity that is visually constructed:

Any time I get on a public bus, I feel like it's a moment of theater. I'm lifted, the stage is moving up and I enter, and people are along the lines, and they're turning and looking, and I make my entrance. It's theater, and I have to perform.⁹³

Their work is a culmination of a growing interest in the construction of disabled identities through gazing and staring, drawing on the seminal separation of sensory impairment (a medical term for loss or abnormality of one or more senses) and disability (the difficulty produced by the confrontation between a person with an impairment and an ableist society) that has marked disability studies since the social model first replaced the medical model of disability.⁹⁴

This modern understanding of disability as an identity in performance goes some way towards explaining the popularity of blindness in the theatre.⁹⁵

⁹² Butler (1990) and (1993); Goffmann (1959). The term 'performative' is not Butler's but is adapted from Austin (1962) via the critique in Derrida (1972), 1-24. See Lloyd (2007), 36 on this. Cf. Davis (1995) on disability and identity, and McRuer (2017) on the relationship between disability theory and queer theory; Sandahl and Auslander (2005), 2-3.

⁹³ Sandahl interview with Belluso, cited in the introduction to Sandahl and Auslander (2005).

⁹⁴ For the social model and the influential impairment vs. disability binary see Thomas (2004). On these models of disability see Linton (1998), Stiker (1999), Davis (2002), 9-32 and Metzler (2006), 11-37. Wheatley (2010), 9ff draws a historical distinction between the models. On disability studies in the theatre see Johnston (2016).

⁹⁵ The suggestion in Davis (2000), 56-7 that disability was a product of the eighteenth century has been accepted by classicists including Rose (2003), 48. See also Garland (1995), Vlahoggianis (1998), Kelly (2007), and Penrose (2015) on ancient disability.

But its performativity also produces a paradox. It is illegal, in most parts of the world, to pretend to be blind.⁹⁶ Exact iterations of the law differ, with the actual illegality very often being articulated around the mis-use of a service animal, or white cane in order to pass as blind, or on the profits an individual gains from passing as blind (disability fraud).⁹⁷

The sociologist Tichkosky recounts her experiments in performing blindness in real life in a chapter bearing a title that makes clear the necessary role of vision in the construction of this identity: *Looking Blind: A Revelation of Culture's Eye* (2010). In the experiment, Tichkosky borrows her partner and fellow sociologist Rod Michalko's guide dog and dark glasses in order to pass as blind.⁹⁸ As well as confirming the social model of disability as performative ("a performance of blindness takes place upon a stage where cultural conceptions of blind or sighted embodiment play out" and later "any appearance of disability is a status constituted by and between people"), Tichkovsky's research developed a further connection between performance and disability, namely, that people who are blind are expected to pass as close as possible to sighted.⁹⁹

These, as well as Rose (1996), focus on visible physical deformity rather than sensory impairment.

⁹⁶ Titchkosky (2005)'s experiences of performing blindness in everyday life have lent much to this discussion. On the ethics of 'passing' more generally, see for example Vernon (2000).

⁹⁷ Set out in the Equality Act 2010 for the UK, replacing the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 for the USA. See Rose (2003), 96-98 on an ancient case of disability fraud.

⁹⁸ Although Tichkosky's aims were to uncover the processes behind the cultural construction of disability, cf. here the controversial (and often illegal) process of blind-simming (pretending to be blind) and the debates around whether disability can be an example of Body Integrity Identity Disorder, as in the case of Jewel Shuping who was blinded with bleach on the advice of her psychologist in order to reconcile her disabled identity with her able body. On this case see Sims, 'Woman arranges for psychologist to pour drain cleaner in her eyes after fantasising about being blind', *Independent*, 2 October 2015.

⁹⁹ Titchkosky (2005), see also McRuer (2017) on the compulsory performance of able-bodiedness.

Her allusion here is to the medical model of disability, which expects those with impairments to seek a cure, or medically to reduce the performance of their impairment until it becomes as close to unnoticeable as possible.¹⁰⁰ In the course of her experiment, however, Tichkosky is given the chance to revert to her sighted identity when a passerby offers to assist her on the subway. She accepts the assistance, refusing to divulge her 'real' sighted identity, as she explains:

I did not reclaim my sighted identity because moving between blindness and sightedness is not a normal move and would reveal a taken-for-granted norm of public life, namely that you *are* who you *appear to be*.¹⁰¹

Tichkosky's experiments were, by her own admission, illegal, though they revealed the complex processes of active spectatorship involved in the performance of blindness.

Clearly, the prohibition against play-acting blindness does not apply in the theatre, where the popularity of Tiresias, Oedipus and Polymestor, and the lost plays about Thamyris, inaugurate a tradition of performing blindness onstage from the fifth century BCE. That the theatre is a space excluded from this ethical problem of performance is acknowledged by Taplin, who reformulates Steiner's famous black hole conceptualisation of theatrical viewing:

Theatre is a specially licensed occasion, a time and place for many people to watch a few people enacting things that would not be 'acceptable' in 'real life', outside that time and place.¹⁰²

In the modern theatre, although the performance of disabled roles by those with able-bodied identities is problematic, it remains common.¹⁰³ The performance of

¹⁰⁰ See the influential overturning of the medical model in Linton (1988).

¹⁰¹ Tichkosky (2005), 221.

¹⁰² Taplin (1996), 118.

disability onstage therefore calls attention to the doubleness of the actor.¹⁰⁴ If, as Tichkosky explains, in real life "you are who you appear to be", in the theatre, a place famously acknowledged as polysemic, a single body can signify both the body of the actor and the body of the character: you both are and are not who you appear to be.¹⁰⁵

That actor and character can be seen onstage within a single figure has been readily acknowledged as part of the performance of gender, particularly in discussions of cross-dressing that have often taken Shakespeare's Rosalind (and particularly the boy-player's epilogue in *As You Like It*) as their focus.¹⁰⁶ That the performance of disability could similarly draw metatheatrical attention both to the blind character and to the sighted actor (and by extension sighted audience), however, has been relatively unexplored, perhaps because disability has only in recent years joined the list of identities that can be considered to be performed.

¹⁰³ Performances of disabled roles by able-bodied actors especially in film and television have often been subject to acclaim, see for example the list of Oscar-winning performances of disabled roles played by able-bodied actors in Mogk (2013), 1-2, and Woodburn and Kopic (2016), whose study found that disabled characters make up 1% of characters in American television, and only 5% of these disabled characters are played by actors with disabilities. See Siebers (2008), 96-119 on "disability drag". There is growing criticism for the practice of "cripping up" (able-bodied actors performing disability), with many comparing it to "blacking up", see Shinn, 'Disability is not just a metaphor', *The Atlantic*, 23 July 2014 and Ryan 'We wouldn't accept actors blacking up, so why applaud crippling up?', *Guardian*, 13 Jan 2015. Cf. Ryan (2015) and Taylor's criticisms of *The Blind Legacy* in Snow (2017), a new musical about the life of Louis Braille discussed in the conclusion to this thesis.

¹⁰⁴ In the medieval theatre this takes the form of an assumption that real-life disability is feigned, on which see Chapter 2. On other ways in which blind characters signal their performance of blindness see Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁵ See Barthes (1972), 262 on the theatre's "real informational polyphony", Kowzan (1968)'s typology of signs, Aston and Savona (1991), 99ff on the difficulty of this polysemy for the equation of reading and seeing in the theatre. Ubersfeld (1977) posits this polysemy as the chief difficulty of reading the sign in the theatre.

¹⁰⁶ See most famously Orgel (1996) esp. 50-2 and 63-64, but see also Rackin (2007) and Drouin (2008) etc. It would be interesting to explore further the interactions between disability studies and gender studies in relation to gazes and viewing in the theatre, particularly given the obvious methodological similarities between disability studies and gender studies. Unfortunately there has not been space to do this in this thesis.

Soule (2000) includes Rosalind alongside Dionysus and the devil in a list of characters who function in this way, drawing attention simultaneously to the actor and the character, naming this phenomenon "anti-character": "such performers, while playing the character, simultaneously asserted their own non-mimetic presence against it".¹⁰⁷ Just as Rosalind in Elizabethan England is famously both the woman character and the boy actor, Oedipus is simultaneously the blind character and the sighted actor: his acknowledgment of the chorus' position (οὐ γάρ με λήθεις) does not simply amplify the fact that his recognition of them is aural (ἀλλὰ γινώσκω σαφῶς).¹⁰⁸ Rather it points precisely to the divide between actor and role (the chorus are seen metaphorically by the character but actually by the actor) that Soule and others see at the level of gender in Rosalind.¹⁰⁹

The appearance of a blind character onstage therefore troubles the representational relationship between signifier and sign that is necessitated by the spectators' active viewing in the theatre.¹¹⁰ Established from Heraclitus onwards, the relationship between seeing and knowing is axiomatic by the fifth century.¹¹¹ The hegemony of sight in discussions of perception (for example Aristotle's ἡ ὄψις μάλιστα ἀσθησίς ἐστι) is evident, as many have noted, at the level of language because of the relationship between *oida* (I know) and *idesthai* (to see): "the cognitive metaphor that understanding is seeing is encoded in the

¹⁰⁷ Soule (2000), 1.

¹⁰⁸ *S.O.T.*1325.

¹⁰⁹ Biet and Triau (2006), 467 allude to the simultaneous presence of the actor and character: "un constant aller et retour entre le personnage et l'acteur".

¹¹⁰ Soule (2000) thinks of this as a premodern phenomenon, but we will see that it operates differently at various points in the history of staged blindness.

¹¹¹ Heraclitus quoted in *Plb.*12.27, ὀφθαλμοὶ τῶν ὄτων ἀκριβέστεροι μάρτυρες 22B101a in Diels and Kranz (1951). See Beare (1906), 89-90 on later examples, and Squire (2016), 10ff who establishes this link between seeing and knowing and cites this passage.

forms of the verb itself".¹¹² The blind characters of Greek tragedy cannot make the easy association that their audiences make between seeing and knowing as their sight and knowledge have been removed, replaced by second sight and prophecy, but crucially, neither can their spectators.¹¹³

Blind characters disturb the visual semiotics of the stage space not because, as Coo has it, they "cannot watch back" but precisely because they do.¹¹⁴ In so doing, they uncouple the association between seeing and knowing - those who look blind are in fact sighted - and exploit the gap between the actor's vision and character's blindness meaningfully. Whether Oedipus changed his mask during his offstage blinding and therefore indicated his blindness visually, or retained the same mask that held within it both his sighted and blind characterisations (as Coo suggests, following Pollux, for Thamyris), blindness uncouples the visual from the process of making meaning by allowing blind characters both to see and to know.¹¹⁵

This uncoupling famously causes dramatic irony in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.¹¹⁶ In spite, and because, of his blindness Tiresias is able to see something that the sighted Oedipus cannot.¹¹⁷ Tiresias later severs the link between sight and knowledge completely, referring to himself as εἰδώς.¹¹⁸ Indeed, when Oedipus first accuses him of willfully withholding information, he

¹¹² Arist.*An.*3.3, 429a. See Arist.*Metaph.*1.980a, on why sight is naturally the preferred sense: αἴτιον δ' ὅτι μάλιστα ποιεῖ γνωρίζειν τι ἡμᾶς αὕτη τῶν αἰσθήσεων καὶ πολλὰς δηλοῖ διαφοράς; Blundell, Cairns, Craik and Rabinowitz (2013), 11. See also Johnson (1987), 107-9 and Giuman (2013), 2-4. On sight and insight more generally see Webb (2016) and Jay (1993) 24ff, and further Chapter 5 in this thesis.

¹¹³ See Chapters 1 and 5, below, on this.

¹¹⁴ Coo (2016), 244.

¹¹⁵ Poll.4.141. Coo (2016).

¹¹⁶ Though cf. also *S.Ant.*1041-2 where Creon and Tiresias both accuse each other of being senseless (μὴ φρονεῖν).

¹¹⁷ *S.OT.*300-4.

¹¹⁸ *S.OT.*318.

replies that he can see (ὄρω), drawing attention to the sighted anti-character (and actor) just as the blinded Oedipus will do at 1325.¹¹⁹ This image is proleptic for Oedipus: just as Tiresias' knowledge is contingent upon his blindness rather than his sight, so too will Oedipus' knowledge of his own errors necessitate his blinding. Blindness onstage is not only a double act of performance, then, but necessarily allows the audience to see the sighted actor through the blind character and to deconstruct the visual semiotics of the theatre space.

Viewing an assemblage: blindness and active spectatorship

The modern realisation that disability, like gender, is an identity that is performed shows blindness to be established by a visual relationship between the viewer and the viewed (either the onlooker in real life or the spectator in the theatre). Blindness onstage requires of its spectator the kind of active vision that assemblages require of their readers. Just as the spectator can be called upon to construct the blind character visually while looking upon a sighted actor by viewing him / her within an appropriate semiotic system, so too is a reader invited to activate an assemblage of theatrical blindness by plugging a scene into an appropriate machine.¹²⁰ This thesis seeks to establish the grammar of that machine. Like the grammar of language, the grammar of this machine operates with reference to classical examples, which underpin scenes of blindness as they engage with changing historical conceptions of vision and viewing, both theatrical and real.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ *S.O.T.*324. cf. 330 where Oedipus bases his anger on the fact that Tiresias *knows* but will not tell. See Segal (1995) 162ff on the synaesthesia of this scene.

¹²⁰ See above on this assemblage-thinking terminology.

¹²¹ Miller (1998), 42 explains that the rules of grammar only make meaning out of language when they are contextualised, using the following example: "If you hear the

The opening chapter, 'Towards a Grammar of Ancient Blindness', establishes the five grammatical rules of the grammar of theatrical blindness using the ancient examples of Oedipus, Tiresias, Polymestor and the Cyclops. The chapters that follow focus on five points of crisis in the history of vision, each examining the way in which a grammatical rule of the machine of blindness is amplified by and reacts to the historical understanding of vision in each period.

Chapter 2, 'Blindness and Death' examines the relationship between blindness and death in Seneca and medieval drama. The denial of reciprocal vision is not only cast here as a metaphorical death that recalls the exile from the sun metaphors that mark death in Greek tragedy. The link between blindness and death is also forged by the theatricality of Roman funerals and the importance of the visibility of death in medieval religious practice.

The third chapter, 'Blindness and Performance, focuses on the self-conscious performance of blindness in the early modern period. Again, it is not a straightforward reception of the perceived falseness of Tiresias' blindness found in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Instead, the trope in early modern drama arises out of an interaction between the classical precedent and contemporary theatrical concerns, such as the vogue for disguise sub-plots in the late 1590s.

Chapter 4, 'Blindness and Place' pursues this metatheatricality of blindness further. The appearance of blind characters onstage requires the

advice 'Put a Tiger in Your Tank' and you were to extract the meaning on the basis of English composition alone, you would in fact have to undertake an elaborate programme of cramming a striped carnivore into a motor-car petrol tank. It is only a knowledge of the English community, car-owners, and assumptions about tigers having a fierceness that might apply to the power of petrol that enable us to see that this is not, in fact, an order to go out and track tigers for the boot of the car". Hornbrook (2002), 96 cites this passage and relates it to the theatre.

establishment of a non-visual semiotics of the stage space, as place is of necessity made apparent by non-visual means of perception. This chapter investigates the way in which the anxiety about new scenographic techniques is reflected in the concerns of blind characters, who echo those of spectators accustomed to projecting place onto a bare stage.

Chapter 5, 'Blindness and Insight' considers the dual metaphor of the relationship between vision and knowledge that is axiomatic throughout philosophy. It details a shift between blindness-as-ignorance found in the Victorian novel and in Maeterlinck's *Les Aveugles*, and the ancient conception of blindness-as-knowledge that returns to prominence in Irish modernism. It argues that this turn is not only the result of Yeats' fascination with Oedipus' blind insight but also a conscious Celtic inflection of the tradition through the paradigmatic figure of the blind bard in Irish myth.

The final chapter, 'Blindness and Audience', investigates the dangers, for the spectator, of viewing blindness on the stage, arguing that blindness in the theatre of the 1990s can be the result of excessive viewing. This awareness of the danger of viewing blindness is set against a modern understanding of both the complicity of the viewer in scenes of pornography or violence and, after 2004, the falseness of viewed images. This new awareness of the dangerous position of the spectator is not only a reflection of the transformation from viewer to viewed that accompanies blinding in Greek tragedy, but also recalls, on many levels, the antipathy to the theatre of the early Church Fathers.

Chapter One:

Towards a Grammar of Ancient Blindness

When Agamemnon returns to the stage in Euripides' *Hecuba*, having heard Polymestor's screams from the offstage tent where he is blinded, he seems shocked at the act of violence that has taken place, and wonders who could have executed it.¹²² The king's surprise seems somewhat incongruous: Agamemnon was the first to hear of Hecuba's desire to punish Polymestor, the murderer of her son.¹²³ It is not the fact that Polymestor has been punished that surprises Agamemnon, but specifically his blinding. This is in part, perhaps, because the punishment he suggested was death: he wonders in an earlier scene whether Hecuba will use a *φάσγανον* as a weapon or kill Polymestor with a poison (*φαρμάκοισιν*) rather than blinding him.¹²⁴ Although Polymestor's blinding may not be the punishment that the king anticipated, it is not unprecedented. His appearance, blinded, onstage here functions, as we will see, as part of an assemblage that is recognisable according to a theatrical 'grammar', which is equally discernible in other plays that involve blindness and acts of blinding.¹²⁵

Although the grammar of this blinding is specifically theatrical, it is a clear development from scenes of blinding in non-dramatic texts. This chapter

¹²² *E.Hec.*1116-1119. Cf. Theseus in *S.OC.*551 who also enters the stage space because of something he hears (*ἀκούων*).

¹²³ *E.Hec.*870ff; Mastronarde (1979), 25 recognizes the incongruity of Agamemnon's reaction here and reads 1116 as his attempt to establish "feigned impartiality" in the trial scene that follows.

¹²⁴ *E.Hec.*876-8.

¹²⁵ Agamemnon is clearly aware of a non-dramatic grammar of blinding in *Hom.II.*19.85ff. See *S.OT.*1308ff and *E.Cyc.*665ff. For the appropriateness of blinding as a punishment here, see *Hdt.*9.93.3, *Plat.Gorg.*473c, *Plu.Mor.*311de, with Devereux (1973) 36ff and Buxton (1980).

establishes the theatrical grammar of blinding according to which assemblages such as Polymestor's entrance can be read. It will become evident that this particular grammar develops in dialogue with, but is crucially different from, the grammar of blinding in non-dramatic texts. The five grammatical rules to assemblages of dramatic blinding - its relationship with death, a special concern for performance and spectacle, a lack of visual awareness of onstage places, access to a particular kind of knowledge and an ability both to highlight and to undermine the spectator - are outlined below.

I. Blindness and death

That death (according to Agamemnon) is the appropriate punishment for Polymestor's specific kind of transgression is a view shared by the chorus of Euripides' *Hecuba*. Immediately before Polymestor's entrance following his blinding, the chorus remind the audience that the appropriate consequence for Polymestor's specific kind of transgression (ὑπέγγυος) is death (ὀλέθριος: the adjective is repeated twice in the same line).¹²⁶ In tragedy, however, blindness is a kind of death, as Agamemnon himself understands after he sees Polymestor's eyes and bloodied face. He asks first who has killed him (τίς σ' ἀπόλεσεν;), and follows this up eventually with a more accurate question - who has blinded him (τίς ὄμμ' ἔθηκε τυφλὸν αἰμάξας κόρας...;).¹²⁷ The sense that blindness is both an alternative and an equivalent to death is compounded by the fact that the punishment here is two-fold: Polymestor has been blinded and his sons have

¹²⁶ E.*Hec.*1027-1030. Collard (1991) on 1035-55 compares here other scenes in which what is heard is not what happens, but he does not claim a relationship between blindness and death specifically. On this kind of "false preparation" in Euripides, see Halleran (1985) 51ff.

¹²⁷ E.*Hec.*1116-1117; cf. Hom.*Il.*5.758 or *Od.*2.49, where ἀπόλλυμι is used (as often in Homer) metaphorically for death.

been killed. This double-pain leads Polymestor, still offstage, to claim as the cause of his crying both his own blindness (1035) and the death of his sons: (ὥμοι μάλ' αὖθις, τέκνα, δυστήνου σφαγῆς).¹²⁸

The special relationship between blindness and death in tragedy extends beyond Polymestor's twin punishment. Announcements of impending death throughout Greek tragedy are figured as farewells to the sun – a symbolic blindness. In the moments that precede their deaths, Ajax, Polyxena and Cassandra all bid farewell to the light.¹²⁹ Similarly, Antigone in Euripides' *Phoenissae* tells her blind father about the death of his wife and son by telling him that they no longer see the light (οὐκέτι σοι τέκνα λεύσσει / φάος οὐδ' ἄλοχος).¹³⁰ For Oedipus, this leads to an apparent contradiction, as he bids farewell to a light that he cannot see at his death.¹³¹ Bernidaki-Aldous explains the recurrence of this rhetorical pattern by noting that the Greek word *phōs* can mean both sunlight and eyesight: “But if blindness can be viewed as death it is because in Greek culture light is viewed as life itself”.¹³²

Oedipus repeats his wish for death at the close of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and, just as the chorus assume that Polymestor has died rather than been blinded in the *Hecuba*, here they suggest to Oedipus that death would have been both an equivalent and a preferable punishment (κρείσσων γὰρ ἦσθα μηκέτ' ὦν ἢ ζῶν τυφλός).¹³³ In non-Sophoclean versions of the Oedipus myth, the threat of death is even closer than it seems to be here. We hear that Oedipus

¹²⁸ E.*Hec.*1037. For the ambiguity of σφαγῆς here see Collard (1991) on 1037 and cf. also E.*Hec.*135.

¹²⁹ S.*Aj.*856-859; E.*Hec.*435; A.*Ag.*1323f. See Macintosh (1994), 98, who points to these and other farewells to the light as an element of the big speech convention.

¹³⁰ E.*Ph.*1547-9.

¹³¹ S.*OC.*1549-50.

¹³² Bernidaki-Aldous (1990), 18.

¹³³ S.*OT.*1349ff, 1367-8.

has tried to commit suicide twice in Euripides' *Phoenissae* (327-336) and he appears as ghost-like in the epilogue.¹³⁴ Outside of dramatic texts, Hyginus in the *Fabulae* claims that both Oedipus' blinding and his subsequent suicide were consequences of Jocasta's death.¹³⁵

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, too, death is figured as a darkening of vision, with Theseus calling Oedipus' death $\chi\theta\omicron\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha \nu\acute{\upsilon}\xi$, and the chorus beginning to pray to the $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\nu\chi\acute{\iota}\omega\nu \acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\xi$ as he leaves the stage to his death.¹³⁶ When Oedipus exits towards his death, he makes a farewell to the sun appropriate to his blindness, lamenting its loss not from his eyes but from his body, yet addressing $\varphi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$ in the familiar way.¹³⁷ Just as his blindness was figured at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a kind of metaphorical death, here his death is a metaphorical blindness, not for Oedipus himself - whose eyes are already deprived of the light of the sun - but for the other characters onstage. This is not only true in the conventional sense that (with very few exceptions) deaths in Greek tragedy are reported by messengers who have been witness to the act of violence offstage, but it also affects Oedipus' daughters and the chorus.¹³⁸ The blinded Oedipus swaps places with Antigone and Ismene, becoming the guide and commanding them to follow him, just as Antigone guided him earlier in the play, and makes

¹³⁴ Dodds (1944) on *E.Ba.*1308 sees a symbolic connection in Thebes myths between blindness, death and castration, noting that the son is the "eye" of the house. Oedipus seems to concur at *S.OC.*866ff. On this see also Devereux (1973), 46: "in Greece, where the only effective kind of survival was posthumous fame and / or male descendants, castration, which deprived a man of offspring, was certainly felt to be a kind of murder"; and Anderson (1961), 38 who notes that the unwillingness to geld horses in the ancient world was linked to the belief that they would die.

¹³⁵ *Hyg.Fab.*242.

¹³⁶ *S.OC.*1752 and 1558.

¹³⁷ *S.OC.*1549-50. Jebb (1883) imagines Oedipus bidding farewell to the memory of the light here.

¹³⁸ Most introductions to Greek theatre remind readers of this, including Walton (1991), 135ff, Rehm (1992), 61, Scodel (2010), 48 but see especially Somerstein (2010), 31ff on the problem of spectating not all violence but "the proximate cause of death".

this substitution explicit: ὧ παῖδες, ὧδ' ἔπεσθ': ἐγὼ γὰρ ἠγεμῶν / σφῶν αὖ πέφασμαι καινός, ὥσπερ σφῶ πατρί.¹³⁹ Once they have reached the place of his death, however, Oedipus demands that his daughters leave the area (in fact, they return from the unseen to the seen space, as is clear at 1667ff) on the grounds that it is not lawful (θέμις) for them to see (λεύσσειν) his death.¹⁴⁰ After her father's death, Antigone announces that she wants to see her father's tomb, but again this visual relationship is denied to the daughters using the same reasoning that Oedipus used earlier (οὐ θεμιτόν).¹⁴¹ The implicit connection between blindness and death is evident here in its reversal, not only playing out blindness as a kind of metaphorical death in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but increasing the reach of Oedipus' blindness at the moment of his death in the *Oedipus at Colonus* to include the metaphorical blinding of his own daughters.

In Euripides satyr play the *Cyclops*, this grammatical rule whereby blindness is a metaphorical death and death a metaphorical blindness is exaggerated to the point of comic pastiche. Polymestor, when he leaves the tent, announces first that he has been destroyed and then that he has been blinded, and similarly the Cyclops thinks of his blinding as a kind of death, using the same verb that Agamemnon had used to characterise Polymestor's destruction: ἀπωλόμην.¹⁴² Just as Agamemnon assumes that Polymestor has been killed

¹³⁹ Soph.*OC*.1542-3. Jebb (1883) reads these lines as evidence of the "Unseen Power" that guides Oedipus.

¹⁴⁰ Soph.*OC*.1641-2. Markantonatos (2002), 117 focuses on the "conveyance of narrative to a select narratee" in 288-290, but does not link this with the visual conclusion of this narrative prolepsis when Theseus is selected as the appropriate witness to Oedipus' death.

¹⁴¹ Soph.*OC*.1756 and 1757. Even the messenger seems to be afflicted with the temporary blindness from which Antigone and her sister suffer, becoming aware of their arrival not by seeing them but by hearing their φθόγγοι (1669).

¹⁴² E.*Cyc*.669. The verb is repeated in 672 and 676, and it is not until 673 that the Cyclops confirms that he has been blinded. See also 444 where the chorus look forward

rather than blinded, the chorus in Euripides' *Cyclops* announce that they will burn the Cyclops rather than blind him (τυφέσθω Κύκλωψ).¹⁴³

In the *Cyclops*, there is no formal farewell to the sun, but as with other elements of tragedy in satyr drama, this topos receives a burlesque treatment.¹⁴⁴ While sleep and night are metaphors for both death and blindness in the *Oedipus at Colonus* (1752), in *Cyclops* they are necessary to the Cyclops' blinding in a very real sense, and Odysseus longs for ὦ μελαίνης Νυκτὸς ἐκπαίδευμ' to come, both literally (the men are waiting for the Cyclops to fall asleep so that they can surprise him) and metaphorically (standing here for the Cyclops' blindness).¹⁴⁵ The sun itself is burlesqued too: here it is reduced from the divine flame to which blind and dying characters in tragedy bid farewell, to a flicker on the end of a log that transforms Cyclops' eye to ash.¹⁴⁶ That the sun has taken a new comic form here is made clear by Silenus, who emphasizes its heat, rather than its light, undermining the farewell formula of tragedy.¹⁴⁷

This act of bidding farewell to the sun, an act that encompasses both blinding and death, is a specifically theatrical trope. Edith Hall maintains that the sun as an enabler of vision is central to Greek tragedy:

All these tragic heroes or heroines uttered their laments under the sun which beat down upon them and whose light they were about

to the Cyclops' ὀλωλότα, not blinding. See p.2 for Agamemnon's assumption that the punishment for Polymestor is death rather than blinding.

¹⁴³ E.*Cyc.*655, see also 646-8 where it is the τὸν μονῶπα παῖδα γῆς that is the object of ὑφάπτειν not the eye itself.

¹⁴⁴ This diminishing of tragedy is the most common understanding of satyr drama, after Harrison (2005), which popularized the "tragedy at play" definition, vs. the traditional position of Pickard-Cambridge (1927) 95, who does not see a relationship between the two genres.

¹⁴⁵ E.*Cyc.*601.

¹⁴⁶ E.*Cyc.*663. Euripides makes a link between the sun and flames in the emphasis on flames as an attribute of the sun in Clymene's prologue to Euripides' fragmentary *Phaethon* (see E.*Phaeth.*F771, F772).

¹⁴⁷ E.*Cyc.*542.

to leave forever; the audiences who watched and listened shared that sunlight with them.¹⁴⁸

By the fifth century BCE, Apollo and the god Helios were widely identified as one and the same figure, and the sun was conceived as the eye of Apollo himself.¹⁴⁹

According to Seale:

... the contrasting imagery of light and darkness which is so prominent in Sophocles' plays is more than an expedient dictated by an open-air performance permanently bathed in sunshine; it becomes a key symbol in the tragic conception.¹⁵⁰

Indeed, Apollo and his cognomen Helios are repeatedly found at the centre of the nexus of meaning attached to blindness in Greek drama. In the immediate aftermath of his blinding, it is Apollo (Helios) to whom Polymestor calls.¹⁵¹ In this, he echoes not only Oedipus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (who famously blames Apollo for his blindness at l.1327) but also Tiresias, who pronounces his own allegiance to Apollo: οὐ γάρ τι σοὶ ζῶ δοῦλος, ἀλλὰ Λοξία.¹⁵² The sunlight that sustains the link between blindness and death in Greek tragedy is a direct consequence of the performance conditions of ancient drama, illuminating the seeing-space and providing the light that enables the characters to come to life. When newly blinded characters like Oedipus and Polymestor call on Apollo, they remind audiences of the necessary relationship between blindness and death in Greek tragedy. In the theatrical grammar of blindness, the

¹⁴⁸ Hall (2010), 3.

¹⁴⁹ See Jebb (1894) XLV; Rose (1959), 59; Leinieks (1982), 116-117; Larson (2007) 158.

¹⁵⁰ Seale (1982), 20. On light and darkness in Greek myth see Christopoulos, Karakanta and Levaniouk (2010).

¹⁵¹ E.*Hec.*1068.

¹⁵² S.*OT.*410. This is in direct contrast to the non-dramatic tradition, in which Athena is usually said to have given Tiresias his prophetic powers, see Call.*Lav.Pall.*, with Calame (2000), 169-205; in Pherecydes it is Athena who physically blinds Tiresias (*FGrHist*, 3F.92); for other versions see Brisson (1976).

all-seeing eye of Apollo is no less important than that of drama's patron god sitting in the front row, Dionysus.¹⁵³

II. Blindness and spectacle

When Polymestor makes his entrance after his blinding, his immediate focus is not simply on his pain nor the violence that has been committed upon him by the Trojan women. Instead, it is the physical changes brought about by his blinding that are the focus, and more specifically how the actor performs his newly blinded status. First, Polymestor draws attention to the awkwardness of his gait: τετράποδος βάσιν θηρὸς ὀρεστέρου / τιθέμενος ἐπὶ χεῖρα καὶ ἴχνος.¹⁵⁴ That crawling upon all fours will confirm his blindness for the chorus and other spectators is evident from Hecuba's anticipation of it: ὄψη νιν αὐτίκ' ὄντα δωμάτων πάρος / τυφλὸν τυφλῷ στείχοντα παραφύρω ποδί.¹⁵⁵ It is not clear exactly what Polymestor is doing here, even with Porson's κατ' for καὶ, other than crawling on all fours, but the comparison of this movement to a τετράποδος θηρὸς assimilates the action here to two other (Euripidean and pseudo-Euripidean) descriptions.¹⁵⁶ Later Polymestor will again describe someone crawling on the floor with red eyes (κύων γενήση πύρσ' ἔχουσα δέργματα).¹⁵⁷ This time it is Hecuba, and in a performance that the spectators will not witness within the confines of Euripides' play.

¹⁵³ On the role of Dionysus in *Hecuba* specifically, see Zeitlin (1996), 172-216.

¹⁵⁴ *E.Hec.*1058-9; The text is difficult here, even with κατ' for καὶ as in Porson (1847),. See the apparatus criticus in Diggle (1984) *ad loc.*

¹⁵⁵ *E.Hec.*1049-50; moving with a blind foot is again the idiom used to describe blind movement in *Pho.*834

¹⁵⁶ Taplin (1977), 363 compares also the entrance of the priestess at *Aesch.Eum.*35, the only other character in Greek tragedy to enter on all fours. Gregory (1997), 110 links the posture Polymestor predicts for Hecuba with the canine qualities of the Furies in both the *Oedipus at Colonus* and the *Oresteia*.

¹⁵⁷ *E.Hec.*1265

However, Polymestor's physical enactment of blindness here recalls even more strongly another dog-like performance in the *Rhesus* by Dolon, who prophesies for himself (as Hecuba does of Polymestor, and he later does of her) a future canine role.¹⁵⁸ Dolon will, he tells the chorus leader, put on a wolf-skin (λύκειον... ἐνάψομαι δορὰν), and, like Polymestor will walk on all fours (βάσιν τε χερσὶ προσθίαν καθαρμόσας / καὶ κῶλα κώλοις).¹⁵⁹ Dolon does not take on this posture because he is blind (though it is significant that the *Rhesus* is the only extant tragedy to unfold entirely in darkness with characters repeatedly complaining that they cannot see well), but he does link it categorically with the playing of a role, using the theatrical verb μιμήσομαι to signal the effect that his movement will have.¹⁶⁰ Dolon reminds the Chorus Leader that he will be able to return to his human form at will, as if to underline the relationship between pretense and the posture that he describes.¹⁶¹

However, neither Hecuba nor Dolon plays out this movement onstage, whereas the blinded Polymestor superfluously describes a gesture that the audience and the chorus can see, but that he cannot. This superfluous description is accompanied by sung lyrics in which attention is explicitly drawn to his new mask featuring bloodied eyelids:

εἶθε μοι ὀμμάτων αἱματόεν βλέφαρον
ἀκέσαι' ἀκέσαιο τυφλόν,

¹⁵⁸ E.*Rh.*208-15.

¹⁵⁹ E.*Rh.*208, 210-11.

¹⁶⁰ E.*Rh.*212, 215. For complaints of problematic vision in the *Rhesus*, see E.*Rh.*736-7: τίς εἶ ποτ' ἀνδρῶν συμμάχων; κατ' εὐφρόνην / ἀμβλῶπες ἀύγαι κοῦ σε γινώσκω τορῶς. The blinding of Thamyras is also recalled (119ff), and the sun does not rise until 985, only ten lines before the end of the play. Liapis (2012), xxxiv suggests Sophocles' *Laconian Women* and *Nauplios Pyrrhaeus* as other possible night plays, though the fragments of neither conclusively demonstrate this.

¹⁶¹ E.*Rh.*215.

Ἄλιε, φέγγος ἐπαλλάξας.¹⁶²

These features combine to create a heightened awareness on the part of the spectators that Polymestor is playing the role of a blind character.

Critical uneasiness about the use of the term ‘metatheatre’ to describe these moments of self-conscious role-playing in Greek tragedy has been ongoing at least since 1986, when both Hornby and Taplin rejected the idea that tragedy is self-referential in a metatheatrical way.¹⁶³ Even Abel himself, widely credited with the coinage of the term ‘metatheatre’ resists the inclusion of tragedy in the canon of plays that he establishes to engage with this idea: “unlike figures in tragedy, th[ose in more metatheatrical genres] are aware of their own theatricality”.¹⁶⁴ Taplin’s (and to a lesser extent Hornby’s) hard line exclusion of ancient tragedy from discussions of metatheatricality have gradually been overturned since the mid-1990s, beginning with discussions of the *Bacchae* and later Euripides more generally.¹⁶⁵

By the early 2000s, although it was commonplace to open discussions of Greek drama’s metatheatricality with acknowledgments that the term and its

¹⁶² *E.Hec.*1067-9. Foley (2015), 54 compares Polymestor’s dochmiac singing here to Oedipus’, noting these as two rare examples of adult male singing in Euripides. Pickard Cambridge (1953), 173 lists examples of changes of mask including *Alc.*512, *Hel.*1186 and *Cyc.*663, see Valakas (2002), 87ff. On changes of mask and blindness see Taplin (1978), 66, Marshall (1999) 192 and (2014), 284 *contra* Halliwell (1993), 206. See Coe (2016) 245 on Pollux’s description of the Thamyris mask.

¹⁶³ Hornby (1986) opposes Greek tragedy and later drama, whereas for Taplin (1986) the antagonist is ancient comedy, which he argues is inherently metatheatrical. Cf. Sifakis (1971), 7: “illusion as a psychological phenomenon was entirely alien to the Greeks” vs. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 33: “its [Greek tragedy’s] subject, in a sense, was itself and it acted itself out before its public” – but they does not argue that this self-referentiality is metatheatrical.

¹⁶⁴ Abel (1963), 135.

¹⁶⁵ Not least by Taplin himself, see Taplin (1996) and Taplin and Wilson (1993). Ringer (1998) discusses the *Bacchae* in the preface to his discussion of metatheatre in Sophocles. For acknowledgments of the critical uncertainty about metatheatricality in discussions of tragedy, see for example Dobrov (2001), 7: “Tragedy’s metatheatrical potential has not been acknowledged as readily as that of comedy owing to lingering assumptions about the limitations of tragic discourse”.

application to Greek theatre had a rocky history, attempts to stratify ways in which Greek tragedy engages with its own theatricality had taken over from conversations about whether Greek tragedy could or could not be metatheatrical.¹⁶⁶ These metatheatrical readings were no longer limited to Euripides – whose dressing up scenes in the *Bacchae* had been the exception that proved the rule long before the overturning of the Taplin-Hornby 1986 position in the mid 1990s.¹⁶⁷ Despite this “community of indefiniteness”, a taxonomy of metatheatricality has arisen since the early 2000s of acts which, when performed onstage, draw attention to the play’s theatricality.¹⁶⁸

The kind of metatheatricality brought onto the stage by performed blindness in ancient drama is what Thumiger calls “reference to facts related to performance” or perhaps more accurately “instances of organised deception”.¹⁶⁹ It is this type of metatheatricality that Rehm has in mind when, in his own discussion of the relevance of the term ‘metatheatricality’ to Greek tragedy, he offers a specific definition:

when Greek tragedy points to its own operations, the audience develops a flexibility of seeing that draws it further into the

¹⁶⁶ See for example Rehm (2002) 23 and later Thumiger (2009) and Dunn (2012).

¹⁶⁷ Studies of the *Bacchae* that can be called forerunners of the mid-1990s turn include: Kullmann (1993), who argues that the metatheatrical ‘meaning’ of the *Bacchae* denied it seriousness; Segal (1982) 7 and cf. the Afterword written for the 1997 edition of the same book; Zeitlin (1985); and Bierl (1991), 177-218.

¹⁶⁸ In fact, several taxonomies have arisen, e.g. Thumiger (2009) vs. Hornby (1986). See also Dunn (2012) 361 who distinguishes “authorial” and “theatrical” metatheatricality. These taxonomies also have a role to play in how metatheatrical ancient drama can be said to be, for example Ringer (1998), 94: “Were intertextual reference to other dramatic texts the sole criterion of metatheatricality, *Oedipus at Colonus* would rank among the most metatheatrical of ancient tragedies”.

¹⁶⁹ Thumiger (2009) 25 and 29. Thumiger includes within her analysis of such instances not only the *Bacchae*'s dressing up scene but also the instances Easterling (1997), 169 comments on, as well as Ajax's deception speech (646-692). On disguise see for example Muecke (1982). The kind of metatheatricality that blindness provokes, however, is closer to the way that Ioannidou (2017), 23-4 adapts Brecht's alienation into tragedy's active spectatorship.

process by which meanings emerge and the narrative has an effect.¹⁷⁰

Scenes of blindness and blinding are, I argue, “instances of organised deception”, and this is confirmed by the blind characters’ emphasis on the techniques required for the performance of a blind role as well as the way in which they foreground the doubleness of theatrical representation.¹⁷¹

It is unsurprising, perhaps, that the *Cyclops* draws attention to the tools of performance in the same way as *Polymestor*, making a link between his past and present masks (κατηνθρακώμεθ’ ὀφθαλμοῦ σέλας) and drawing attention to his position (newly immobile) onstage.¹⁷² However, this metatheatrical awareness of the techniques required to feign blindness onstage is not limited to Euripides’ blind characters.¹⁷³ Like the *Cyclops* and *Polymestor*, *Oedipus* also seems to draw attention to his changed mask in the moments after his blinding, seeming to present his decision to blind himself in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a choice between different types of physical eyes: ὄμμασιν ποίοις βλέπων.¹⁷⁴ *Oedipus* is

¹⁷⁰ Rehm (2002), 23. Other similar definitions exist, e.g. Rosenmeyer (2002) 97: “the play recognizes its own status as fiction and performs a hermeneutics of itself”. Rehm’s is particularly useful here in its suggestion that the “operations” are both plural and practical.

¹⁷¹ See Thumiger (2013) on the relationship between doubling and viewing.

¹⁷² *E.Cyc.* 663, 667-8. See Torrance (2013) who sees the *Cyclops* within a larger scheme of Euripidean metapoetry that contributes to the audience response here; and Wright (2006) 31-42 on satyrs behaving “metamythologically”. Both, though, are interested primarily in Homeric influence here. For metatheatrical readings of the *Cyclops* more generally, see Olsen (1988) who reads the presence of wine in the play and Polyphemus’ disbelief in Dionysos (*E.Cyc.* 204) as a metatheatrical *agōn*, and Hunter (2009), 57 who reads the end of the *Cyclops* as a self-conscious gesture towards further satyr performance. Mastrorarde (2010), 55 thinks the *Cyclops* is wearing a non-tragic mask as opposed to the human characters in this scene who are wearing their masks from tragedy.

¹⁷³ Though this kind of metatheatricality has been commented on most often in relation to Euripides’ *Bacchae*, see note 166. See Dunn (2012), 361, for example.

¹⁷⁴ *S.OT.* 1371. *Oedipus* also qualifies the kind of eyes he had before as different from the kind of eyes he has now at 1378 and 1385. See Taplin (1978), 66: “The actor must have changed his mask to one with dark eye-sockets with streams of blood running down from them”, though cf. Pickard-Cambridge (1988), 173 and Valakas (2002), 87 who

also concerned with other ways in which the illusion of his blindness is established, including his surprise that the chorus have remained onstage to care for him (and react to his blindness).¹⁷⁵

In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus repeatedly makes the audience aware that his movement is altered by his blindness, not because he walks on all fours (like Polymestor), but because he requires a guide. He pairs his command to Antigone, his guide, with an acknowledgement of his blindness at the beginning of the play (κάθιζέ νύν με καὶ φύλασσε τὸν τυφλόν).¹⁷⁶ Later he confirms that it is because of his blindness that his movement is altered. He creeps around the stage (εἴρπον) because he is dependent on the eyes of others (ἀλλοτρίοις / ὄμμασιν), and it is this dependence that convinces the onstage spectators of his blindness.¹⁷⁷ Prior to these lines, the chorus refer to him as πρέσβυς, associating his movement and mask with old age, but it is not until he has confirmed that he moves in this way because he requires a guide that they ask him ἐή, ἀλαῶν ὀμμάτων / ἄρα καὶ ἦσθα φυτάλμιος; and then infer his circumstances in life (δυσαιών / μακραίων γ', ὅσ' ἐπεικάσαι).¹⁷⁸

Oedipus also draws attention to his performance of blindness in ways that

thinks Oedipus would have worn Tiresias' mask and compares also the changed masks of Admetus (*E.Alc.*512) and Helen (*E.Hel.*1186). See also Griffith (1996), 14-28, who attempts to reconstruct the stage directions for the *Oedipus Tyrannus*; and Pearson (1917) I.177-8, theorising that Thamyris' mask must have had two different eyes which when viewed in profile would give the impression of sight and blindness.

¹⁷⁵ *S.OT.*1321-3.

¹⁷⁶ *S.OC.*21. He objectifies his guides even further at 1109, describing them as if they were props to his performance.

¹⁷⁷ *S.OC.*146-8. Walton (1984) 107 admits that Oedipus may have changed his mask but downplays the importance of this: "An audience tells that a man is blind not by his eyes but by his hands".

¹⁷⁸ *S.OC.*143, 150-1, 151-2.

are less similar to those employed by Polymestor.¹⁷⁹ In the *Oedipus at Colonus* he functions as a director of the theatrical spectacle, instructing Antigone and the other onstage characters in how to play their roles.¹⁸⁰ Oedipus does not only instruct his daughter to guide him from his very first speech (9ff), but also engages in an ongoing dialogue about where he and Antigone should place themselves on the stage, how they ought to enact their roles (πρόσθιγέ νύν μου, and the chorus' acknowledgment that he alone will control his movements onstage: οὔ τοι μήποτε σ' ἐκ τῶνδ' ἐδράνων, / ὦ γέρον, ἄκοντά τις ἄξει.).¹⁸¹

In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the blinded king's metatheatrical gestures take the form of acknowledging the doubleness of his acting out of blindness.¹⁸² When Oedipus returns to the stage after his self-blinding, he laments a specifically double sorrow: οἴμοι μάλ' αὖθις.¹⁸³ Goldhill compares other uses of this phrase in Greek tragedy "when there is some specific doubleness at stake" (Aesch.*Aga.*1345 and S.*Trach.*1206).¹⁸⁴ Goldhill sees the two οἴμοι-s here having different functions, "the physical anguish from the blinding and the mental

¹⁷⁹ Though other types of metatheatrical gesturing are not absent from *E.Hec*: Torrance (2012) notes alongside more general metapoetic allusions a doubling motif brought about by the dramatisation of this myth. See also Gregory (1995), 391-3 on the way in which Hecuba's genealogy is specifically tragic and makes sense of her metamorphosis.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Dunn (2012) 365's comment that the stranger plays the role of the *chorēgos* for Pentheus in the *Bacchae*.

¹⁸¹ S.*OC.*173 and 176-7. The chorus, however, do instruct him in the specifics of his movement 196-7, and Antigone tells him that she will show him how to move in the space at 198-9.

¹⁸² The doubleness has often been referred to in studies of the *OT* and of Thebes more generally. See, for example: Segal (1981), 215 on the "perplexing doubleness of identities", Girard (2004), 69 and McClure (2012), 378 on Jocasta's doubleness. The idea of the double has been connected with the theatre at least since Artaud (1938) but was a provocative stimulus long before Artaud, see Sherman (1993).

¹⁸³ S.*OT.*1317. Indeed, the onstage and offstage audiences already know that what Oedipus has to say will be two-fold, as the Messenger has decoded his double message from his single offstage shout: βοᾷ [1] διοίγειν κληῖθρα καὶ [2] δηλοῦν τινα / τοῖς πᾶσι Καδμείοισι τὸν πατροκτόνον (S.*OT.*1287-8).

¹⁸⁴ Goldhill (2012), 102. Cf. also Clytemnestra's double strike in S.*El.*1415-6.

anguish from the recollection of bad things in his life".¹⁸⁵ Oedipus reminds the audience of another doubleness, however, in his next line: that of the theatre itself. When Oedipus remarks that the chorus has not been hidden from him (οὐ γάρ με λήθεις), he reminds the audience of the convention of ancient tragedy that the chorus remain onstage (with a few famous exceptions).¹⁸⁶ Immediately after pointing to this convention, he decodes the doubleness of theatrical role-playing, explaining how he identified the chorus with their role: ἀλλὰ γινώσκω σαφῶς, / καίπερ σκοτεινός, τήν γε σὴν αὐδὴν ὅμως.¹⁸⁷ The use of the phrase οἴμοι μάλ' αὔθις is a feature of the blinded character's return to the stage (E.*Hec.*1937 and the near echo in E.*Cyc.*665), foregrounding in this explicit acknowledgment of doubleness the necessary acting out of blindness required in his acquired role.

Although the blind character's emphasis on their own performance is heightened when they re-enter after an offstage blinding, it is not limited to such scenes. When the blinded Oedipus again enters the stage space in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, he does so while reminding the audience that he is performing the role of his own blinded double. He gives a brief summary of his offstage life since

¹⁸⁵ Goldhill (2012), 102. He also notes the chorus' confirmation of the doubleness of Oedipus' crime and suffering in their doubling of διπλᾶ (1320).

¹⁸⁶ S.*OT.*1325-3. Walton (1984), 97 assumes that the chorus leaves the stage in *Ajax*, *Eumenides* and *Alcestis*, *Helen* and *Rhesus*. Rehm (1992), 55-56 provides the same list and discusses the importance of a second *parodos*. Taplin (1978), 23 agrees that this convention can be acknowledged for dramatic effect, reading Aesch.*Aga.*1348-71 as lines that show Aeschylus' embarrassment at the convention that the chorus leaves the stage.

¹⁸⁷ S.*OT.*1325. Hearing has become the double of vision, but the chorus also rely on their hearing to recognise Oedipus at S.*OC.*143ff. They assume from his visual appearance that he is πρέσβυς, but it is not until he decodes his movement for them aurally that they understand his blindness, and they later understand his identity when he tells them who his father was (S.*OC.*143-50 and 207ff). Theseus also recognizes him based on what he has heard (S.*OC.*551). Compare the use of hearing rather than vision for proof in the *agōn* at the end of *Hecuba* (on this see above). On doubles in S.*OT* more generally (e.g. Oedipus and Tiresias, wife and mother. etc.) see Vernant (1978).

his blinding, describing himself as an εἶδωλον.¹⁸⁸ This self-description has been much discussed, in particular by Zeitlin, who hints at its metatheatrical potential:

Oedipus, of course is not an eidolon in any literal sense. He is a genuine dramatic personage under whose mask is a live actor who plays his role.¹⁸⁹

Oedipus is not an *eidolon* of Homeric epic, and does not share the functions of Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia*, or Polydorus in *Hecuba*; he does not return from the Underworld in order to impart specific knowledge that drives the plot, and his death – if we are to take his claims seriously – is at most, metaphorical. Nor is he, as Zeitlin proposes, simply bringing to life the history of the Theban cycle. However Zeitlin's use of theatrical terminology offers some sense of the intensely theatrical meaning of *eidolon* here.

Oedipus, Zeitlin notes, is an emblem “that through theatrical self-representation brings back onstage a figure from the past”.¹⁹⁰ Oedipus alludes here to his own theatrical nature, both in this allusion to his doubleness and the physicality that must accompany it. He is at this point a double of Tiresias, who had entered led by his own guide only a little earlier, as well as a double of Sophoclean expressions of his character. He is also, however, a double identity in the sense that he is a sighted actor playing a blind role.

¹⁸⁸ *E.Phoen.*1539–1545. Cf. *S.OC.*109–10 where Oedipus also calls himself an εἶδωλον.

¹⁸⁹ Zeitlin (1994), 191. Mastrorarde (1994) on 1543 translates “image”, but notes that “the phrase is problematic in sense and metre”, comparing *A.Ag.*839, *S.Aj.*126, *S.Ph.*947. Lamari (2010), 111 thinks he emerges “like a ghost” here; Steiber (2011), 124 reads the εἶδωλον of Oedipus within a “tricolon of simulacra” here and thinks this associates Oedipus with statuary; against Craik (1988) 259 who calls this imagery “commonplace” (citing *S.Tr.*192–193, *A.Ag.*81–82 and *S.OC.*109–110). Though dreams and old age appear frequently together in the examples Craik cites here, Oedipus is singular in his heaping up of this doubling language.

¹⁹⁰ Zeitlin (1994), 194.

III. Blindness and place

The establishment of fictional place in the theatre is also undermined by blindness, since it introduces a new mode of non-visual recognition of the place represented onstage. That the *theatron* or seeing-space is threatened by onstage blindness seems obvious, and this is confirmed by the blinded Polymestor's insistence that he will collapse the boundary between onstage and offstage (by breaking through the wall of the tent: βάλλων γὰρ οἴκων τῶνδ' ἀναρρήξω μυχούς).¹⁹¹ Coupled with this is Polymestor's concern for his own geographical location and demand for his own exile. He asks πᾶ βῶ, / πᾶ στῶ, πᾶ κέλσω; and later suggests that he will move beyond a visible geography into the sky (οὐράνιον... μέλαθρον) or down to Hades (ἐς Ἄιδαν).¹⁹² This repeated impulse to move to a different (offstage) place is confirmed by Agamemnon who, in his list of imperatives that close the play, insists that Polymestor be exiled (ἐκβαλεῖτέ).¹⁹³

Polymestor's desire to change places and to leave the theatrical space is also accompanied by a new mode of establishing the specifics of the fictional place in which he finds himself. He is unsure whether Hecuba is onstage in the moments following his blinding (ἤ γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστί που;) and insists that the other characters define the stage space in speech for him: σήμηνον, εἰπέ ποῦ 'σθ'.¹⁹⁴ This new verbal / aural mode of experiencing the onstage geography and identifying other onstage characters (as is the case at Agamemnon's entrance:

¹⁹¹ E.*Hec.*1035.

¹⁹² E.*Hec.*1056 repeated at the end of the same speech (1079ff), and 1100-1102. See E.*Hipp.*140 for κέλλειν used of death as well as exile.

¹⁹³ E.*Hec.*1284-6. Cf. Agamemnon's earlier comment that Polymestor's crime might not have deserved punishment by blindness in a non-Greek place (1246-7).

¹⁹⁴ E.*Hec.*1124, 1125; for another cognate of σημαίνω used again in the context of a sign that cannot be seen, see E.*Hel.*151.

ἡσθόμην γάρ, Ἀγάμεμνον, σέθεν / φωνῆς ἀκούσας) is not restricted to Polymestor himself. Polymestor assumes that the other onstage characters will come to help him because they hear him, not because they see him, asking κλύει τις ἢ οὐδεὶς ἀρκέσει; - and he is proven right when Agamemnon explains that he has come onstage κραυγῆς ἀκούσας.¹⁹⁵ Agamemnon here uses aural evidence to ascertain what is happening in the seeing-space, just as Polymestor had earlier required (and had assumed that the other characters onstage would require) non-visual evidence for the place and characters represented. Agamemnon's next line confirms this, suggesting Echo as a comparison with the screaming Polymestor, and describing her specifically as a character without visual form connected aurally with her landscape:

οὐ γὰρ ἥσυχος
πέτρας ὀρείας παῖς λέλακ' ἀνά στρατὸν
Ἦχῶ διδοῦσα θόρυβον.¹⁹⁶

After Polymestor's blinding, the dominant mode of storytelling shifts from visual to aural, with both Hecuba and Polymestor demanding that their onstage and offstage audiences 'listen' and narrating elements of the plot that are beyond the temporal scope of visual representation in the play.¹⁹⁷ Hecuba returns to an earlier time before the beginning of Euripides' play when Troy enjoyed good fortune (εὐτύχει / Τροία); but for Polymestor, the juxtaposition of this new aural

¹⁹⁵ E.*Hec.*1093 and 1109.

¹⁹⁶ E.*Hec.*1109-1111: "for not in a quiet voice did / Echo, child of a mountain rock ring out / her voice through the encampment". A comparison with Echo is also made in *Andromeda*, E.frag.118 and parodied in Aristoph.*Thes.*1018ff as Gregory (1999) *ad loc.* points out.

¹⁹⁷ E.*Hec.*1137 and 1217. On this *agōn* as a narrative act, see Barker (2009), 329, and Lloyd (1992), 97, who compares Polymestor to a messenger.

mode of representation and narrative he shares is even more pointed.¹⁹⁸ Having announced that he will explain why he killed Polydorus, Polymestor then rushes through this justification, giving an unsatisfactory reason in only seven lines (1138-1144) of the 50-line speech. Without any further introduction, he moves straight into a narration of the way in which Hecuba lured him and his sons into the tents and attacked them. In doing so, he refracts his own blindness onto the spectators, narrating events that he has seen but they have not. Indeed, the place evoked here – the Trojan women’s tent – never has a visual life in Euripides’ *Hecuba*. The spectators experience it aurally, just as Polymestor experiences the onstage space aurally after his blindness.

Like Polymestor, Oedipus also requests exile and attempts to leave the stage space to go offstage, repeatedly asking the chorus to send him away as quickly as possible (ἀπάγετ’ ἐκτόπιον ὃ τι τάχιστα με).¹⁹⁹ Later, he asks Creon for exile, specifically requesting that he be taken to a place where no other humans will see him (ῥῦψόν με γῆς ἐκ τῆσδ’ ὅσον τάχισθ’, ὅπου / θνητῶν φανοῦμαι μηδενὸς προσήγορος).²⁰⁰ His exile is a metaphorical wish for death here, as he clarifies in 1446-1458, and he desires to replace the mountain on which he ought to have died as a baby (ἔνθα κλήζεται / οὐμὸς Κιθαιρῶν οὔτος) with the mountains he now wishes to flee to (ἴν’ ἐξ ἐκείνων, οἳ μ’ ἀπωλλύτην,

¹⁹⁸ E.*Hec.*1208-9. Rehm (2002) 182ff sees also the presence of offstage spaces, Athens and Thrace, brought to aural (rather than visual) life in this trial scene.

¹⁹⁹ S.*OT.*1329ff.

²⁰⁰ S.*OT.*1340-3, 1436-7. See especially Sourvinou-Inwood (1991), 224-84 who argues (based on *Lycophron*) that exile is the necessary punishment for murder and Parker (1983) appendix 5 and 7, who includes Oedipus alongside Heracles in a list of characters for whom exile is appropriate following intra-familial murder, though he also reminds us of an older tradition (e.g. *Phoenissae*) in which Oedipus remained in Thebes, 386. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 306-8 think Oedipus' exile returns him to heroic status in *Oedipus at Colonus*. On practices of exile more generally see Forsdyke (2005).

θάνω).²⁰¹ It is also, however, a desire to leave the stage space. Although Oedipus is not granted the exile to the mountains that he asks for, he is granted an exile from the stage space into the house (Creon orders ὡς τάχιστ' ἐς οἶκον ἐσκομίζετε and later tells Oedipus ἴθι στέγης ἔσω).²⁰² Creon reminds the attendants that they must take him inside out of reverence for the sun (βόσκουσαν φλόγα / αἰδεῖσθ' ἄνακτος Ἥλιου), and in doing so, figures Oedipus' exit from the vision of the spectators into the house as both a kind of exile and a kind of death.²⁰³

The Cyclops is equally concerned with an exile to follow his blindness, though it is Odysseus' exile rather than his own his own. He does, however, exit both out of his cave and from the stage space at the close of the play.²⁰⁴ The description of the cave as ἀμφιτρῆτος is particularly telling here of the fact that the Cyclops is leaving not only the fictional cave but also the stage space. The only other use of the adjective ἀμφιτρῆς in extant Greek is of the other theatrical cave, in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.²⁰⁵ Caves with tunnels going out on either side in this way are not only specifically theatrical, appearing only in the *Cyclops* and the *Philoctetes*, but they also present specifically theatrical conundra. Odysseus uses

²⁰¹ *S.O.T.*1451-1454. He calls the mountain his tomb (κύριον τάφον) at 1453.

²⁰² *S.O.T.*1429 and 1515. Cf. Parker (1983) on the contagion of pollution in this scene. Given the Helios passage (1424-8), it is clear that Creon is concerned with who might see Oedipus.

²⁰³ *S.O.T.*1424-1428. This is likened to an exile from the sun by Mitchell (1844), 97-8 who compares here *Pi.P.*9 on a Theban solar eclipse that also features an address to Helios. Cf. Collard (1991), who reminds us that exile portrayed as a kind of death is a typical feature of Greek escape prayers.

²⁰⁴ *E.Cyc.*704-7. O'Sullivan and Collard (2013), 225 on 704-5 call this "clearly impossible to stage before the audience", but note that the Cyclops' desire to hurl rocks at Odysseus is "consistent with the Homeric narrative". For Homeric influence see: Duchemin (1945); Wetzel (1965); Glenn (1972); Konstan (1981), 207-27; Seaford (1984), 51-9; Dougherty (1999) and Hutchinson (2007).

²⁰⁵ See O'Sullivan and Collard (2013) 225 on 707 and *S.Ph.*19. The cave in the *Philoctetes* is remarkable, Odysseus tells us, because of its special relationship with the sun (*S.Ph.*17). On the particularities of caves in Greek literature, see Ustinova (2009).

ἀμφιτρῆτος of the cave only before he has seen it, and the Cyclops uses it here to describe his cave as he moves offstage. The Cyclops moves into a liminal space between onstage and offstage, like the house in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which has a stage presence though it is not onstage. In both cases, the blinded characters have left the seeing-space and become invisible to the spectators.²⁰⁶ In this movement to an unseen but fictionally important offstage space, the Cyclops and Oedipus make the same movement from seeing space to unseen space that Oedipus makes again in the *Oedipus at Colonus*.²⁰⁷

Oedipus repeatedly tells the chorus and the spectators that he is an ἀπόπολις throughout the *Oedipus at Colonus*, and the chorus command him to go in exile as soon as they realise who he is: ἔξω πόρσω βαίνετε χώρας.²⁰⁸ Oedipus' final moments take place offstage – in a place that he is able to lead Theseus to without a guide (1520-1) – and without spectators (ὡς οὔτ' ἂν ἀστῶν τῶνδ' ἂν ἐξείποιμί τω / οὔτ' ἂν τέκνοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς, στέργων ὄμως).²⁰⁹ But after Theseus alone has been selected as the ideal spectator for Oedipus' death, the messenger tells us that even Theseus did not watch the offstage action. Theseus,

²⁰⁶ In Oedipus' case, so that he does not pollute them and in the Cyclops' case, so that he is able to carry out an unstageable action. See Torrance (2013), 245-266 on *kainon* as an acknowledgment of the difficulty of translating action from epic to the stage in the *Cyclops*.

²⁰⁷ See Hammond (2009), 6 who sees the space of tragedy more generally as liminal; Kelly (2009), 101 on the threshold; Wiles (1997), 220 who sees Colonus as a liminal place; and Renger (2013) who calls Oedipus a “threshold myth”. Cf also Meinel (2015), 211 who sees the liminal position of Colonus echoing Oedipus' liminal ritual position. See Bernard (1985) on the spaces of tragedy and Segal (1981), 47-8 and 385ff on the liminality of Oedipus himself.

²⁰⁸ *S.OC.226*, Oedipus is later offered the chance to end his exile and go into Theseus' palace (*S.OC.643*), and to return to Thebes with Creon (740). But he refuses, reminding Creon specifically that he refused to grant him exile at the end of the *OT* (761ff). When the Messenger tells the chorus that Oedipus has died, he imagines a kind of exile from life (1584), and describes the place Oedipus has come to at the end of his life as a literal threshold (1590).

²⁰⁹ *S.OC.1528-9*. Ringer (1998), 92ff relates the choice of spectators here to the doubling of actors. See also Johnston (1993) on the ‘metamorphoses’ of Theseus, *pace* Jebb (1885) who sees this scene as proof that the four actors must have occasionally been permitted.

we hear, raised his hand to cover his eyes in order to avoid seeing a sight that no one could bear to look at (οὐδ' ἀνασχετοῦ βλέπειν).²¹⁰

Oedipus' sudden knowledge of the fictional geography at the end of the play (e.g. 1542ff), however, is in marked contrast to his inability to visually perceive the fictional space in the rest of the play. Oedipus begins the play, after briefly reminding the audience of his blindness, by asking Antigone to tell him where they are (τέκνον τυφλοῦ γέροντος Ἀντιγόνη, τίνας / χώρους ἀφίγμεθ' ἢ τίνων ἀνδρῶν πόλιν;).²¹¹ Antigone attempts to identify the place that they have come to first based on visual aspects of the fictional place, drawing attention to the city walls that she can see in the distance (πύργοι μὲν, οἳ / πόλιν στέγουσιν, ὡς ἀπ' ὀμμάτων, πρόσω).²¹² However, it is only when she alludes to the fact that the place they have come to is sacred and mentions the song of the nightingale that she can hear, that Oedipus understands and asks to be seated.²¹³

The entrance of a third character introduces a further mode of non-visual perception of the grove to which Antigone and her father have come. Before agreeing to tell them where they are, the Citizen warns the father and daughter of an aspect of the fictional geography that has hitherto gone unseen to both of them: the grove to which they have come can also be viewed mythically, as it is the grove of the Furies.²¹⁴ He goes on to remind them that the Furies to whom the grove belongs also have a place within the hierarchy of vision that is enacted

²¹⁰ *S.O.C.*1650-2. Cf. Budelmann (2000), 42-3, on Theseus' vagueness about Oedipus after his death, e.g. κείνος (1765) τούσδε τόπους (1761). For other secret burial grounds see Kearns (1989), 51-2.

²¹¹ *S.O.C.*1-2

²¹² *S.O.C.*15-16.

²¹³ *S.O.C.*15-16, 17-20.

²¹⁴ *S.O.C.*39-40.

onstage, calling them - πάνθ' ὀρώσας Εὐμενίδας.²¹⁵ The Furies' visual epithet is not unexpected here, and is consistent with their characterisation in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, where their special vision is foregrounded, for example in ὄρα ὄρα μάλ' αὖ, λεύσσετε πάντα.²¹⁶ The Furies have a special relationship both with vision and with the place in which the blind Oedipus and his daughter now find themselves.²¹⁷

In the absence of Oedipus' sight, the Citizen offers an understanding of the place that does not rely on vision. He goes on to describe the place in mythical, non-visual terms, reminding us of Colonus' special position in the myths relating to Poseidon and Prometheus, and narrating a brief aetiology for the name of the grove.²¹⁸ The Citizen's description does not contain any elements that can be accessed by eyesight alone; rather he identifies the place to Oedipus in terms of its story.²¹⁹ This proves to be exactly the non-visual information that Oedipus needs in order to locate himself, since the oracle of Apollo told him that he would find his place of rest in a land sacred to the Eumenides (ὄπου θεῶν / σεμνῶν ἔδραν λάβοιμι).²²⁰ Oedipus struggles to navigate the onstage space throughout the play, with the Chorus protecting him from falling from a ledge of

²¹⁵ *S.O.C.*33.

²¹⁶ *A.Eu.*255, see also 322-3.

²¹⁷ The Erinyes are linked to Oedipus' family in *A.Th.*1055. See Lloyd-Jones (1990), and Brown (1984), 277; Winnington-Ingram (1980), 275 calls Oedipus an "unpersuaded Erinyes". Cf. also Winnington-Ingram (1980), 264, where suggests that Oedipus has found his ἔδραν here at Colonus precisely because of the presence of the all-seeing Furies.

²¹⁸ *S.O.C.*53-63. The chorus at 668 begin their description of Colonus with these aspects (horses and nightingale's song) that Oedipus has had access to aurally from the Citizen and Antigone.

²¹⁹ *S.O.C.*62.

²²⁰ *S.O.C.*87-93.

rock (192-3) and telling him how to move safely within the fictional space (195-6).²²¹ Instead, he creates an aural and mythical geography.²²²

Oedipus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* equally has difficulty establishing what is happening within the stage space after his blinding. His first concern on returning to the stage is to establish the geography of the stage space: ποῖ γὰς φέρομαι τλάμων;²²³ The chorus do not answer this question, and Oedipus next describes a darkness (ὡς σκότου) that only he, in his blindness, can see.²²⁴ He remembers, in the same speech, the pins with which he took away his own vision – a scene that was invisible both to the audience and the chorus as it happened offstage.²²⁵ This is in contrast with the chorus' narration of their visual encounter with the newly blinded Oedipus in the preceding lines.²²⁶ Oedipus tells us that he has shifted to an aural mode of awareness of his surroundings, and returns in his speech a few moments later to offstage and unseen locations such as Cithaeron and Corinth.²²⁷

The audience is blind to these locations, because they exist only in the

²²¹ *S.OC*.76. When the chorus enter, they echo the Furies' ὄρα in *A.Eu*.255, but their sight does not enlighten them as to who Oedipus is. Cf. the cliff that the Cyclops bumps his head into (682-3); and see Dawe (1982) on *S.OT*.1329 for Oedipus falling over the stone of Apollo Agyieus. See further Chapter 4 on similar confusion about the cliff in *King Lear*.

²²² On the historical and mythical geography of Colonus see further Edmunds (1996) and Dunn (2012).

²²³ *S.OT*.1309.

²²⁴ *S.OT*.1313-5.

²²⁵ *S.OT*.1317-8 The extent to which the prop is still onstage in Oedipus' hand has been debated: Bruhn (1897) on 1296 notes "er hält die περόναι noch in der Hand. Cf. Kamerbeek (1967): "It is probably better to consider χέντρων as referring to the wounds afflicted by the περόναι or /and the piercing pangs caused by them".

²²⁶ *S.OT*.1297ff

²²⁷ *S.OT*.1325-6. *S.OT*.1391-1403. As in *S.OC*, the visual setting gives way to a mythological / historical one, see Rehm (2002), 215-235. On Thebes and Athens see: Knox (1957); Zeitlin (1990), 147; Sabbatucci (1978) 117-141 and Seaford (1994). See Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 329ff, and Segal (1982) on Thebes and Athens in the *Bacchae*. Cf. also *E.Ba*.1291 for Thebes as a place of wrongful seeing, with Cadmus describing the place that Pentheus was mis-seen with reference to the mis-seeing of Actaeon's dogs.

offstage life of the play, and they have access to them only aurally. Their situation is paralleled with Oedipus' own blindness at the end of the play, who is only able to 'see' Thebes and what is happening onstage through the chorus' lines (e.g. 1416ff) and his own hearing (1472). The blind Oedipus describes Cithaeron and Corinth here using the techniques of aural description that Creon, Antigone and the Citizen use for his benefit in the *Oedipus at Colonus*.²²⁸ Oedipus' blindness before a sighted audience (both onstage and offstage) is highlighted here, but when he becomes dependent on reports from other characters he shows himself to be as blind as the spectators, who have been dependent on reports of the offstage geography throughout the play.

Euripides' *Cyclops* seems to be the exception that proves the rule here: it is not clear whether in lines 679ff the Cyclops is attempting to ascertain something about the stage space that the spectators can see, or whether the spectators are suffering from a blindness to the positioning of Odysseus and his surviving companions comparable with Polyphemus'.²²⁹ The chorus leader taunts the Cyclops with different possible positions on the stage, eventually concluding his mockery: πρόσθεν οὗτός ἐστι σοῦ.²³⁰ Edmunds notes that Oedipus' blindness precludes him from participating in the "dramatic reflexivity"

²²⁸ Cf. also *S.O.T.*1-5 where the opposite happens: Oedipus describes the scene that the audience see before them. Both Jebb (1885) and Kamerbeek (1967) take this description seriously, describing the costumes and props of the suppliants from Oedipus' words.

²²⁹ Ussher (1978) on 679-682 is very specific on their positioning onstage: "they are skulking silently beneath a projecting piece of rock [...] such projections could, of course, have been arranged, but we need not suppose them represented". On the rocks in 20 he notes "use of deictic τήνδε with a gesture, need not mean – cf.30n – that rocks are visible to the spectators". Cf. Seaford (1984) on 688, who thinks Odysseus speaks to the Cyclops only once: "the situation has radically changed. Od. has now escaped to safety"

²³⁰ *E.Cyc.*688.

that other characters enter into with the spectators.²³¹

However, these moments that disrupt the reflexivity of vision in the *theatron* also underline the imperfections of the spectators' vision, and remind the audience of their own blindness towards the geography of the stage in the absence of naturalistic scenery.²³² The moment of this disruption in the *Cyclops* is telling – it is not clear whether or not Odysseus and his companions remain onstage during this scene from the text itself, but modern readers have assumed that what the *Cyclops* is told about the onstage space here is not what the audience see.²³³ The spectators take on, temporarily and for comic effect, the blindness of the blinded character to the fictional space he inhabits, acknowledging their inherent blindness and the active spectatorship required in the creation of fictional place in the *theatron per se*.²³⁴

IV. Blindness and knowledge

Almost as soon as Polymestor has lost his sight in Euripides' *Hecuba*, he develops a kind of second sight, making reference to a kind of prophetic knowledge. The

²³¹ Edmunds (1996), 40. This reflexivity has been questioned at different points in the play, e.g. Griffith (1996), 17 on the altar. On reflexive seeing as a condition for theatrical performance in fifth century Athens see n.64.

²³² Edmunds' comment here relies on the assumption of naturalistic scene painting more detailed even than the description in Pickard-Cambridge (1946), 51. For the opposite argument see Arnott (1962), 99. On ancient scenography see Dingel (1971); Padel (1990) 346-54; and Wiles (1997) and (2007). Else (1957), 168-9 discusses Aristotle on scene-painting. See Winnington-Ingram (1980) 264 on the scenographic representation of the grove at Colonus specifically.

²³³ Kovacs (1994), 139 prints here the stage direction: "Odysseus and his men accompanied by Silenus slip silently out", to clarify that the actors are no longer in the positions that the chorus leader described.

²³⁴ See Wiles (1997), 123 who details the role of the chorus in this alternative non-visual mode of seeing; and Slaney (2013), 101 on the "distinctly theatrical dyadic tension between what is absent and what is present". On the active suspension of disbelief see Ruffell (2008), 40. For an ancient account of the spectators' problematic involvement in the construction of onstage place, see Arist.*Po.*1455a, with Green (1990), and further Chapter 4, below.

substitution of sight with insight is apparent most obviously in the prophecy that preoccupies the final moments of the play (1259ff). The replacement of one sense with another is not restricted to theatrical blindings, as we shall see, but the forecast Polymestor makes here is a specifically theatrical one. The action he foretells in this moment of prophecy is confirmed in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, where the plot that the blinded Polymestor describes is brought visually to life.²³⁵

The first part of Polymestor's prophecy (1265) returns to the image of the blinded Thracian crawling out of the tent paralleled in the metatheatrical image of Dolon in the *Rhesus*. It is not only these intertexts with other plays that make his prophecy specifically theatrical, but its source: it is Dionysus who has told Polymestor of this future for Hecuba and Agamemnon (1267). Segal links this specifically with the active spectatorship required by the *agōn* that occupies the final scenes of this play, noting that

... it is not accidental that this vision of Agamemnon's reversal of roles from victor to victim and from spectator to participant comes from Dionysus, the god who also presides over the tragic festival and the instability and deceptiveness of appearances that tragedy depicts.²³⁶

Like Oedipus in his famous confrontation with Tiresias, Agamemnon, although sighted, is shown to be short-sighted and lacking the knowledge of his own downfall that the blinded Polymestor possesses.²³⁷ Polymestor, having suffered a blinding that operates according to a specifically theatrical grammar has received in compensation a theatrical kind of prophetic knowledge.

²³⁵ See Thalmann (1993) who reads all of *Hecuba* through the lens of the *Oresteia*. Gregory (1991), 108 suggests that this prophecy is in fact a reversal of the plot of the *Oresteia*. For the relationship between Euripides and Aeschylus figured in terms of influence more generally, see Aélion (1983).

²³⁶ Segal (1993), 235.

²³⁷ Segal (1993), 189 calls this "Agamemnon's blindness" specifically. *S.O.T.*300ff.

After their blindings, Oedipus and the Cyclops, too, are able to view the future through a kind of insight that takes the form of theatrical prophecy. Oedipus' wish for exile (1436-7) is also a prophecy, of sorts, of the action that preoccupies the *Oedipus at Colonus*, and although his repeated insistence that he be exiled in the final moments of the play (γῆς μ' ὄπως πέμψεις ἄποικον and ἄπαγέ νύν μ' ἐντεῦθεν ἤδη) are not fulfilled here, they are played out in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, where he also has a special relationship with prophecy.²³⁸ Antigone twice comments in the *Oedipus at Colonus* that the death and exile that he forecasted in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* have now been fulfilled (ἔπραξεν οἶον ἦθελεν and ἄς ἔχρηζε γὰς ἐπὶ ξένας / ἔθανε).²³⁹ Antigone's (and her sister Ismene's) presence in the *Oedipus at Colonus* also transforms the impotent Oedipus' desperate pleas at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* that his children not be taken away from him (μηδαμῶς ταύτας γ' ἔλη μου) into another example of prophecy, whose effects are delayed until the *Oedipus at Colonus*.²⁴⁰ Even the satyric Cyclops seems to acquire prophetic knowledge after his blinding, referring to an ancient oracle (παλαιὸς χρησμὸς) and foretelling Odysseus' wanderings (πολὺν θαλάσση χρόνον ἐναιωρούμενον) in the *Odyssey* before his final exit from the stage.²⁴¹

²³⁸ S.OC.1383-1396; see Kelly (2009) 47-49 for relationship between the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*.

²³⁹ S.OC.1704 and 1706. This problematic ending has been much discussed. A weighing up of the arguments is offered by Kovacs (2009), who cites: Davies (1982), who sees himself 'revisiting' a conversation from half a century ago; Taplin (1983); Hester (1984); Gellie (1986); Roberts (1988); Hester (1992); and Budelmann (2006), among others. See also the seminal work on closure in tragedy and other genres by Fowler (1989), (1997) and (2002); and more recent contributions to the question of the ending by Rehm (2002), 221-35; Roberts (2005); and Sommerstein (2011).

²⁴⁰ S.OT.1523.

²⁴¹ E.Cyc.696-700.

The regular appearance of Tiresias in extant tragedy no doubt has a role to play in establishing the link between blindness and insight in ancient drama.²⁴² That the figure of a seer should be so readily adaptable to a variety of theatrical plots is unsurprising: Greek seers exist in constant dialogue with the theatrical. Reference is consistently made to their costume and the properties which mark them out visually as prophets, as is apparent, for example, in Cassandra's references to the costume of the priestess of Apollo in *Agamemnon*.²⁴³ The threat of falsehood is well-known to ancient seers who are often accused of lacking genuine divinatory ability, and this makes the seer a suitable figure for theatrical mimesis.²⁴⁴

The theatrical blind seer Tiresias is far from what is expected of a seer in the ancient world. In the ancient Middle East (which Flower argues is key to the development of a Greek tradition of prophecy), the seer was required to be free from physical defects, and particularly without "squinting eyes", according to the Enmeduranki text.²⁴⁵ Even among Greek seers, Tiresias' insight-in-blindness is not the dominant method of acquiring supra-human knowledge. In Pindar's *Olympian* 6 Iamus, first in the famous Iamidae line of seers, receives his

²⁴² See the full account of Tiresias' blinding in Call.*Lav.Pall.*119ff, where he is described carrying a staff and resembling his onstage presence in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. See also Bushnell (1988), 26 on epic seers vs. tragic seers. A different model for theatrical prophecy might be found in Sophocles' *Thamyris* if more of the play remained extant.

²⁴³ *A.Ag.*1264ff. The Pythia wore a theatrical costume, according to Diod.16.26.6, who reports that after her rape by an abusive inquirer, a law was passed that required the Pythia to be over the age of 50, though even after this law was passed she continued to wear the costume of a young woman. See Flower (2008), 211-239 on this.

²⁴⁴ e.g. Plut.*Mor.*407e.

²⁴⁵ On this text see Lambert (1967) and (1998). See Collins (1997); Flower (2008), 45-71; Perdue (2008). This is equally the case in the Biblical tradition, where special relationships with God of the kind required for prophecy are predicated upon a lack of physical defect, particularly relating to the eyes. See *Leviticus* 21.16.23 where Moses is informed that any of his followers who have disabilities must not approach the sanctuary, and the emphasis is placed on blindness (and castration).

prophetic skill as an aural gift from Apollo. He follows Apollo's voice and is given the ability to hear prophetic truth.²⁴⁶ This aural connection is also evident in the stories about Melampus (who learnt the language of birds when his ears were licked by two snakes).²⁴⁷ Prophecy can also be inherited without its attendant blindness, as appears to be the case for both of Tiresias' daughters, as well as for Theoclymenus whose family tree from Melampus onwards is listed as proof of his prophetic skill in *Odyssey* 15.220-86.²⁴⁸

Tiresias' blindness, then, is not a typical product of any previous mythology about the acquisition of prophetic skill. He is an outlier, and the link he embodies between blindness and prophecy is privileged alone within the dramatic tradition. This link is so clear in Greek tragedy that even sighted characters who prophesy have a clear link with blindness. Prometheus, the originator of prophetic and divinatory techniques, tells the chorus of the skills he has taught mankind in visual language: τυφλὰς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐλπίδας κατώκισα.²⁴⁹ He also causes a certain kind of blindness among mortals which troubles Zeus: θνητούς γ' ἔπαυσα μὴ προδέρκεσθαι μόρον.²⁵⁰ Even the ineffectual seer Amphiaraios, who is ignored both in the *Seven Against Thebes* and in *The Suppliants*, is reported to have shot a boar, hitting him in the eye and blinding him.²⁵¹ Through the figure of Tiresias, insight-in-blindness becomes the dominant method of prophecy in the ancient theatre, resulting in a persistent connection between blindness and knowledge.

²⁴⁶ Pi.O.6.61-71.

²⁴⁷ Apollod.1.9.11.

²⁴⁸ For the genealogies of the seers, see Flower (2008).

²⁴⁹ A.Pr.250.

²⁵⁰ A.Pr.248.

²⁵¹ Apollod.1.8.2.

V. Blindness and spectatorship

It is not only the *agōn* at the end of *Hecuba* that conventionally turns Agamemnon into an active spectator who must judge the action in front of him, however, but Polymestor's blindness too.²⁵² Agamemnon is cast in the role of an active spectator, who like an ancient audience must watch and choose a winner, and he obeys the same instruction to spectatorship that both the onstage and offstage audiences are ordered to follow as the blinded Polymestor returns to the stage.²⁵³ When Hecuba announces that the blinded Polymestor is about to enter, she does so imagining a process of spectatorship that is primarily visual, using the verb 'to see' (ὄψη) and later qualifying her description of events ὡς ὀρᾶς.²⁵⁴ Hecuba's focus on vision here is striking because it deliberately sets up a contrast with Polymestor who cannot see. Polymestor is thus excluded from the active spectatorship that Hecuba invites the audience and the chorus to participate in, and is therefore excluded both from the community witnessing onstage and from the visual paradigm of the theatrical experience constructed in these final moments.²⁵⁵ The emphasis on seeing and spectatorship, and its contrast with the blind character's repeated attempts to engage non-visually

²⁵² For Agamemnon as an active spectator of Hecuba (in 807ff), see Mossman (1995), 128-9 and Hall (2006), 134. On Hecuba's manipulation of gazes more generally, see Segal (1993), 178 and Zeitlin (1996), 186-91. See also Torrance (2013) 206ff, on these moments as meta-poetic. On the spectator as judge, see Else (1957), 437-8.

²⁵³ On the debate about whether Agamemnon has made this decision in advance, see Barker (2009), 355, who is drawing on Michelini (1987), 155 and Mossman (1995), 132.

²⁵⁴ *E.Hec.*1049, 1053. This does not qualify as direct address according to Bain (1977) 102 and 186, but the chorus leader shows himself to be speaking on behalf of the group in his use of the first person plural (ἐπεσπέσωμεν) only moments before. On direct address and the problems of identifying it in Greek tragedy, see Mastronarde (1979), 98-113. Easterling (1996), 177 notes that visual instructions to the onstage audience (here, the chorus) are also instructions to the offstage audience. See also Lada-Richards (1993) on emotional audience response.

²⁵⁵ Again, the insight Polymestor gains is theatrical. His second sight is also offstage sight: *E.Hec.*1150ff.

with the onstage action, is the fifth element in the grammar of theatrical blindness.

The final moments of Euripides' *Phoenissae* are structured around a similar instruction to active spectatorship. The blinded Oedipus, who is about to leave the stage to go in exile to Colonus, makes his final speech. He recognises a specific visual relationship between the spectators and his identity, commanding the citizens to look at him (λεύσσετ') and reminding them of his unlucky relationship with the gods.²⁵⁶ The passage stands in for the choral lamentation that ends the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which similarly contains an imperative of vision (λεύσσετ') and of which there is considerable lexical echo in the *Phoenissae* passage.²⁵⁷

The echoes of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* in Euripides' Oedipus' final address to the onstage and offstage audience have frequently been used to deny the authenticity of the passage, but the transference of the speech from the sighted chorus to the blind Oedipus also intensifies the metatheatrical implications of the speech.²⁵⁸ When delivered in the voice of Oedipus himself, the speech picks up the repeated exhortations to 'see' or 'look' that have characterized Oedipus' relationship with other characters since his return to the stage.²⁵⁹ In Oedipus' voice, the lines also give less specific information about the identity of their addressee: πάτρας κλεινῆς πολῖται instead of πάτρας Θήβης ἔνοικοι. The choral

²⁵⁶ *E.Ph.*1758 - 1763.

²⁵⁷ *S.OT.*1524-1530; Powell (1911) on *E.Ph.*1758-9 discusses the "special awkwardness" of these lines and their relationship to *S.OT.*1524-5. See also Mastronarde (1994) on these lines. Craik (1988) on *E.Ph.*1758-62 notes only that "the similarity with *S.OT.*1524-5 is suspicious".

²⁵⁸ For both plays, see Dawe (1973) and Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990) who debate the authenticity of the *OT* lines; Mastronarde (1994) on 1758-62 sums up the debate for *Phoenissae*, and comments briefly on the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

²⁵⁹ *E.Ph.*1715, 1747 etc.

passage at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* remains within the fictional framework, addressing the onstage Thebans specifically, whereas the more general address that Oedipus makes in the *Phoenissae* could include within its audience the Athenian spectators.²⁶⁰

If the addressees in the *Phoenissae* are not only the onstage 'inhabitants of Thebes' of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* but also the spectators, inhabitants of a different 'renowned fatherland, then the imbalance of the visual relationship between sighted spectator and blinded character is highlighted. Oedipus' short speech refers to the audience's sight (λεύσσειτ'), as well as retrospectively recalling a time when he was himself sighted (ὄς τὰ κλείν' αἰνίγματ' ἔγνω καὶ μέγιστος ἦν ἀνὴρ).²⁶¹ He introduces his anticipated exit from the stage (νῦν ἄτιμος αὐτὸς οἰκτρὸς ἐξελεύνομαι χθονός), a forewarning that does not feature in the choral version at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.²⁶² This exit from the stage and Thebes is inserted between the pair of lines about the audience's current and his own past sight, and his gnomic comments on mortality.

The anticipation of his departure from the stage space here, closely followed by the assertion of his mortality, returns us to the connection between blindness, exile and death that will be central to the next stage in the myth. Oedipus' anticipated exile at the end of *Phoenissae* is also his departure from the stage, and onto the set of the roughly contemporaneous *Oedipus at Colonus*. This exile is not merely a metaphorical equivalent of his blindness, or longed for death, but also signals the end of the play. The associations contingent on

²⁶⁰ Athens suits the 'famous fatherland' description just as much as Thebes, and the word πάτρας must be especially flexible in the mouth of the displaced and rejected Oedipus.

²⁶¹ E.Ph.1761.

²⁶² E.Ph.1759.

blindness here are not simply metaphorical, rather they emphasise the necessity of vision to the theatrical exchange, as the blinded Oedipus cannot sustain his position onstage.

As well as recalling the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and highlighting the role of vision in sustaining the dramatic illusion, this passage in the *Phoenissae* also underlines the metatheatrical effect of blindness onstage. The blind man's exhortation to vision foregrounds the spectator's sight in contrast to his own blindness, and repurposes the recurrent link between blindness and death to signal the end of the theatrical illusion. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, this juxtaposition between sighted spectator and blinded character is heightened by the messenger's instruction to the chorus to engage visually with Oedipus as he re-enters the stage space (εἰσόψει), using θέαμα to describe the Oedipus they are about to see (the same root which gives rise to etymological explanation for the necessary visual nature of the theatre).²⁶³

The chorus take him at his word and describe their response as a visual one ὧ δεινὸν ἰδεῖν πάθος ἀνθρώποις, not simply because this is the required formula in which to express shock in Greek tragedy, but because this is the response which has been modeled for them.²⁶⁴ Earlier in his speech the messenger records his own reaction to a scene that does not appear onstage – the suicide of Jocasta. While casting himself in the role of spectator to this offstage scene, the messenger concedes that there is a difference here: the chorus will not experience it in the same way as he did because it is not a theatrical

²⁶³ S.O.T.1294-6. Kamerbeek (1967) on 1294 rejects the idea that δείξει can be a type of theatrical presentation here, preferring instead to take it impersonally / as intransitive, though in Luc.*Im*.5 it is used of artistic representation. Dawe (1982) reads δόξει instead.

²⁶⁴ Cf. for example δεινὰ δ' ὀφθαλμοῖς δρακεῖν, A.*Eu*.3. Sommerstein (1989) thinks of δεινὸν as conventionally related to the theme of terror in Greek tragedy but does not note that this image is conventionally visual.

event, but one which they will hear about rather than see (ἡ γὰρ ὄψις οὐ πάρα).²⁶⁵

It is the lack of *opsis*, the visual mode that Aristotle complains of in tragedy, that guarantees that the chorus' engagement cannot be visual, according to the messenger. The messenger is also modeling here a specifically visual mode of interaction with the tragedy of Jocasta's death available only to those who were present at the offstage scene, using verbs of seeing and gazing, and instructing the chorus in their own necessarily visual participation in what will follow.²⁶⁶ The chorus, like the audience at 1524, are instructed to use their vision to interact with the blinded Oedipus, sustaining a visual relationship that has been ongoing since before his blindness – the chorus remind us at the end of the play that their interaction with him before his blinding was visual: οὐ τίς οὐ ζήλω πολιτῶν ἦν τύχαις ἐπιβλέπων / εἰς ὅσον κλύδωνα δεινῆς συμφορᾶς ἐλήλυθεν.²⁶⁷ Oedipus laments the end of the reflexivity of vision here, wanting to be hidden from view (καλύψατ') and weeping that he no longer has a reflexive visual relationship with his daughters: προσβλέπειν γὰρ οὐ σθένω.²⁶⁸

In the *Cyclops*, the joke that occupies the thirty lines between the Cyclops' return to the stage and the beginning of his prophecy relies on the opposition between the sightedness of the spectators and Polyphemus' blindness.²⁶⁹ The chorus first proclaim that they can see (αἰσχρὸς γε φαίνῃ) and then direct the

²⁶⁵ S.O.T.1237-40

²⁶⁶ S.O.T.1251-1267. See Segal (1995) 157 on the blocking of vision here.

²⁶⁷ S.O.T.1526-1527.

²⁶⁸ S.O.T.1411, 1486. Cf. also the repeated figuring of his blindness as an intentional exclusion from the reflexive vision of the world: e.g. S.O.T.1335-6, S.O.T.1337-9.

²⁶⁹ O'Sullivan and Collard (2013) on 670 contrast this mockery with the brief sympathy that the chorus show towards Polymestor in *Hecuba* (1085-6) and puts it into the context of "the audience's expectations of what usually happens to ogres in satyric dramas". See O'Sullivan and Collard (2013), 29-30.

Cyclops around the stage, claiming to mis-see where Odysseus and his companions are located, and eventually concluding that he has been standing in front of the Cyclops since the beginning of the scene.²⁷⁰ The chorus invite the audience to take advantage of their sight to join in the joke at the expense of the blinded Cyclops, highlighting their superior vision.²⁷¹

In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, dramatic reflexivity is similarly contested by the appearance of a blind character onstage.²⁷² The vision of the spectators and other characters onstage are expressly opposed to Oedipus' blindness throughout the play (such as, for example, Antigone's comment at 244-45). The final scenes of the play, however, take the form of a series of messenger speeches by imperfect (that is, non-visual) spectators and repeated pleas from Antigone and her sister that they be allowed to engage with the spectacle of her father's death in a visual way.

Three messengers appear onstage in quick succession, and each narrates that they were prevented from viewing Oedipus' death. Antigone, although she returns to the stage lamenting the things she has seen (ιδόντε), reports that she and her sister suffered from a kind of blindness: νῶν δ' ὀλεθρία / νὺξ ἐπ' ὄμμασιν βέβακε.²⁷³ She confirms that she did not see her father's death, since Oedipus died far away from her (ἔρημος ἔθανες ὧδέ μοι), and both of the sisters declare that they wish to see the place where their father's body lies (1756-7).²⁷⁴

It is Theseus who comes closest to witnessing Oedipus' death, but even he does

²⁷⁰ E.Cyc.670, 688.

²⁷¹ Cf. Dougherty (1999), 331 on the "voyeuristic gaze" of the satyrs.

²⁷² Cf. also the way in which Tiresias diminishes the importance of vision as a method of experiencing reality in S.OT.366-7. Vision and blindness are directly opposed at several points in the *Oedipus at Colonus* (e.g. S.OC.244-245)

²⁷³ S.OC.1683-4. Again here, death is figured as an absence of sunlight, see above.

²⁷⁴ S.OC.1714.

not bear witness to his final moment. The first messenger reports that Theseus covered his eyes (1650-2), and Theseus relates to Antigone and Ismene that he is forbidden from seeing the tomb ever again (1760ff). The final moments of the *Oedipus at Colonus* invert the visual model of spectating demanded by the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Hecuba* or *Cyclops*. No one but the blinded Oedipus is a spectator to the final action of the play, and this collapse of reflexive viewing in the theatre invites a metatheatrical awareness of the spectator's own active viewing.

Blindness and Punishment

Although this grammar of blindness is expressly theatrical, as we have seen, it is also a development of the non-dramatic mythical tradition of blindness and blinding. In both the narrative and dramatic traditions, blindness is a punishment given to mortals who transgress certain fundamental limits. Buxton explains that "blindness is a powerful verbal and visual metaphor for the limits of humanity", and for Barasch, certain crimes are commonly punished by blindness, notably "sins of vision".²⁷⁵

In Callimachus' hymn *On the Bath of Pallas*, for example, Athena justifies the blinding of Tiresias to his mother on the grounds that he has transgressed a limit (ὄς κε τιν' ἀθανάτων, ὅκα μὴ θεὸς αὐτὸς ἔληται, / ἀθρήση, μισθῶ τοῦτον ἰδεῖν μεγάλῳ).²⁷⁶ Tiresias' crime is labelled a "sin of vision" by Barasch (he has seen Athena naked), and although we do not hear Tiresias' mother's response, we can assume that the logic of Zeus' decision did not come as a surprise to the

²⁷⁵ Buxton (1980), 25. Cf. Rose (2003), 79-94 on real-life blindness in the ancient world.

²⁷⁶ Call.*Lav.Pall.*101-2.

young boy's mother. Hera makes a similar comment in the *Iliad*: χαλεποὶ δὲ θεοὶ φαίνεσθαι ἐναργεῖς.²⁷⁷

Blindness as a punishment for transgressive seeing occurs frequently in ancient myth and narrative texts. Tatti-Gartzziou sees a straightforward link here, noting that “Blindness is an appropriate penalty for seeing what is not *themis* for mortals to see”.²⁷⁸ But blindness is far from the only possible punishment for a mortal who sees a god without permission. Actaeon is transformed into a stag and attacked by his own dogs when he sees Diana bathing (indeed, Athena tells Tiresias' mother that she ought to be thankful that her son avoided being torn apart), and Semele dies when she sees Zeus.²⁷⁹

Inappropriate seeing, though, is only one example of mortal transgression punished by blinding. Excessive pride, particularly when turned towards the abilities of the gods is often punishable by blinding, as its perpetrator threatens to assume an immortal capacity. Thamyras is famously blinded after boasting that his poetic ability surpassed that of the Muses in the *Iliad*, and although the narration of this episode does not mention the specific disability that is inflicted upon Thamyras (he is simply πηρός, a hapax in Homer), his blindness is explicit in Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 1.3.3) and mentioned in the *Rhesus* (916-25).²⁸⁰ Pausanias also recalls having seen a portrait of Thamyras at the moment just after his blinding, and it is perhaps because the blindness element of the tale is

²⁷⁷ Hom.*Il.*20.131. Barasch (2001), 26.

²⁷⁸ Tatti-Gartzziou (2010), 183; for real-life punishment, see Allen (2000).

²⁷⁹ Call.*Lav.Pall.*107-118; Apollod.3.4.3; On these examples (and others) from a medical perspective see Esser (1939), esp. 159f.

²⁸⁰ Hom.*Il.*2.594-600.

so well known that Homer selects a general term for the hubristic poet's punishment.²⁸¹

In the *Ibis*, Ovid links the crimes of the blinded characters Thamyris, Demodocus and Phineus.²⁸² The crimes of Thamyris and Demodocus are clearly related (both are poets who are blinded by the Muses), but Phineus' connection is less obvious. Phineus' blindness is most commonly said to have been caused by an attempt to reveal the secrets of the gods.²⁸³ Stesichorus similarly revealed a more than mortal knowledge, in this case of Helen's sexual encounters, and was blinded (Helen was worshipped as a goddess in Sparta); but he repented and composed a palinode for Helen and had his sight returned to him.²⁸⁴ As Aristotle maintains, ἅπαντα γὰρ ἀποδίδομεν τοῖς θεοῖς ὄραν: all-encompassing sight is a divine quality, and therefore seeing that which should not be seen is not only a visual infringement, but is an attempt to collapse the differences between the divine and the human.²⁸⁵ Equally, other crimes punished by blindness can be seen to have at their core the transgression of the boundary between gods and mortals.

In the theatre, we find a similar relationship between blindness and the punishment of crimes that involve the over-stepping of fundamental limits. In Euripides' *Hecuba*, the grieving mother asks Agamemnon to execute the punishment himself, before conceiving of her own revenge; and Agamemnon agrees that punishment is warranted by Polymestor's actions, though he will not

²⁸¹ Paus.9.30.2.

²⁸² Ov.*Ib.*271-2.

²⁸³ See Bouvier and Moreau (1983), 5-19,

²⁸⁴ Pl.*Phd.*243 a-b; See Sider (1989).

²⁸⁵ Arist.*Po.*1454b 5-6.

exact it himself.²⁸⁶ When Polymestor leaves the tent after he has been blinded, the chorus pity him, but assert that the punishment is commensurate with the crime (δράσαντι δ' αἰσχρὰ δεινὰ τάπιτίμια).²⁸⁷ Odysseus in Euripides' *Cyclops* similarly thinks of blinding as a necessary punishment for the Cyclops, and one that will be harsh enough to balance the Cyclops' murder of his companions: κακῶς γὰρ ἂν Τροίαν γε διεπυρώσαμεν / εἰ μή σ' ἑταίρων φόνον ἔτιμωρησάμην.²⁸⁸

The relationship between blindness and punishment in the case of Oedipus, however, is less clear-cut. Oedipus himself lists various punitive and non-punitive reasons for his blindness.²⁸⁹ The idea that blindness is a punishment for what Oedipus has done is his first defence of his self-blinding. He claims that he would be unable to look upon his father and mother in Hades without sufficient punishment, and continues to enumerate proofs that his blinding was the appropriate punishment, articulating a wish for a number of well-known punishments, including exile:

ὅπως τάχιστα πρὸς θεῶν ἔξω μέ που
καλύψατ' ἢ φονεύσατ' ἢ θαλάσσιον
ἐκρίψατ', ἔνθα μήποτ' εἰσόψεσθ' ἔτι.²⁹⁰

Devereux suggests that we find here two separate punishments for two inseparable crimes: incest and parricide / regicide.²⁹¹ This idea, however, does not seem to be supported by ancient sources: both Dio Chrysostom and Aelian

²⁸⁶ E.*Hec.*789-793.

²⁸⁷ E.*Hec.*1086.

²⁸⁸ E.*Cyc.*694-5.

²⁸⁹ S.*OT.*1369-1415.

²⁹⁰ S.*OT.*1373-4, 1410-12: "Hide me somewhere out of sight as quickly as possible / or kill me, or throw me into the sea / where no one will see me".

²⁹¹ Devereux (1973).

link blindness and incest but reject the idea that blindness is an appropriate punishment for incest.²⁹² Although infrequent in narrative sources, blinding as a punishment for incest appears to be well known to Sophocles, who refers to the blinding of Phineus' incestuous sons in *Antigone* (970ff). Blinding is also a relevant punishment for incest because it is an act of symbolic castration.²⁹³ Within tragedy, castration and punitive blinding are linked, with the Erinyes of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* said to preside over blindings, castrations and impalements; and, as if to reinforce the nexus of punishments from which Oedipus symbolically suffers, it is to the seat of these chthonic goddesses that the blinded, exiled Oedipus comes at the opening of *Oedipus at Colonus*.²⁹⁴

There are several marked differences, however, between the theatrical grammar of blinding outlined in the first half of this chapter and the pattern according to which blindness unfolds in non-dramatic sources. First, although characters are blinded as a punishment in both narrative and dramatic texts, and receive gifts to compensate them for their loss of sight, the recompense given for blindness in narrative sources is different. Rather than the prophetic knowledge given in exchange for sight in the theatrical sources, in narrative texts both knowledge and poetic inspiration can be gifts given in recompense to those who have been blinded. This is the case for example in the lines often taken to indicate Homeric authorship in *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, where the girls are instructed to answer that the blind man of Chios is the greatest of singers (ἀριστεύσουσιν ᾠοιδαί).²⁹⁵ There is a tempting parallel with Homer's bard

²⁹² D.Chr.10.29f; Ael.NA.3.47; see Kamerbeek (1967) for incest in the Oedipus myth.

²⁹³ Devreux (1973), 40ff discusses the frequent links between eyes and phalluses.

²⁹⁴ A.Eu.186f.

²⁹⁵ h.Ap.166-173.

Demodocus, whose poetic ability, we are told, was given to him at the same time as the Muses removed his sight (ὄφθαλμῶν μὲν ἄμερσε, δίδου δ' ἠδεῖαν ἀοιδήν).²⁹⁶

Poetic skill in these narrative sources is not a gift given to mitigate the effects of blindness specifically, and earlier variations on the myth seem to suggest that it is given in exchange for any loss of sense: Democritus denies that anyone can be a great poet without first falling into madness, an idea that is already a παλαιὸς μῦθος according to Plato.²⁹⁷ Explanations are offered for the dominant link between blindness and poetry, with Buxton offering “natural logic” as an explanation, and Aristotle asserting that ὥσπερ οἱ τυφλοὶ μνημονεύουσι μᾶλλον.²⁹⁸ An augmented memory would not only give the poet an advantage in oral composition, but would also break down the boundary between the poet and the Muse (who is often asked to recall factual elements of the poem from her memory), a reflection of the transgression for which blindness is often given as punishment in non-dramatic texts.

An even more important discrepancy exists, however, between the theatrical grammar of blinding and its patterning in non-dramatic texts. Narrative texts permit the blinding of humans by gods, or of non-humans by humans, but it is extremely rare here for one human to punitively blind another without encountering divine resistance. The shepherd Evenus is the narrative example which comes closest to the blinding of one human by another, and his case is clearly the exception that proves the rule.²⁹⁹ In Herodotus, the

²⁹⁶ Hom.*Od.*8.62.

²⁹⁷ See Cic.*Div.*1.37, see Dodds (1951), 82 and Padel (1995); Pl.*Lg.*719c .

²⁹⁸ Buxton (1980); Arist.*EE.*1248b.

²⁹⁹ On human punitive blinding see Tatti-Gartziou (2010), 185-186.

Apollonians blind Evenius as a punishment for having fallen asleep when he ought to have been protecting the flocks of sheep from attack by wolves. The process of punishing the shepherd is described as if it were a legalistic one.³⁰⁰ The gods do not uphold this human judicial position; they disagree with the punishment but are unable to restore Evenius' sight. Instead, because they acknowledge that his blinding was unjust, they promise him gifts in return that will mitigate his loss of sight: αὐτοὶ δώσειν Εὐηνίῳ δόσιν τοιαύτην τὴν πολλοῦς μιν μακαριεῖν ἀνθρώπων ἔχοντα.³⁰¹

Outside of dramatic texts, all instances of blindness inflicted on human characters by human characters are problematized, either by divine intervention, as is the case in Herodotus' narration of Evenius' blindness, or by the existence of a multitude of inconsistent mythical variants: in some versions of the myth, Phineus is blinded by the Argonauts, but this is superseded by alternative versions of the myth suggesting that he was blinded by the gods for various crimes.³⁰² The gods can make human vision stronger or weaker at will (Athena, for example, enables Diomedes to distinguish gods from mortals in *Iliad* 5.127-8), but when mortal characters take mortal vision into their own hands they do so at great personal risk.³⁰³ In non-dramatic texts it is uncommon for

³⁰⁰ Hdt.9.93.

³⁰¹ Hdt.9.93: "we will give Evenius a gift that will make many people consider him happy".

³⁰²Variations: Apollod.i.9.21; other examples are Phineus' sons, who are said to have been blinded by their father / step-mother (e.g. *S.Ant.*973ff), but also to have been devoured by beasts. D.S.iv.44.1-6 notes the variety of incompatible variants; this is also the case for Telesphorus, who is blinded by the king (among other punishments) in *Plu.Mor.*606b but not in *Ath.*14.616c; The blinded sons of the Thracian king in Hdt.8.116-117 appear in the first variant but not the second (118); Phoenix is blinded by his father in one version (Apollod.3.13.8) but Chiron restores his sight.

³⁰³ cf. *Hom.II.*20.321, 20.341.

such blindings to arise without divine intervention, and such incidents produce a multitude of textual variants.

Tragedies are very different in this respect: here mortals can inflict blindness on others and themselves. Of the surviving examples of blind characters, *Hecuba* is the most straightforward dramatic example of the blinding of one human by another. Unlike the blindings by humans in narrative sources, the blinding of Polymestor by Hecuba and her women is ratified by the authority figure, Agamemnon. Oedipus' self-inflicted blinding is both more complex and more telling about the transformation of blinding from its mythical / narrative context into a theatrical one. The self-blinding in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a distinct departure from either its non-dramatic or its tragic predecessors. Homer's only reference to Oedipus is in *Odyssey* Book 11, where there is not only no reference to his blinding, but the possibility of it is strictly excluded (Homer has Oedipus return to his political office after the events of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*).³⁰⁴ One fragment of the Euripides *Oedipus* seems to be spoken by one of Laius' servants and displays a different tradition of Oedipal blinding: ἡμεῖς δὲ Πολύβου παῖδ' ἐρείσαντες πέδωι / ἐξομματοῦμεν καὶ διόλλυμεν κόρας.³⁰⁵ Given the fragmentary nature of these non-Sophoclean Oedipus plays, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the self-blinding motif was evident in previous versions of the Oedipus myth.³⁰⁶ It seems not unlikely, however, that the self-blinding in the Sophoclean play was both transgressive and unusual.

³⁰⁴ Hom.*Od.*11.271-80.

³⁰⁵ E.*frag.*541: "pressing the child of Polybus to the ground / we ruined his eyes and blinded him"; see Liapis (2014).

³⁰⁶ See Mastronade (1994), 24-25 and Edmunds (1985) for other Oedipuses. For self-blinding in Aeschylus' *Oedipus*, see A.*Th.*780f.; Hutchinson (1985), xxiv-xxv; West (1990), 116-118 and Finkelberg (2014).

A third difference between theatrical and narrative blinding can be discerned. In tragedy, punishment from the gods can also be in the form of madness, which manifests itself as a kind of blindness.³⁰⁷ Already in Homer, *atē* appears both as madness and loss of sight: Helen tells Menelaus that ἄτην δὲ μετέστενον, ἦν Ἀφροδίτη δῶχ'.³⁰⁸ The connection between madness and blindness in tragedy, unlike in non-dramatic texts, is a visual one: characters are known to be mad when they look mad, and distortions of the eyes (*diastrophoi*) are common signs of madness in tragedy and medical writing.³⁰⁹

Padel places vision and blindness at the centre of her understanding of madness in ancient tragedy: “The mad do not look normal to other people. They are not supposed to see normally either. Madness skews the two-way flow between what self sees and how others see self”.³¹⁰ She contrasts madness (manifested as tragic mis-seeing) in the cases of Ajax, Agave and Heracles, with the superior sight of Cassandra, Orestes and Pentheus.³¹¹ The madness of Ajax, Agave and Heracles – who see things which are apparent to mortals, but do not see them as they really are – is more clearly a kind of blindness.³¹² Sophocles’ *Ajax* opens at night, in darkness, with an imbalance of sight: “The sane man sees

³⁰⁷ Cf. Pietikäinen (2015), 17: “Madness has a visible role in Greek mythology”. See Oyebode (2012) on the tradition of madness in the theatre from a psychiatric point of view. On the relationship between tragic madness and Homeric / epic madness see O’Brien-Moore (1924), though blindness / vision does not feature in his list of additions tragedians make to epic madness. Herkowitz (1998), 25 and *passim* also differentiates tragic and epic madness. On tragic madness *in scaenis* in the *Aeneid* see Fratantuono (2007), 118. On madness in tragedy more generally see Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 23-8.

³⁰⁸ H.*Od.*4.261; on *atē* see Barasch (2001), 33-36.

³⁰⁹ Padel (1995), 74, who cites examples of madness represented as distorted eyes / viewing, e.g. A.*PV.*882, E.*HF.*868, E.*Ba.*1123, etc.

³¹⁰ Padel (1995), 74, see also Padel (1992), 59-63.

³¹¹ Though these two types of madness often coexist, see for example Orestes’ misidentification of his sister Electra as an Erinyes (E.*Or.*264), foreseeing her later revenge.

³¹² There is evidence of other lost tragedies in which characters killed their relatives, thinking them to be animals / plants, e.g. A.*frag.*57-62.

the mad. The mad man does not see the sane. Madness changes sight, and can darken it".³¹³ Ajax is temporarily blind to the onstage situation, a conversation between two sighted characters in front of a seeing audience.

Whereas in narrative sources madness can be expressed in a variety of ways including disturbances of vision, in tragedy it is consistently figured as a temporary loss of sight. These three differences between the dramatic and non-dramatic traditions are not random, rather, their contribution to the theatrical grammar of blindness relates in important ways to the mechanics of the theatre generally, and to fifth-century tragedy in particular. The five grammatical rules of theatrical blinding develop out of this non-dramatic tradition, but their specific performance context sets them apart from it. And these five grammatical rules recur, as we will see in the following chapters, in scenes of blindness and blinding throughout theatre history.

³¹³ Padel (1995), 68.

Chapter Two:

Blindness and Death

Around 530 BCE, Solon passed a law that prevented funeral processions from taking place in Athens during the daylight hours.³¹⁴ Other restrictions to funeral rituals also came in under this decree, including the relegation of women to the back of the funeral procession, and the limitation of participation in the *ekphora* to close friends of the deceased only.³¹⁵ When Demosthenes read out Solon's law, however, he phrased the injunction in language that recalled the farewells to the sun uttered by characters leaving the stage to their deaths in Greek tragedy. The deceased should, he read, be 'carried out' before sunrise. It is not so much the darkness or the particular time of day that Solon's law emphasised, according to Demosthenes, but the fact that the procession must be completed away from the sunlight, *πρὶν ἥλιον ἐξέχειν*.³¹⁶

This same connection between an absence of sunlight and death preoccupies characters in their final moments in Greek tragedy, where death is figured as a farewell to the sun.³¹⁷ Hope sees the noise of the procession as the

³¹⁴ See Turner (2016), 145-6 on the role of this law in the visibility of funerary rites. Turner relates this to visual art, but does not make a connection with the theatre, instead concluding that because the death masks have no eye-holes, "none were masks designed to be worn" (148-9). Solon was also concerned with limiting theatrical representation (see Plut. *Sol.*29.4 for the archetypal confrontation between Solon and Thespis). For the longevity of Solon's anti-theatrical principles, see Kezar (2007).

³¹⁵ On Greek funerary rituals see Macintosh (1994), 19-23, who points to Kurtz and Boardman (1971), 142-161, Garland (1985) 23-31 and Morris (1992).

³¹⁶ D.43.62, see also Plu.*Sol.*21.4-5 where other aspects of the law are the focus rather than the sunlight instruction. On these see Foley (1993), Alexiou (2002), 18-23 and Blok (2006). See also Parker (1983), 35-41 on pollution coming from funerals, and Holst-Warhaft (1992), 118 on the new legislation and the prevention of civic unrest.

³¹⁷ On this trope in fifth-century tragedy, see Chapter 1. For viewing and death in ancient Greece more generally Turner (2016), who points to the relationship between viewing

offending characteristic here, but the oracle that Demosthenes cites in support of this law in fact promotes the singing of choruses for the dead alongside sacrifices and other noisy aspects of mourning.³¹⁸ Instead, it is the visibility of mourning that Solon proscribes here, deploying what becomes a tragic trope of exile from the sunlight in the fifth century, to consign celebrations of death to a non-visual time of the night.³¹⁹ This chapter, drawing on the discussion, in the previous chapter, of the necessity of the sun (personified as Apollo) for both life and vision in Greek tragedy, explores the relationship between death and blindness. In Seneca, Oedipus comes closer to death than his Sophoclean counterpart; and this implied equivalence between the two punishments of blindness and death is further amplified in the Christian context of medieval drama, where the recurring trope of blindness as punishment for sin focuses the spectators' attention on the precarious afterlives of those who are blinded.

Exiled from the light: Seneca's *Oedipus*

The act of spectating during death rituals was even more closely linked with the theatre in Rome. Polybius details the rites at a Roman funeral, focusing in particular on its visible (ἐναργής) spectacle and on the role of the spectators (παντὸς τοῦ δήμου σπάντος).³²⁰ The mourners wear masks representing the dead, according to both Polybius and Pliny the Elder, and Turner reminds us of

and death as a persistent thread in visual culture, citing Osborne (1988), Shapiro (1991) and Turner (2009).

³¹⁸ Hope (2010), 31-42. See Dem.42.66.

³¹⁹ Though Turner (2016) 146 points out that "the Athenian funeral was not exactly invisible, even after it was restricted to non-daylight hours" because of a lively interest in memorializing death in visual art.

³²⁰ Plb.6.53-4.

an important feature of these wax masks: “they have no eye-holes”.³²¹ Just as blinded Oedipus at the end of the *Oedipus at Colonus* is the only spectator to witness his own death, showing a special link between blindness, death and second sight, so too in Roman funeral processions those who play the role of the dead also assume a kind of blindness in front of an audience.³²² Links between the theatrical reanimation of the dead person during the funeral procession and metaphorical blindness are made in Latin poetry, with Propertius, for example, juxtaposing a death figured as a metaphorical blinding (*mors claudet ocellos*) with a concern for the theatrics of the funeral (*nec mea tunc longa spatietur imagine pompa*).³²³

It is unsurprising, then, that the Roman playwright Seneca takes the link between blindness and death seriously.³²⁴ Seneca does not only present death as an equivalent and preferable punishment for his Oedipus, as Sophocles does.³²⁵ Rather, just as Roman funerals elevate the relationship between blindness, theatrical representation and death beyond their Athenian counterparts, Seneca

³²¹ Turner (2016) 149, does not make a link with the theatre, instead concluding that this lack of eye holes means that “none were masks designed to be worn”, 148. See Plb.3.53.6 and Plin.*Nat.*6.35. Flower (1996)’s comprehensive account of these masks sees them as ‘life-masks’ rather than ‘death-masks’; Toynbee (1971) 48 discusses the masks at Vespasian’s funeral in Suetonius’ account; Bettini (2005), 195-8 sees these funerary performers as well-rehearsed actors; Noy (2011), 8-9 notes the silence of ancient sources on these masks.

³²² On the witnessing of death in Rome see Kyle (1998), Bodel (1999) and Dodge (2011), as well as comments on the visibility of Roman tombs by Koortbojian (1996); Davies (2000); Hope (2003) and Wallace-Hadrill (2008), 77-109.

³²³ Prop.2.13b.1-8. See Flower’s (1996) 310 discussion of this poem. On the enduring importance of Solon’s law for funerals roughly contemporary with Propertius’ poem, see Cic.*Leg.*2.59.

³²⁴ Turner (2016), 155 sees an implicit connection here, noting that “Vision, in the face of death, has its limits”. She later reads the myth of Orpheus told in the *Metamorphoses* as proof that “the dead, it seems, resist being seen”, 156.

³²⁵ See S.*OT.*1349ff, 1367-8. On death and blindness in Sophocles see Chapter 1, above.

also extends the equivalence of death and blindness in his *Oedipus*.³²⁶ Like the Euripidean Polymestor and Cyclops, and the Sophoclean Oedipus before him, Seneca's Oedipus (we are told by the messenger) immediately assumes that death is the appropriate punishment. He reaches for his sword (*hoc scelestum pectus aut ferro petat / aut fervido aliquis igne vel saxo domet*) and reproaches his soul for delaying punishment by death (*anime, quid mortem times?*).³²⁷

The first half of the Senecan Oedipus' final speech, as the messenger reports it, is taken up with assurances that death is the appropriate punishment for his crimes against his father (*hoc patri sat est*), and his self-blinding seems not so much a considered and appropriate punishment for his incest, but an accident.³²⁸ Oedipus begins to cry, and it is this weeping that directs him towards blindness (*et flere satis est?... fodiantur oculi!*).³²⁹ Although his decision to blind himself seems to be the result of emotion rather than a rational decision, he has already glossed the relationship his punishment must have with death before selecting it. Death is not sufficient punishment for his two crimes, he clarifies, because it can only happen once (*quod saepe fieri non potest fiat diu*).³³⁰ His blindness, on the other hand will be an extended living death (*mors... longa*),

³²⁶ Rehm (1992), 7 calls Athenian weddings and funerals "performances of a more intimate nature". See Garlick (1999) on the modern relationship between funerals and the theatre. See also Wiles (2011), 42ff on the type of citizen involvement at funerals and the theatre.

³²⁷ Sen.*Oed.*926-934. He also compares himself here to two deaths that result from mis-seeing, Pentheus' (cf. τί λεύσσω in E.*Ba.*1280) and Actaeon's.

³²⁸ The messenger suggests death from 915-954 and blinding from 954-979. Boyle (2011) on 915ff remarks on the "legal language" of the messenger's speech, and compares the appropriateness of the punishments here to the punishments in Sen.*Her.F.*1202-18 and Sen.*Phaed.*1220-42.

³²⁹ Sen.*Oed.*952-957. Note also the demonstrative *en* inviting the chorus to engage visually with Oedipus at the moment of his blinding although he is offstage, and also its repetition (*en ecce*) at 1004 when Jocasta returns to the scene.

³³⁰ Sen.*Oed.*948.

distancing him from the living (*vivis... exemptus*) but not conveying him to the underworld to be reunited with his father (*nec sepultis mixtus*).³³¹

His assertion here links his blindness with the exile of the Sophoclean Oedipus (both from the stage in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and from Thebes in the *Oedipus at Colonus*), but also confirms its absolute equivalence with a *mors longa* surpassing the looser metaphorical connection between blindness and death in Greek tragedy.³³² The sun metaphor for death is not absent here either, and the messenger announces Oedipus' blinding with a phrase that echoes the Greek tragic farewells to the light: *tantum est periculum lucis*.³³³ Seneca's Oedipus also confirms the link between blindness, death and an exile from the light, requesting both exile and death in the immediate aftermath of his self-blinding.³³⁴

Even the weapon used to enact the Roman Oedipus' blinding – although it is an often-recognised difference between the Senecan and the Sophoclean blindings – re-emphasises the link between blindness and death.³³⁵ Sophocles' Oedipus blinds himself with the pins of his mother's brooches (*S.O.T.*1268-1274). In Euripides' *Hecuba*, the same weapon (women's brooches) is used to deprive Polymestor of his vision, as the blind Polymestor tells Agamemnon (*E.Hec.*1169-117). The brooches are also in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, where Oedipus is again blinded with women's brooches, sharing the same golden epithet that Sophocles had used of them in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (χρυσηλάτους at *E.Phoen.* 59-62).

³³¹ *Sen.Oed.*949-951. He later (977) acknowledges that his blindness – figured here again as an exile from the sun (*nox*) – is the appropriate punishment for his incest (*thalamis*).

³³² Cf. also *Sen.Oed.*949: *quaeretur via*, casting the blindness as a kind of exile.

³³³ *Sen.Oed.*971.

³³⁴ *Sen.Oed.*1015-1018.

³³⁵ For accounts of the relationship between Sophocles' and Seneca's Oedipus plays see Edmunds (2006), 61; Tarrant (1995); Macintosh (2009), 43 and Zanobi (2014), 117-118. However see also Töchterle (1994) on Seneca's fifth-century influences.

Whilst commentators like Mastronarde consider χρυσηλάτους to be a standard descriptor for women’s decorative jewelry in tragedy, it is hard not to see here a recognizable allusion to Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Indeed, elsewhere in extant drama, the adjective appears most commonly to describe objects related to Oedipus, such as the tripod of Apollo’s oracle, or the ekphrasis on a shield belonging to Oedipus’ son Polyneices (an image which reminds the onstage characters of the boy’s father).³³⁶

Seneca’s Oedipus, however, does not blind himself with a golden brooch; instead he uses his own hands (*manus in ora torsit...*).³³⁷ Wilamowitz’ famous assertion about Seneca’s *Medea* that “this Medea has read Euripides” seems *not* to be true of his Oedipus.³³⁸ Almost a century after Wilamowitz’ claim, however, it is Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides* to which scholars like Trinacty look in order to find a model for the switch from brooches to hands.³³⁹ Indeed, it is in Ovid’s retelling of the life of Hecuba in *Metamorphoses* 13 that we find the most obvious model for the method of the Senecan blinding:

... et digitos in perfida lumina condit
expellitque genis oculos (facit ira nocentem)
immergitque manus, foedataque sanguine sonti

³³⁶ See Mastronarde (1994) on 62 with Smolenaars (2008), 227-8 who notes that the word appears elsewhere in Sophocles only to describe the brooch in *S.Tr.*924, and only in descriptions of the blinding brooch in extant Euripides; Cf. *Ar.Pl.*9 and *A.Th.*644.

³³⁷ *Sen.Oed.*962-970

³³⁸ Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1919) 3:162.

³³⁹ Trinacty (2014), 95-7; and McAuley (2015), 207ff. On the strong Euripidean presence in the *Metamorphoses* and the strong Ovidian presence in Seneca’s *Troades* and *Medea* in particular see Curley (2013), Trinacty (2014), and Lauriola and Demetriou (2015), among others. See also Tarrant (1995), 227 for a Neronian reading of Jocasta’s death speech (esp. 106-9) as a parallel to Agrippina’s *ventrem ferri* reported in *Tac.Ann.*14.8.6. Boyle (1997) 229 reads this as a denial of Greek tragic convention in favour of a Roman model: “the neck or throat is the standard body part involved in the killing of women in Greek tragedy”, with Loraux (1987), 50. The renewed focus on Jocasta in Seneca’s play recalls the emphasis placed on Jocasta in the fragments of Euripides’ *Oedipus*, see Liapis (2014).

non lumen (neque enim superest), loca luminis haurit.³⁴⁰

Just as *Medea fiam* puts Seneca's *Medea* into dialogue with the *Medea* of Ovid's *Heroides*, and Phaedra's pointed description of her step-son's *ore graio* accentuates the Roman performance context, the use of Ovid's Polymestor in the creation of a Latin Oedipus could seem to be simply another example of Seneca's Romanising of Greek tragedy.³⁴¹ But Ovid also makes explicit, at the lexical level, the relationship between blinding and the farewell to the light. Ovid uses *lumina* and *oculi* to refer to eyes, but at the moment of Polymestor's blinding uses only *lumina*, which can mean eyes, light and life. When Seneca re-dramatises this scene from Ovid, he does not use the word *lumina* (974) but does preserve the connection implicit in this word between eyes and light, resulting in the messenger's formulation of blindness as an exile from the light, *tantum est periculum lucis*.³⁴²

Seneca, building on the Ovidian link between light and eyes, restates not only the explicit connection between blindness and darkness but also the implicit tragic relationship between death and exile from the light. Although the weapon is different from the Greek model, Seneca's Oedipus blinds himself with his own hands (*manus in ora torsit*), recalling the hand movement that he imagined at first would procure his death (*impiam capulo manum / ensemque*

³⁴⁰ Ov.*Met.*13.554-564: "... and she drove her fingers into his hateful eyes / and pulled them from their sockets (anger made her cruel), / and she plunged her hands, dripping with sinful blood / not

³⁴¹ Sen.*Med.*171, cf. Ov.*Her.*6.151, see Trinacty (2014), 105-6; Sen.*Ph.*660. See also, on the connection between this Romanising of Greek tragedy and pantomime Mac.*Sat.*2.7.12.ff, Suet.*Nero.*21 and Suet.*Jul.*56.7, with Zanobi (2014).

³⁴² Sen.*Oed.*971. See Bielfeldt (2016) on the relationship between sight and light in Greek depictions of gazing and looking. On the seeing light in Roman literature see Kanellou (2013). See Bartsch (2006), 41-56 on eyes and mirrors. On real-life visual impairment in Rome see Trentin (2013).

ducit).³⁴³ It is the repetition of *manus* as the weapon both for death and for blinding that, despite giving a resolutely Roman flavor to Seneca's blinding scene (whether by allusion to Ovid's Hecuba or Tacitus' Agrippina), confirms the link established in Solon's laws between the funeral procession happening in the dark and Greek tragic deaths figured as exiles from the sunlight.

Biblical blindness and ancient sin

The transference of Greek tragedy into Latin poetry and its subsequent rewriting as drama is one of the key ways that Gildenhard and Revermann explain the survival of Greek tragedy after the fifth century.³⁴⁴ Despite Lowell-Edmunds' argument that the survival of the Oedipus myth into the early modern period depended on three Latin texts (Seneca's Theban plays and Statius' *Thebaid*), medieval drama clearly drew on a rich history of staged blindness encoded in both Seneca and Latin poetry.³⁴⁵ However, Roman tragedy's adoption of the Greek tragic link between blindness and death is also found in the Bible.³⁴⁶ Indeed, ancient tragedy lurks behind much medieval drama despite the dominant myth of the death of tragedy in the Middle Ages, brought about by the rise of broadly anti-theatrical Christianity and Byzantium's interest in collecting and preserving texts in anthologies and extracts rather than performing them.³⁴⁷ In the medieval blinded characters, we find the grammar of ancient dramatic blindings mediated via the Bible and re-dramatised in plays on religious themes.

³⁴³ Sen.*Oed.*962 and 935-6.

³⁴⁴ Gildenhard and Revermann (2010).

³⁴⁵ Edmunds (2006), 60.

³⁴⁶ Hartsock (2008) reads blindness in the New Testament, but Raphael (2008) is the fullest disability studies reading of the Hebrew Bible. Both use Mitchell and Snyder's "narrative prosthesis" as a mode of reading disability, on which see for example Raphael (2008), 63ff on the connection between Isaac's blindness and Rebekah's infidelity.

³⁴⁷ A view held by Wilson (1996), 117-9, 238 and 254-5 among others.

The idea that Christianity restricted the circulation of Greek texts has been thoroughly debunked at least since 1975, when Zuntz argued that the spread of texts might have been even wider after the advent of Christianity than it had been before.³⁴⁸ Coupled with this is the rejection of the idea that ancient drama survived in the Middle Ages only in excerpts, typified by Symes' formulation of a possible corpus of ancient texts to which "every minimally educated person in Byzantium would encounter in his or her schooling" and which remained influential throughout the Middle Ages.³⁴⁹ Within this list of plays are two plays featuring Oedipus (*Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Seven Against Thebes*) and *Hecuba*, along with *Phoenician Women*. Symes answers the question simply: "Why were [ancient] comedies and tragedies never staged?" with the simple answer "We have no evidence that they were not".³⁵⁰

The fusion of classical drama and Christian storytelling is frequent in this period. Augustine boasted of his skills as performer in his flying Medea set piece (*Confessions* 3.6); Rabanus Maurus used tragedians as an example in his explanation of a passage of *Matthew* (*Commentarum in Matthaeum* 2.6); Bede compared dramatic poetry to the *Song of Songs* (*De Arte Metrica* PL 90:174); and

³⁴⁸ Zuntz (1975), see also Morgan (2003). Symes (2016), 108 points to both of these; For the traditionally restrictive view, see Edmunds (1985), 64: "For about 1000 years, no one in Western Europe, except in isolated pockets, read Sophocles or any other Greek text."

³⁴⁹ Symes (2016), 108 see also Marcianak (2004) and Symes (2011); See *Codex Theodisianus* 6.10.13, for example. Barnes (2010) thinks the Church synod of 692 may in fact have been proof that previous legislation was not working. For the archaeological and iconographic evidence for the continued presence of ancient drama until at least the third century CE see Bieber (1961), 227-52.

³⁵⁰ Symes (2016), 110. The role of classical myths in interpreting tales from the Bible is made explicit in early Biblical drama: the *Christos Paschon* tells the story of the passion of Christ drawing on Euripides (and particularly Euripidean mother figures) and making explicit in one of its earliest manuscripts that this Biblical story is being told *κατ' Εὐριπίδην*. On this manuscript see Brambs (1885), 25; on dating, see Marciniak (2004). On the figure of Mary and Euripidean mother figures more generally see Sticca (1974) and Puchner (1997).

most extensively, Honorius Augustodunensis described the priest as the tragedian in the ritual drama of the liturgy of mass (*Gemma Animae* 83).³⁵¹ The term ‘tragedy’ was also expanded from its fifth century dramatic connotations to include qualifications of elements of worship (an eleventh-century handbook on the music of liturgical performance by Aribo Scholasticus describes comic and tragic modes³⁵²), events from Christian narrative (Peter Chrysologus, archbishop of Ravenna describes the martyrdom of John the Baptist as tragedy) and unfortunate events of real life (Eleanor of Aquitaine describes her son Richard the Lionheart’s circumstances as ‘tragedy’ in a letter to Pope Celestinus III).³⁵³ Rather than a vehicle for the anti-theatrical repression of ancient dramatic texts, the medieval Church was a uniquely appropriate place in which interests in both performance and ancient authority collided to provoke a renewed interest in classical drama.³⁵⁴

Furthermore, though the Bible can be said to have contributed much of the material for medieval drama, this does not preclude the persistence of a classical tradition of blindness in this period. Indeed, as we will see, the plot lines in the Bible often enhance the ancient grammar of blindness. Like the blindings that we saw in both the ancient narrative and dramatic traditions in Chapter One, blindness in the *Bible* can be a divine punishment that is synonymous with

³⁵¹ See Symes (2010) and Dox (2002), 52. On the flying Medea see Hall (2002), 3 and Kelly (1993), 30-1.

³⁵² See also Symes (2011) on the increasing theatricalisation of medieval acts of worship.

³⁵³ Symes (2010).

³⁵⁴ See Hall (2002), 37 on church choirs and ancient choral singing; White (2006) on ways in which training for the singing of hymns preserved the skills required for tragic performance, and Hall and Wyles (2008) on popular performance. See Mayvaert (1973) and Symes (2003) on school performances of Latin drama.

and equivalent to death.³⁵⁵ In *Deuteronomy*, blindness is listed alongside death as appropriate punishment for those who are disobedient to God:

The Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee.³⁵⁶

Here, as in Seneca's *Oedipus*, death as an appropriate punishment is dwelt on at length before blindness is suggested. Other elements that are part of the grammar of ancient dramatic blindness are also found here. The threat of blindness is repeated again (*Deuteronomy* 28:34), followed almost immediately by the threat of exile:

The Lord shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee.³⁵⁷

The idea of blindness as a punishment is repeated several times in this passage, together with a scene startlingly reminiscent of the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, when Creon takes away Oedipus' children: "Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail

³⁵⁵ On the Bible, Christian theology and ancient tragedy, see Taylor and Waller (2013) though they do not discuss this passage. On the ways in which bodies could signal spirituality in the medieval period more generally, see Lomperis and Stanbury (1993), viii on the "incarnational aesthetic". This has been more readily studied with reference to the female body in particular, see Pearman (2010).

³⁵⁶ *Deuteronomy* 28:27ff. Cf. also *Deuteronomy* 28:21–27, which describes death by plague.

³⁵⁷ *Deuteronomy* 28:36–7. On blindness as darkness / an absence of light see also 1 *John* 2:11.

with longing for them all the day long”.³⁵⁸

The Bible, like Greek tragedy and to an even greater extent Senecan tragedy, links blindness and death, and this introduces a special relationship between blindness and sin that places the blinded character within the liminal space outlined by Seneca’s *Oedipus (mors longa)*.³⁵⁹ The blind in the Bible are not permitted to approach the altar out of fear of pollution, a fear well known in particular to the chorus of the *Oedipus at Colonus*, when they command Oedipus to leave their land so that he does not pollute it (μή τι πέρα χρέος / έμᾶ πόλει προσάψης).³⁶⁰

The link between blindness and sin recurs throughout the Bible, but in this new Christian setting blindness is not only telling of past sin, as it is in ancient texts, but of the threat of damnation after death. Enemies of King David are frequently referred to as blind, and blindness is also shorthand for those who either disobey the will of God or refuse to believe in him. Many of the references to blindness in the Bible are part of stories about healing, which collate salvation (either through baptism or sacred healing) with restoration of eyesight.³⁶¹ These stories equally unfold according to the grammar of blindness set out in Greek tragedy, with the restoration of eyesight accompanying the absolution of sin and

³⁵⁸ *Deutonomy* 28:32, cf. *S.OT.1521* – the intervening verse of *Deutonomy* 28:35 threatens a swollen foot. The Israelites addressed by Moses in *Deutonomy* are expected to understand that certain types of sin are punishable by blindness: see *Isaiah* 43:8 (unbelief), *Isaiah* 42:16 and 56:10 (ignorance), *2 Peter* 1:9 (moral inadequacy). Cf. Theseus recognizing Oedipus’ past crimes by his blindness in *S.OC.551ff*.

³⁵⁹ See for example *Lamentations* 5:16-17, with Barasch’s (2001), 83 comment “Dimming of eyes, then, goes together with a faint heart”. Cf. Goffman (1968). See Stiker (1999), 85 on the way in which the marginality of people with disabilities in the medieval period contributes to distrust of them: “Distrust, amounting to slander, was often leveled on the disabled”.

³⁶⁰ *S.OC.229-236. Leviticus* 21:18, which also proscribes those who have disfigured feet from approaching. For other exclusions of the blind from Israel and Jerusalem see e.g. *2 Samuel* 5:8.

³⁶¹ See *Isaiah* 29:18, 35:5 and *Matthew* 11:2-6, 9:27-31 for examples of this.

disbelief. Gifts are often given in recompense for blindness in the Bible, just as they are in Greek tragedy, with insight-in-blindness also evident among the blind Christian prophets such as Ahijah:

And Jeroboam's wife did so [went to ask the prophet what would happen to her son who was sick], and arose, and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age.³⁶²

The scene that follows this verse in *Kings* revolves around the opposition between worldly sight and insight, or second sight, as is the case in the famous confrontation between Oedipus and Tiresias in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.³⁶³ Ahijah sees through the disguise in which the wife of Jeroboam arrives, ("Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another?"³⁶⁴) and he is able to tell the wife of Jeroboam that the root of her son's illness is her own worship of idols and failure to observe the commandments, although he cannot of course have seen these acts. He then prophesies about the future of Israel, alluding specifically to the death of her son as the result of her past sin. The implicit link between ocular and spiritual blindness in the Bible results in a prioritising of the link between blindness and death that is evident in Greek tragedy and exceeds even the emphasis placed upon it by Seneca.

After the fourth Lateran Council in 1215, there could be no doubt that the ancient grammar of blinding was the dominant mode of reading blindness. A passage in *John 9* is the exception that proves the rule. A blind man is brought to Jesus to be healed, with both the disciples and the Pharisees assuming that his blindness is evidence of a previous sin and that his blindness will therefore not

³⁶² 1 *Kings* 14:4.

³⁶³ S.OT.338ff

³⁶⁴ 1 *Kings* 14:6

be curable.³⁶⁵ Jesus makes clear, however, that the man's blindness is not the result of any sin on his part:

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.³⁶⁶

This story of healing is deliberately speaking against the well-established traditional connection between blindness and previous transgression that is formed in ancient drama.³⁶⁷

However, it was significantly not this story about the healing of blindness that was popularised by the canon of the fourth Lateran Council. In *John* 5, a man who has a disability (it is unspecified, though he steps out from a multitude of people which, we are told, includes those who are blind) is healed.³⁶⁸ Before this healing becomes possible, Jesus must first absolve the sin that caused the man to be made blind in the first place. He does so, and later reminds the newly sighted man that his sight is conditional on his abstaining from sin: "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee".³⁶⁹ This story, and particularly the verse that connects the man's previous infirmity with his sin, became popular in 1215, when the passage was widely reproduced as part of a

³⁶⁵ *John* 9:2 "Master, who did this sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" and *John* 9:24, "we know that this man is a sinner".

³⁶⁶ *John* 9:1-3

³⁶⁷ The logic of this story from *John* 9 is followed in only one play, the Dutch *Die Geboren Blinde*, discussed by Steenbrugge (2006), though she does not read it as the exception that proves the rule: it is the miracle, and his sightedness that leads the Geboren Blinde to acknowledge Jesus as the son of God.

³⁶⁸ *John* 5:3.

³⁶⁹ *John* 5:14.

canon of the fourth Lateran Council.³⁷⁰ The medieval Church and its institutions contributed, in this sense, to the canonization of the Greek tragic grammar of blindness and insisted specifically on a connection between blindness and death, when death is both a physical and a spiritual state.

Religious drama: blindness, sin and damnation in the Lamech plays³⁷¹

The connection made in the Bible between blindness as a proof of sin and spiritual blindness and damnation after death is played out in medieval Biblical drama.³⁷² Two archetypes of medieval drama are most commonly associated with blindness: Jews and beggars or, more specifically, false mendicants.³⁷³ Wheatley devotes a chapter in his study to the anti-Semitic connotations of blindness onstage, contrasting the French and English traditions.³⁷⁴ At the centre of his discussion are two figures, Lamech and Longinus.³⁷⁵ Of these two

³⁷⁰ On the popularity of this story in the Medieval period and after, see Wheatley (2010), 10ff.

³⁷¹ Much of Chapter 2 is indebted to Wheatley (2010), an excellent book, which discusses many of the examples here, but is interested in identifying a particularly Medieval aesthetic of blindness and relating the disability to contemporary concerns across Europe, and does not specify a particular link with death, though he does deal with sin and salvation as it relates to medieval faith.

³⁷² Amplified, as Wheatley (2010), 15 points out, by the fact that engagement with the Eucharist (and particularly the elevation of the Host that after the Synod of Paris in 1205 became the most important moment) was almost exclusively visual and therefore excluded the blind. See Duffy (1992), 96. Snoek (1995), 60 reports that those under interdict frequently drilled holes into Church doors in order to witness the elevation of the Host. Spiritual blindness could therefore be both literal and metaphorical for those excluded from visual participation in Church ritual.

³⁷³ See Wheatley (2010), 76ff. Lampert (2004) claims a similarity of marginal presentation between Jews and women. On these connected social groups and the medieval stage see also Sponsler and Clark (1997).

³⁷⁴ More generally, Wheatley (2010) 4 sees French texts treating blindness more cruelly than their English counterparts: "Why was French medieval literature cruel toward and satirical about blind characters when English literature was much less so?". See also Weygand (2009) on the development of institutions for the blind and their effect on the perception of blindness by French society.

³⁷⁵ On these two figures see Wheatley (2010), 80ff; on the presentation of these figures in art and literature see Barasch (2001), chapter 3. Other sighted characters affirm the

characters, it is Lamech who is particularly interesting here, because his blindness features in dramatic texts but is not explicit in the Bible.

Even in Lamech's Biblical presentation, however, the same sins of transgression (incest, murder of a father figure or the breaking of a divine boundary) that cause blindness in characters of ancient drama accompany him: he is the first bigamist of the Bible, who murdered Cain (from whom he is descended), as well as others. Although he is not blind in the Bible, emphasis is placed on his artistic abilities as well as his sexual excess. It is easy to see why dramatists saw blindness as a fitting attribute for him: his abilities overlap with those often given in recompense for blindness, and crimes are also alluded to that are punishable by blindness in ancient drama.³⁷⁶ Metaphorical and actual blindness are frequently features of Jewish characters of European medieval drama, with the personified Judea often portrayed as blind, as is the case in Isaiah's announcement of the birth of Jesus at the beginning of the Benediktbeuern *Ludus de Nativitate*, (*Judea numine / et nunc caeca fugiat / ab erroris limine*) and the scene in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, in which the Jewish characters onstage are made blind by the breaking of Eucharistic bread.³⁷⁷

Murdoch focuses on the stage's exclusion of the Lamech presented in the Bible, noting that:

metaphorical prevalence of this link between blindness and sin even in morality plays, including for example the Malus Angelus in *The Castle of Perseverance* who warns of the sinful Humanum Genus that "for syn he was born I have hym blent" (531). See also Helmich (1976), 198-200 on allegorical French drama where Sin often blindfolds the sinner character.

³⁷⁶ His blindness did feature in Jewish scriptural commentary, e.g. in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, see Wheatley (2010), 80.

³⁷⁷ *Ludus de Nativitate*, 6-8, see Bevington (1975), 181. See also *Romans* 11:25 on Israel's blindness, *2 Corinthians* 4:3-4 on the blindness of non-believers. Barasch (2001), 83 comments "Here blindness is both the outcome and the manifestation of a moral guilt".

Drama, the most visual of all the medieval biblical presentations, only rarely allows Lamech onto the stage at all, let alone permitting him to dispose of Cain while he is there.³⁷⁸

Although Lamech's presentation in drama (appearing in plays in Cornish, French, German, English and later in Spanish) differs from that of the Bible, the grammar of blinding from Greek tragedy continues to accompany him. Lamech appears in the N-Town plays as part of the *Ludus Controventriae*, in a 50-line interlude that follows the story of Noah. Lamech enters, *conductus ab adolescente*, and immediately makes a link between blindness and madness: "Blyndnes doth make me of wytt for to rave / Whantynge of eye syght".³⁷⁹ However, it is the blind Lamech's special connection with death rather than his bigamy or any other Biblical sin that is the focus of this episode. Lamech and his adolescent guide boast of the skill at archery that he had when he was sighted, and when Lamech insists on proving that he can still shoot an arrow, his guide tells him that he sees a beast under the bush. Lamech shoots his arrow, but a human cry follows from underneath the bush:

Out out *and* alas myn hert is on sondyr
With a brod arwe I am ded *and* sclayn (174-6).³⁸⁰

It is the voice of Cain, who has been killed by Lamech's arrow, mistaken for a beast. But in order to ascertain who the man is, Lamech must ask the boy, who confirms "Caym þou hast kyllyd I telle þe ful pleyn" (180).³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ Murdoch (2003), 84.

³⁷⁹ *Ludus Coventriae* 144ff. Subsequent line references to the Block (1992) edition of the *Ludus Coventriae* are given in brackets in the text.

³⁸⁰ "Out out and alas my heart is torn apart / with a sharp arrow I am dead and slain" On this scene see also Craig (1955), 258.

³⁸¹ "It is Cain you have killed, I tell you plainly",

This dramatic version also exaggerates Lamech's relationship with death.³⁸² On realising that he has killed Cain, Lamech turns on the boy, and threatens to kill him. The stage directions then announce the boy's fate: *Hic lameth cum arcu suo verberat Adolescentem ad mortem* (183-6). The adolescent dies on the stage and is permitted a four-line death speech in which he shares with the audience the grisly details of his death ("his bowe hath broke my brayn", 188). Lamech shows a special concern for his damnation in the afterlife ("God wyl be vengyd ful sadly on me", 192), paving the way for the divine punishment by flooding that follows in the next scene.³⁸³

In the Cornish cycle *Gwreans an Bys, The Creacion of the World* Lamech appears again, with his episode taking up nearly 280 lines. The link between Lamech's blindness and his sins is more evident here – the play opens with Lamech boasting that his lack of morals rivals Cain's, making clear that he is descended from Cain (o cayme mabe adam ythove/ Sevys an Sythvas degre) and alludes specifically to his bigamy ("dew wreag").³⁸⁴ The scene focuses even further on the relationship between death and blindness: Cain speaks to Lamech before he dies (1570ff), telling him who he is and reminding us of Lamech's blindness by pointing out that he is unable to see the proof he offers him (1577).³⁸⁵

³⁸² Though, as is the case for Polymestor, Lamech's murder of Cain is not simply punishable because it is a murder, but because Cain is under the protection of God (*Genesis* 4.15). On Lamech's punishment in Jewish and Christian texts see Byron (2011), 93-122.

³⁸³ On this, see also Wheatley (2010), 81.

³⁸⁴ On this scene see Murdoch (2003), 85. *Gwreans an Bys*, 1436-7, 1453-4. Subsequent line references are given in brackets in the text.

³⁸⁵ In what follows (1578-90) the servant tries to convince Lamech that the cries he is hearing are the cries of a beast rather than of the dying Cain. Lamech repeats that he cannot see who the victim is (1593ff), and then attempts to ascertain who it is by touch

French dramatic versions of the Lamech story, like the Cornish one, are much more detailed than their English counterparts. The playwright of *Le Mistère du Viel Testament* is particularly insistent upon the link between Lamech's blindness and the sins that will damn him after his death. Lamech appears onstage sighted, at the beginning of the play, vaunting his bigamy and praising the children of his two wives, Ada and Sella ("Je prens plaisir a regarder / Les enfans que j'ay de mes femmes").³⁸⁶ They then enter and discuss his immorality, listing his sins (4515).³⁸⁷ Immediately following the list, Lamech re-enters, complaining specifically of his blindness: "Je ne sçay comme il m'en prendra, / Mais je sens affoiblir ma veue"(5466-7). The relationship between his blindness and his sins is made explicit when, shortly after the devils have taken the murdered Cain to hell and declared Lamech to be a devil, Lamech returns home, and both of his wives address him according to his disability, with Ada saying "Vous, aveugle...!" (4976).³⁸⁸

Blindness here is telling of Lamech's sin, and brings him metaphorically closer to death not only because his blindness is always referred to as proof that he will cause death (Lamech "qui tua Cayn" is his epithet throughout *Le Mistère du Viel Testament*, and explains his blindness), but also because in Christian

(1601-1605). See also 1625ff for the discussion of Lamech 'seeing' God's mark on Cain by touch. Murdoch (1993) 86-8 sees Lamech taken to hell here.

³⁸⁶ *Mistère du Viel Testament*, 4487. Subsequent line references will be given in brackets in the text.

³⁸⁷ *Mistère du Viel Testament*, 4515. Reiss (1972), 44 thinks that this is the only appearance of Lamech in medieval French drama, but while he is notable here, he also appears in the related *Mystère de la Passion* as Wheatley (2010) points out.

³⁸⁸. See also the case of Longinus' appearances in medieval drama. Here again, the link between blindness, death and sin is strengthened by French dramatic texts in particular, who give Longinus an agency that he does not have in the Bible, in his attack on the body of Christ, and make him Jewish, again creating a link between blindness and the importance of sin after death. Sight and conversion, blindness and damnation are linked again here when Longinus is converted by the blood of Christ. See Wheatley (2010) 85ff on these.

drama his sin (and visual proof of it in his blindness) will result in damnation after death. The punishment by blindness trope of ancient drama is transformed into the link between spiritual blindness and physical blindness in the Bible, and results in a persistent interest in the damnation after death of those who are blind in medieval drama.

Sin and the abuse of Christian charity in non-Biblical blindness

The thirteenth-century French farce from Tournai, *Le Garçon et L'Aveugle* begins with the same image as Seneca's *Oedipus*: a blind man speaks alone on the stage, lamenting his lack of a sighted guide – a necessity for his reintegration into everyday life: "que je n'ai au mains un garchon / qui me remenast au maison".³⁸⁹ Although Seneca's *Oedipus* does not leave the stage to die – as Sophocles' *Oedipus* does in the *Oedipus at Colonus* - he does leave the stage accompanied by four guides who represent different types of death:

violenta Fata et horridus Morbi tremor,
Maciesque et atra Pestis et rabidus Dolor,
mecum ite, mecum, ducibus his uti libet.³⁹⁰

Barasch compares *Oedipus'* daughters and *Tiresias'* boy in Sophocles' play with the guides of medieval drama and art, and finds in the Middle Ages a break with the tradition:

³⁸⁹ *Le Garçon et L'Aveugle*, 11-12: "that I don't even have a boy to hand / who could take me home". Subsequent references to line numbers will be given in brackets in the text. Symes (2015) has identified scribal emendations covering the period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, evidence of the enduring popularity of this play. Cf. *Sen.Oed.1ff.*

³⁹⁰ *Sen.Oed.1060-1062*: "Violent fates and the trembling shudder of Disease, / Atrophy and black Plague and furious Pain, / Come with me, come with me: I am delighted to have guides like these". Cf. *S.OT.1520ff* where *Oedipus'* daughters lead the blinded king from the stage, and *S.OC.1542-3* where *Oedipus* declares that he will be his own guide at the moment of his death.

... the guide is now profoundly different from what he was in antiquity: he has a distinct appearance, a physical and moral character of his own.³⁹¹

Though altered, the figure of the guide remains central to the characterisation of blind characters in drama of the Middle Ages, allowing the blind characters to partake in a specific kind of sin. Whereas in Biblical drama blindness is the punishment for a sin specifically proscribed by the Bible (and the verb used of the Blind Beggar's sexual practices in *Le Garçon et L'Aveugle* is "porqueler", suggesting a connection with the blinding of the Sodomites, for example), in non-Biblical plays blindness is more commonly proof of a specifically theatrical sin: pretending to be blind.³⁹² The deliberate abuse of Christian charity in these false mendicant figures marks them out as particularly sinful figures, a characterisation confirmed by their blindness.³⁹³

The sense that blindness could both enable and signal the abuse of Christian charity for financial gain is apparent to the blind character in *Le Garçon et L'Aveugle*:

tu prierais, je canterai
s'arons assés argent et pain (31-2).³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ Barasch (2001), 105.

³⁹² Though blind characters continued in both dramatic and non-dramatic texts, to be connected with generalized sin / immoral behavior. See Wheatley (2010), 92 and Mills (2015). See also Wheatley (2010), 2 on entertainments requiring the performance of blindness, depicted also in a manuscript image from Flanders, MS Bodley 264. In the drama of the Low Countries, characters such as Blijnde Begeerte and Ziende Blinde make the link between blindness, deception and sin, as Steenbrugge (2006) points out, though she contrasts the relative effusion of "allegorically blind characters", whose blindness is merely a description of their sinfulness, with the "few genuinely blind characters".

³⁹³ Cf. Wheatley's (2010), 10 comments on the skepticism of medieval Christians towards disability. For the way that Christian charity structured the medieval understanding of disability see Stiker (1982), 65ff. On the growing real-life suspicion that people suffering from blindness were pretending to be blind for financial gain, see Jütte (1994).

³⁹⁴ "you pray and I will sing / we will have enough money and bread".

Equally aware of the economic advantage that his disability confers on him is the blind Jolestru in the comic episode of *Le mystère de la vie et hystoire de Monseigneur saint Martin*, who, with the lame Haustebet, runs away from the procession which will heal them of their disabilities because

nous amassons trop plus d'argent
sans peines et sans travailler.³⁹⁵

Although English medieval literature is not often engaged with the blind false mendicant figure until much later (*The Blind Beggar of Bednall Green*, for example, in the seventeenth century), blind beggars, in both English and French literature, are often depicted in situations from which their blindness would exclude them in life. In both English and French versions of this figure we see an anxiety about whether or not their blindness is real. In Courtebarbe's *Les Trois Aveugles de Compiègne*, for example, the characters experience no difficulty with independent long distance travel despite their blindness. However, when a clerk meets them on their journey, he is suspicious of their blindness and wonders how they are able to travel:

Lors se pensa qu'aucuns en voie,
Comment alaissent il lor voie?
Puis dist: "El cors me fere goute
Se je ne sai s'il voient goute!"³⁹⁶

His anxiety about whether their blindness is real or not recalls the famous passage in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in which Oedipus announces his suspicions of

³⁹⁵ *Le mystère de la vie et hystoire de monseigneur saint Martin*, p.iii.: "we're already earning plenty of money / without effort and without working". See Wheatley (2010) who cites these examples and discusses this trope.

³⁹⁶ *Les Trois Aveugles de Compiègne*, 29-32 ed. Ménard (1979), 109ff: "He thinks: if neither of them can see / how do they find their way? Then he says: "May my heart be struck with gout / if I don't find out whether they see 'owt!".

Tiresias. The accusation that Tiresias is a false prophet (most clearly expressed in the next lines: ... τὴν τέχνην δ' ἔφου τυφλός / ἐπεὶ φέρ' εἶπέ, ποῦ σὺ μάντις εἶ σαφής;³⁹⁷) is linked to his blindness both actual and metaphorical. Oedipus' political motives are clear (particularly in the lines concerning his anxieties about Creon) but when he turns to the seer's supposed falseness, it is blindness that Oedipus invokes. Similarly, the chorus of Euripides' *Cyclops* fail to believe the Cyclops when he pronounces himself blind, thinking that this is the result of a drunken prank, because he names his attacker 'No one'.³⁹⁸ Just as Oedipus takes Tiresias' blindness to be a clue to his falseness, so the chorus of *Cyclops* immediately assume that the Cyclops' blindness must be false. Similarly in *Les Trois Aveugles de Compiègne*, the clerk is immediately skeptical of the three men's apparent blindness, and Jeannot learns the hard way in *Le Garçon et L'Aveugle* when he realises that he ought to have understood the blind man's disability as a sign that he was in fact wealthy.

The short farce known as *Un Aveugle et son Varlet et une Tripière* features a blind man who also claims to be deaf.³⁹⁹ When we first see the blind man, he is receiving bottles of wine from his guide with great joy, and this places him within the tradition of the drunken / immoral blind beggar figure. After complaining that they do not have enough money, the pair visit the tripe-seller in order to beg for food. It is the blind man's pretended deafness that the guide assumes will give the pair away, and he tells the blind man that the tripe seller

³⁹⁷ S.O.T.389-390

³⁹⁸ E.Cyc.673.

³⁹⁹ On this play, see de Julleville (1968), 278, Wheatley (2010), 125, who discusses it briefly in the context of other farces featuring blind characters, e.g. the *Farce de Goguelu*, and Barasch (2001), 97 – in the latter two, the suspicion of his blindness is commented on.

will not give them any food if he speaks – presumably because she will know that he is not deaf:

Mais il est eschet en ce cas cy,
Maistre que vous parlez.⁴⁰⁰

When the pair meet the tripe-seller, however, it is not his deafness that she disbelieves (even though the audience have just heard that he is only pretending to be deaf), but his blindness. The guide explains that the man can neither hear nor see, and the tripe-seller responds that she knows that he can see well enough but does not question his deafness:

Il m'est avis sans nulle doubtte,
Que ce bon homme icy voit bien (67-8).⁴⁰¹

It is blindness, specifically, that is charged with falseness, even when other attributes are more obviously feigned.

Blindness can also render the blind character especially vulnerable to be taken in by the theatrical illusion. In Coornhert's *De Blinde van Jericho* (c. 1582), Bartimeus de Blinde is taken advantage of by the various false guides of the play, who all have allegorical names like the guides at the end of Seneca's *Oedipus: Een Pharizeus Verdienste, Justitia Imputativa, Toereeckentlijcke Rechtvaerdicheyt and Verkeert Oordeel*. His daughter, the equally allegorical *Observatio Sui*, excuses her father's inability to see through their deception on grounds of his

⁴⁰⁰*Un Aveugle et son Varlet et une Tripière*, 48-9: But he will know, in that case / Sir, if you speak". Subsequent references to line numbers are given in brackets in the text.

⁴⁰¹"It is my opinion, without any doubt / That this trickster here sees well". See Wheatley (2010), 125-6, who explains that the blind man's behaviour here is intended "to raise suspicions about whether he is impaired and to exemplify the stereotype of drunkenness associated with the disability" and provide an excuse for the tripe-seller and the guide to engage in lewd conversation.

blindness, but turns her admonition of him into anti-theatrical polemic against mimesis:

Bedrogen te worden van een onbekende,
Machmen verschonen in donversochte blende;
Maer wie can verschonen het moetwillige hooft,
Dat dickmael den bekenden bedrieger gelooft? ⁴⁰²

She cannot, however, excuse those who commit the sin of willing belief in 'bedriegers', such as is the case with spectators at the theatre.

The connection between blindness, sin and death persists in *De Blinde van Jericho*, with Bartimeus' conversion and restoration to sightedness narrated later in the play by Sermo Propheticus as if it were the offstage murder of these false guides by Penitentie (879ff). Throughout the play blindness is linked with darkness and concern for the 'dark soul' of the blind man after death ("zijn duystere ziel siet niet", 907-908), but here it is not the blind character who partakes in the deception that amounts to a sinful abuse of Christian charity, but the guides who abuse the blind character.⁴⁰³ Spectators are consistently made aware that the blind characters may be feigning their blindness in these non-Biblical plays, not only because of a wide-spread medieval suspicion of the blind in real life, but because the abuse of Christian charity (either by those who

⁴⁰² *De Blinde van Jericho*, 159-163: "To be deceived by someone you don't know / Can sometimes be excused in an inexperienced blind man; / But who can excuse the strong-willed head / That often believes a known deceiver?". Subsequent references to line numbers are given in brackets in the text. On this play see Steenbrugge (2006), who notes also a connection between blindness and knowledge in this play and in Everart's *Tspel van Maria ghecompareirt by de Claerheyt*. The verb 'bedriegen' is of religious significance here: the Dutch Lutheran Bible of 1648 introduces the term "bedriegen" to the summary of the Ten Commandments in *Mark 10:19*, expanding on the "je zult niemand te kort doen" of the Statenvertaling. On these see Joby (2015), 116, and van Miert et al (2017).

⁴⁰³ See also Wheatley's (2010) 118ff discussion of the equally abusive guide Saudret in *Le Mystère de la Resurrection*, where the guide has a specifically Biblical textual history: he has been the guide to the blind man who is cured in *John 9*. See Servet (1993).

pretend to be blind or by those who abuse the blind) is a specific kind of sin that endangers the sinner's life after death. Given the metaphorical relationship between blindness and death in each of these plays, it is unsurprising that damnation after death is of particular concern in representations of these medieval blind characters.

Performing ancient blindness and the medieval iconography of death

Jeannot, Justitia Imputiva and the other guides of medieval drama are props in the theatrical representation of blindness. In both its theatres and its art, the Middle Ages were uniquely interested in the props that connect blindness, viewing and death, and this interest stands at the intersection of two related traditions of blindness.⁴⁰⁴ On the one hand this interest draws on the assumption in ancient drama that blindness was a punishment for a previous transgression, and the resulting connection between blindness and death as equivalent punishments. On the other hand, it is a result of the additional Biblical developments of these associations, linking blindness with spiritual blindness, disbelief, abuse of Christian charity and ensuing damnation in the after life.

Another prop of blindness in both art and theatre in the Middle Ages is the blindfold, making visible – like the guide – the blind character's disability. Like blindness in the Bible, the connotations of the blindfold in art are two-fold: the blindfold both prevents the character from seeing the spiritual light of

⁴⁰⁴ That the medieval period saw a relationship between performance and death is apparent from the lively interest in the danse macabre, see O'Connor (1942), Gertsman (2006) and (2010); and on death experienced visually see Huizinga (1919), on 'het beeld van den dood'. On the medieval iconography of death more generally see Binski (1996) and DuBruck and Gusick (1999).

redemption and proves that s/he will not be saved after death.⁴⁰⁵ Panofsky ascribes the invention of the blindfold (in depictions of Cupid in art particularly) to the Middle Ages, noting a clear interest in medieval art in the blindfold for the representation of such allegorical figures as Cupid, the Synagogue, Wealth and Death.⁴⁰⁶ The recurrent presentation of Death as blinded in medieval art follows the logic of medieval drama: Death is blindfolded because those who are blinded in drama are metaphorically closer to death, through both their exile from sunlight and their assumed sin.⁴⁰⁷

That the blindfold is considered to be a prop of blindness in drama as well as in art is apparent from Shakespeare's medieval character John of Gaunt's wish for blindness-in-death after the exile of his son in *Richard II*:

My oil-dried lamp and time-bewasted light
Shall be extinct with age and endless night;
My inch of taper will be burnt and done,
And blindfold Death not let me see my son.⁴⁰⁸

Even in plays like *Richard II* that do not feature a physically blind character, the link between blindness, sin and death persists. In the morality play *Everyman*, Death is not a blindfolded bringer of doom and destruction as he is in medieval

⁴⁰⁵See 2 *Corinthians* 3:13-14 on Moses' veil causing blindness in the minds of the children of Israel. See Barasch (2001), 84 on blindfolded images of the Synagogue in art. That blindness could incite a general suspicion about a blind character's morals in ancient drama is apparent in Oedipus' suspicions of Tiresias, for example, *S.O.T.*300f.

⁴⁰⁶ Panofsky (1939), 95ff. See especially 122-23 for a comparison of blind Cupid and Death representations in medieval art and architecture.

⁴⁰⁷ Like the link between blindness and death in ancient drama, the trope that death is blindfolded in medieval art also owes its origins to the relationship between death and night and / or absence of sunlight (on *caeca nox* and her relationship to the blind Synagogue and blind Death in art see Panofsky (1939), 110-111). More recently on medieval art and death see Kinch (2013).

⁴⁰⁸ *Richard II*, 1.2.221-4, see Forker (2002). Here the blindness trope is doubled: John of Gaunt wishes for death, imagined as a blind figure, to blind him. Only allegorical figures concerned with the afterlife wear blindfolds in Shakespeare – this is the only use of the word 'blindfold' with the exception of the "blindfold Fury" in *Venus and Adonis* 554.

art, but rather the virtuous messenger of God, whose sightedness is crucial to his pursuit of Everyman: “yonder I se Everyman walkynge”.⁴⁰⁹ In spite of this, he characterises his task as if it were an act of blinding:

Lorde, I wyll in the worlde go renne over all,
And cruelly out-serche bothe grete and small.
Every man wyll I beset that lyveth beastly
Out of Goddes lawes, and dredeth not foly.
He that loveth rychesse I wyll stryke with my darte,
His syght to blynde, and fro Heven to departe,
Excepte that almes be his good frende,
In Hell for to dwell, worlde without ende (72-9).

Not only is Everyman's death a kind of blinding, but Death remains unseen for most of the play (“now out of syght I wyll me hy”, 180).

Everyman, similarly, when he is told that Death has been sent for him, considers the fact that he is not spiritually prepared for death to be a problem of vision: “This blynde mater troubleth my wytte” (102). Although the audience do not learn the specific sin that causes Everyman to fear that he will be damned after his premature death (“For all unredy is my boke of rekenynge”, 134), a catalogue of his sins is alluded to throughout the play, all of which are sins punishable by blinding in either classical or biblical sources.⁴¹⁰ Goodes makes this connection explicit, explaining to Everyman that “Thy rekenynge I have made blotted and blynde” (419).

Although Everyman does not lose his physical sight, his death at the end of the play is imagined to be a kind of metaphorical blindness, inverting the trope

⁴⁰⁹ *Everyman*, 80. Subsequent references to line numbers in this play will be given in brackets in the text. Cf. however Goldhamer (1973) who reads the differences rather than similarities between *Everyman* and the *ars moriendi*.

⁴¹⁰ He refers to God using the Hebrew term ‘Adonay’ at 245, Felawshyp comments that he would join Everyman in drunkenness, lust and murder (272-282), Goodes comments that Everyman’s love of material things is “to thy dampnacyon” (429). Paulson (2007) reads the play as a dramatisation of the process of penance before the community.

of figuring blindness as a metaphorical death in Greek tragedy. Just like the blinded Oedipus at the end of the *Oedipus at Colonus*, Everyman devotes much of his play to the question of who will remain to guide him to his death, and attempts to choose an appropriate spectator for his death.⁴¹¹ The friends who visit him onstage are continuously figured as guides to Everyman in his exile. Good Dedes asks Beaute and Strength: “That ye wolde with Everyman go, / And helpe hym in his pylgrymage” (672-1), and Strength answers “We wyll brynge hym all thyder” (675).⁴¹² Although Everyman is technically sighted, he clarifies that it is because of their vision that he requires these guides, calling them as they are leaving the stage to “Loke in my grave ones pyteously!” (838). Like Oedipus at the end of the *Oedipus at Colonus*, Everyman inverts the pattern of the blind when, led by a guide at the moment of his death, he announces that he will now lead his guides:

And now, frendes, let us go with-out longer respyte;
 I thanke God that ye have taryed so longe.
 Now set eche of you on this Rodde your honed,
 And shortely folowe me.
 I go before there I wolde be. God be our gyde! (776-80)

Everyman’s spiritual blindness becomes a kind of second sight at the moment of his death. Although he struggles to read the book of his good deeds (called “blynde reknyng”, 508) earlier in the play (“For one letter here I can-not se”, 507), he develops at the moment of his death a new kind of insight - the ability to distinguish between true and false friends: “Now may I true frendes se”

⁴¹¹ For discussion of these passages in the *S.O.C.* see Chapter 1, above. While Oedipus chooses Theseus, who does not eventually witness his death, Everyman descends into his grave with only Good Dedes as his companion.

⁴¹² For blindness as a kind of exile see Chapter One and Chapter Four. Everyman’s exit from the stage is also, he reminds us, like the blind Cyclops’, an exit into the cave: “For in to this cave muse I crepe” (792).

(855). For the audience, the opposite is true.⁴¹³ Everyman presumes them to be capable both of hearing and of seeing the moral of the play through the stage action:

Take example, all ye that this do here or se,
How they that I love[d] best do forsake me
Excepte my Good Dedes, that bydeth truly (867-9).⁴¹⁴

However, after he has left the stage to descend into his grave, the Doctor who has the final word and sets out the moral of the play assumes their interaction with the onstage action to be non-visual: “This morall men may have in mynde. / Ye herers, take it of worth, ole and yonge” (902-3). As Everyman develops the kind of second sight usually acquired through blindness in Greek tragedy, the spectators begin to suffer from a kind of blindness.⁴¹⁵

That the blind figures of medieval theatre sit at the centre of ancient dramatic, Biblical and iconographic traditions of representing death-as-blindness is apparent from the title page of the copy of *Everyman* held at the British Library (printed c.1530). Although Death here is not blindfolded, as he is throughout medieval art, he fixes his gaze firmly on the heavens, refusing to return Everyman’s stare and thus denying the possibility that his vision might be reciprocal with Everyman’s (see figure 1, and compare also figure 2 where the other characters of the play clearly do enjoy reciprocal vision).⁴¹⁶ Although both

⁴¹³ For the debate about whether *Everyman* was ever staged, see Mills (1995), 127-49.

⁴¹⁴ See Young (2015) on vision and theatrical spectacle in *The Castle of Perseverance*. Cf. Camille (1989) 219 who qualifies the medieval period as one of “image explosion”. For blindness as an interruption of the reciprocal viewing expected in the theatre in later drama, see Chapter 6.

⁴¹⁵ Busse and Kern-Stähler (2016) argue (using linguistic analysis) that blindness, like death, is perceived as a process rather than a single event in the Middle Ages. Cf. Macintosh (1994) on death as a process in Greek and Irish tragedy.

⁴¹⁶ Death is not present to view Everyman’s death in either Peter van Diest’s *Elkerlijc*, the English *Everyman* or Christianus Ischyrius’ Latin version. In *Homulus*, Death departs

characters are physically sighted, it is specifically reciprocal vision that Death threatens here, excluding himself from precisely the kind of vision that is required by the theatre.

It is not only Everyman whose death excludes him from the reciprocal gaze. Death in the Middle Ages was widely regarded as a moment that severed reciprocal vision – as it was understood to do also in the fifth-century theatre – especially among monastic orders and in religious life more generally.⁴¹⁷ The Fourth rule of St Benedict reminded monks to *mortem cotidie ante oculos suspectam habere*, and the monastic practice of being present at the moment of deaths of others in the fraternity gave rise to the ‘signs of death’ poems, with the most commonly remarked sign becoming the title of one of the poems: *Whanne Mine Eyhnen Misten*.⁴¹⁸

That this figuring of death as the end of the reciprocal vision was related to representations of death in the theatre, was apparent to Augustine. In his *Confessions*, Augustine reprimands those who separate their fear at witnessing death in real life from their desire to witness death in the theatre in order to

at the end of Act I as night falls. In Macropedius’ later version *Hecastus*, however, Death stabs Hecastus in V.10. On these plays see Best (1981), and on the controversial dating of *Everyman* and *Elkerlijc* see Mierlo (1948) and Zandvoort (1941) though the conversation about nature of the relationship between the two plays has been ongoing at least since Kalff (1890), who first saw *Everyman* as a translation of *Elkerlijc*. More recently, see Davidson, Walsh and Broos (2007).

⁴¹⁷ See Kinch (2013), 6ff. On the increasing importance of vision in religious devotion in the late medieval period see Crosby (1997) 132-2, who calls the shift from ear to eye in the late medieval period the “striking of a match”, though see also Hamburger (1998) and Kamerick (2002). On images and medieval Christianity more generally see Aston (1984), 135-92. For the frequent staging of death in the plays of the medieval period see Enders (2002).

⁴¹⁸ On the Fourth rule of St Benedict see Hasquenoph (1991) and Sipe (1974). Cf. also Celle’s *depinge mortem ante oculos tuos, quam horrenda facies*, cited in Woolf (1968) 74, for the role of art in these visual interactions with death. On the real life practice of watching deaths in monasteries see Robbins (1970) and on the ‘signs of death’ poems see Woolf (1968), 78-80 and Williams (1976).

satisfy their curiosity and *concupiscentia oculorum*.⁴¹⁹ To the imaginary teacher in Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*, the reminder that death, when it comes, will be a curtailing of vision, is equally apparent. The allegorized *Sapientia* encourages her student (*Discipulus*) to *vide* not only the image of a dying man but the *similitudinem hominis morientis* inside himself, making the link between witnessing death and theatricality.⁴²⁰

Wheatley coins the 'religious model' of disability as a way to conceptualise the medieval attitude to blindness.⁴²¹ He sees the Church taking on the role of the medical establishment in the medical model of disability (promoting the sense that impairment is a deficiency that must be medically treated), and contrasts this with the perception of blindness in the ancient world: "the Greco-Roman world did not operate under any kind of unified discursive system resembling orthodox Christian teaching".⁴²² As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, it is often precisely this 'orthodox Christian teaching' that is used to sever the connection between ancient and medieval drama. Here, Wheatley too points to the role of Christianity in causing a break between ancient and modern understandings of blindness. However, as we have seen, the influence of the Bible on medieval drama does not eclipse classical influence.

⁴¹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions* 10.35.54-5. Elsewhere in Book 10, Augustine is interested in the sounds of the theatre, see Kendrick and Roesner (2011), 61, but when he turns to the spectacle of death it is specifically the spectators' vision that he faults. See his antitheatrical views elsewhere at in *Confessions* 3.2, for example, where it is the falseness of theatre that is the problem.

⁴²⁰ Suso, *Horologium Sapientiae* 528.3-4, see Kinch (2013) 10 on this passage – but Kinch is more interested in examples of the *imago mortis* than the *similitudo mortis*.

⁴²¹ Wheatley (2010), 10ff. On real-life disability in the medieval world, see Stiker (1999), with the criticisms of Metzler (2006), and most recently Eyler (2016), 3, who prefers the "cultural model" to the "religious model". See also on these models Turner and Pearman (2010), Crawford and Lee (2014) and Krötzl, Mustakallio and Kuuliala (2015).

⁴²² Wheatley (2010), 13. He opposes his 'religious' model to the ambiguity that both Garland (1995) and Rose (2003) claim for the blind in the ancient world.

Instead, by highlighting the link between blindness and death, the Bible and medieval religious practice transmit to medieval drama the ancient idea that blindness in the theatre is a kind of metaphorical death. This ancient trope becomes firmly entrenched in the medieval imagination to the extent that by the time of *Everyman*, death in the theatre is presented as a denial of reciprocal vision.

Here begynneth a treatyse how the
hye fader of heuen sendeth de the
to comon every creature to
come and gyue a counte
of theyr lyues in this
worlde and is in ma-
ner of a mozell
playe.



Figure 1.

Title page of *Everyman* (published London c.1530 by John Scott and held at the British Library): on the left side of the image, Everyman looks towards Death; on the right side, Death looks upwards and does not meet Everyman's gaze.



Figure 2.

An illustration from *Everyman*, (published London c.1530 by John Scott, and held at the British Library): characters in the play are looking directly at each other.

Chapter Three:

Blindness and Spectacle

Abraham Bosse's 1633 etching *Les Farceurs de l'Hôtel de Bourgogne* makes explicit what is implicit in the appearance of blind characters on the early modern stage, namely the connection between failing sight and theatrical spectacle (see figure 3). A comic actor, Hugues Guéru, in disguise at the centre of an inset play, holds out his glasses. The inset play is the object of three different groups of spectators: the onstage spectators within the play, as well as, we infer, the offstage spectators to the scene in the Hôtel de Bourgogne and those looking at the etching itself.⁴²³ Although the actor is not blind (though his removal of his spectacles has required his companion to take a hands-on approach to guiding him), the positioning of his spectacles centre stage here is significant. The blind characters of the early modern theatre do not only remind audiences of the dangers of theatrical viewing; they also serve as the 'ideal' spectators of the pre-naturalistic stage.⁴²⁴

That a blind character can best model spectatorship in the early modern playhouse might seem paradoxical to modern theatregoers, but in the early

⁴²³ Bosse's etching regularly serves as an introduction to discussions of metatheatricality, having featured not long after its completion on the title page of Scarron's 1651 *Roman Comique* and adorned the front cover of Fischer (2007); on the etching and the theatre see Howarth (1997) 197-8.

⁴²⁴ It is Schlegel (1846), 70 who coins the term 'ideal spectators', describing the chorus of tragedy, though see Goldhill (2013), 40-1 on the misunderstanding of the term. See also Goldhill (2012), 166-201. Battezzato (2005), 154 offers a fusion of Schlegel and Schiller's definitions of the "ideal spectator" with modern theories of the reader, e.g. the "model" reader in Eco (1979), 7 on which see Rabinowitz (1995) and Carlson (1993), 520. It is to this influential misinterpretation of Schlegel's apophthegm to mean a chorus that models a possible interaction with the performance that I refer here, using Schlegel's / Battezzato's term 'ideal spectator'.

modern theatre the idea that those who watch a spectacle require spectacles is a commonplace. For George Hakewill, the blind author of *The Vanitie of the Eie* (1608), there is not just a metaphorical relationship between spectating and the failure of vision, but an actual one. In a short poem he summarizes Walter Baley's advice on the preservation of eyesight, listing things that ought to be avoided in order to preserve vision:

Wine, women, bathes, by art or nature wrought,
Onions, garlike, mustard seed, fire and light
Smoake, bruises dust peper to powder broguth,
Beanes, lentiles, straines, winde, teares and Phoebus bright,
An all sharpe things our eie sight do molest,
Yet watching hurts them more than al the rest.⁴²⁵

The link between theatrical spectacle and failing eyesight had been established at least as early as 1326, when Bishop Walter de Stapledon's glasses are listed as *unum spectaculum cum duplici oculo, precii ijs* ("spectacles with two lenses, price: two shillings").⁴²⁶ Here, the inventory uses the classical Latin *spectaculum* (used elsewhere of theatrical spectacle and sight in the theatre) to refer to the tool required to correct his failing eyesight.⁴²⁷ In the Middle Ages, the term *spectaculum* takes over from more obvious Medieval Latin terms for glasses (the Papal Latin *ocularia* and the Latin for a convex lens *conspicilia*, for example),

⁴²⁵ Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eie*, 97. Baley does not include the poem in his *A Brief Treatise Touching the Preservation of the Eiesight*, though he does advise the reader throughout to moderate consumption of the items that feature in Hakewill's list. See Clark (2007), 25ff and Nunn (2005).

⁴²⁶ Hingeston (1892), 565. See Ilardi (2007), 70-71.

⁴²⁷ For *spectaculum* see Cic.*Phil.*1.36 (performance), Vit.5.6.2, Ov.*Met.*10.668 (places occupied by spectators in the theatre), Liv.23.47, Petr.27.2 (act of looking); see Ilardi (2007), 70 and North (2008), 360; the word is widely used for lenses within optical theory in the Middle Ages (see for example twelfth-century Latin translations of the *Kitab al Manāzir*).

replacing them with a word drawn instead from the vocabulary of theatrical seeing.⁴²⁸

Spectacles were a fashionable prop towards the end of the sixteenth century, with their growing numbers in real life attested by the formation of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers in 1629.⁴²⁹ This increasing interest in glasses and devices for improving vision is also apparent in drama: Benedick does not yet have them at the end of the 1590s in *Much Ado About Nothing*, but within less than a decade it seems obvious to Lear that Gloucester will require them.⁴³⁰

By the end of the 16th century, theatregoers would have been familiar with the link between blindness and the theatre. Four plays about Oedipus and his family are recorded between 1581 and 1600, and these Oedipal plays complement a lively interest in blindness onstage as we will see.⁴³¹ Alongside a new proliferation of blind characters onstage is a recurring interest in disguise: the anonymous 1599 *Look About You* contains more acts of disguise than any other play of the period, and the 1604 *When You See Me You Know Me* makes an explicit link between misguided or wrongful seeing and theatrical disguise.⁴³² Blind characters become an image not only of the denial of reciprocal vision in the theatre; their metatheatrical performance of blindness is also testimony to

⁴²⁸ See Ilardi (2007), 70. See Rhodes (1982) on vocabulary relating to instruments of sight between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

⁴²⁹ On the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers see Ilardi (2007), 134.

⁴³⁰ *King Lear*, 4.6.166; *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1.1.170.

⁴³¹ The number of plays featuring blind characters in this period is made even larger by those plays of which the titles are known but which are no longer extant, e.g. *The Blind Knight* and *The Blind Eats Many a Fly*. On these see Wiggins (2012).

⁴³² On the popularity of disguise plays in this period, see Hyland (2011) 6. Gurr (2009) argues for the actor Edward Alleyn's pivotal role in the Admiral's Men's interest in disguise until 1597. See also Freeburg (1915), 123 for an early attempt to put this interest in disguise down to the particular talents of one of the Admiral's Men.

the reliance of theatrical spectating on information provided by other senses and, most importantly, by the imagination.

This chapter examines the ways in which blind characters provide an image of spectatorship in the non-naturalistic theatre of this period. We have already seen how in the medieval period concerns about the potential falseness of disability generally, and of blind characters in particular, were tied to a real-life economics of Christian alms-giving. In the early modern theatre these concerns about false portrayals of blindness are transformed into a metatheatrical talent for disguise. The special relationship between blind characters and theatrical disguise is explored in two ways in early modern drama. Blind characters are themselves masters of disguise, and repeatedly remind the spectators that their blindness is a performance; and they are also able to see *through* the spectacle in front of them. Blind characters thus become 'ideal spectator' figures for the actual spectators of the plays under discussion here, since the spectators' vision is consistently either enhanced or undermined by these early modern performances of blindness.

"I stumbled when I saw": Performing blindness

A profound shift in the religious weight given to Christian charity after the Reformation affected real-life attitudes to blindness in early modern Europe. In particular, the Reformation put an end to the understanding that salvation could be procured by prayers made by the grateful living for the virtuous dead.⁴³³ People living in poverty or with disabilities, who had previously partaken in an economy of exchange that, though unequal, was mutually beneficial, became

⁴³³ See Schen (2002) on this pre-Reformation structure of salvation.

after the Reformation beneficiaries of a model of charitable alms-giving that was no longer reciprocal.⁴³⁴ Out of this one-sidedness grew a ready skepticism towards disability in general, with a concomittant increase in literary interest in figures who pretended to have a disability for financial gain.⁴³⁵

It is this new attitude to disability that lies behind the portrayal of Simon Simpcox in *King Henry VI* part 2. The Simon Simpcox interlude takes up a mere 100 lines in the life story of King Henry VI, and is more frequently regarded as key to studies of Shakespeare's sources in the history plays.⁴³⁶ However, it has recently been the subject of a disability studies-led reading by Row-Heyveld, who considers the miracle restoration of sight in Act 2, Scene 1 to be an examination of changing attitudes to disability during the Reformation. According to Row-Heyveld, this episode:

... engages and restages some of *2 Henry VI's* central themes, specifically how disability serves as a pointedly emasculating signal of personal and political weakness in Shakespeare's rewriting of history.⁴³⁷

Although Row-Heyveld rightly points to the Reformation's impact on characters' attitudes to Simon Simpcox, she does not connect this to the period's renewed sense of the performativity of disability.

The episode begins with the narration of a miracle. A townsman enters, announcing that

⁴³⁴ The shift is also marked in disability studies, see for example Row-Heyveld (2009).

⁴³⁵ Cf. Woodbridge (2001), 3ff on the faking of disability and vagrancy in early modern England, and Hobgood and Wood (2013) more generally on the changing attitudes towards early modern disability.

⁴³⁶ Although the play itself was probably written 1590-91, the episode is much older, featuring in Thomas More's 1529 *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, and probably before. Row-Heyveld (2009) examines some of these versions.

⁴³⁷ Row-Heyveld (2009).

Forsooth, a blind man at Saint Alban's shrine
Within this half-hour hath received his sight –
A man that ne'er saw in his life before.⁴³⁸

The King takes the miracle to heart immediately, and praises God for giving "light in the darkness".⁴³⁹ The sudden restoration of sight to Simon Simpcox reminds the King of the complex relationship between sin and blindness in the Bible (echoing John 9:41).⁴⁴⁰ He exclaims:

Great is his comfort in this earthy vale
Although by sight his sin be multiplied.⁴⁴¹

Gloucester, on the other hand, is skeptical of Simpcox's blindness and begins to test him, discovering that despite claiming to have been blind from birth, Simpcox climbed a damson tree in his youth and is able to name the colours of the other characters' clothes.⁴⁴² Gloucester reaches his conclusion:

Then, Simon, sit there the lying'st knave
In Christendom.⁴⁴³

Gloucester then takes it upon himself to stage another false miracle, to parallel the one that took place offstage – the 'healing' of Simpcox's lameness. Gloucester directs the performance, calling for a beadle to enter with a whip, and making provisions for the props and the staged action:

Now fetch me a stool hither by and by.
Now sirrah, if you mean to save yourself from whipping,
Leap me over this stool and run away.⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁸ *2 Henry VI* 2.1.62-4

⁴³⁹ *2 Henry VI* 2.1.66

⁴⁴⁰ Noble (1935), 122; Cf. Carroll (1996), 127-157 who reads Simpcox as a reflection of Henry's metaphorical blindness and impotence.

⁴⁴¹ *2 Henry VI* 2.1.69-70.

⁴⁴² *2 Henry VI*, 2.1.93, 106. See Tilley (1950), 408 M80 on the proverbial "The blind man can judge no colours", attributed in one example (falsely) to Aristotle.

⁴⁴³ *2 Henry VI*, 2.1.121-2. Note again the emphasis on his feigned blindness as an abuse of Christian charity.

Simpcox plays his lameness convincingly initially (“Alas, master, I am not able to stand alone”) but as soon as the beadle hits him with the whip he leaps over the stool and runs offstage followed by his wife and other onlookers.⁴⁴⁵ Those who remain on the stage react to the dramatising of this false miracle as if they had witnessed a play, with the Queen announcing, “It made me laugh to see the villain run”, and the King reneging on his earlier excessive piety: “O God, seest thou this, and bearest so long?”.⁴⁴⁶ The onstage spectators of this staged anti-miracle echo Gloucester’s reaction to Simpcox’s restoration of eyesight: they acknowledge the alleged miracle to have been an act of theatre. Gloucester, unlike the other onstage characters, is always aware that the offstage miracle was false – and it is not Simpcox’s restoration to sightedness that is in question, but his initial blindness.

Gloucester's ability to see through Simpcox's disguise relies on the codification of blindness into a series of performable attributes. First, the blinded man must move in a limited way (Gloucester is surprised that he was able to climb a tree); he must have a visible impairment in his eyes (“Let me see thine eyes”); and he must not possess knowledge derived through vision (“sight may distinguish of colours, but suddenly / To nominate them all, it is impossible”).⁴⁴⁷ This attention to the physical attributes of blindness, and to the type of movement it demands in particular, often preoccupies those who are newly blinded in early modern drama, drawing attention to the fact that they are

⁴⁴⁴ *2 Henry VI*, 2.1.136-8.

⁴⁴⁵ *2 Henry VI*, 2.1.139.

⁴⁴⁶ *2 Henry VI*, 2.1.147, 146.

⁴⁴⁷ *2 Henry VI*, 2.1.102, 125-6.

playing a theatrical role.⁴⁴⁸ These attributes of performed blindness are equally well known to another Gloucester, the blind Gloucester of *King Lear*, whose blindness becomes most obviously a performance in Act 4 Scene 5.⁴⁴⁹

Lear's Gloucester's "I stumbled when I saw" is not only an allusion to the insight often gained in blindness, but is also a literal description of the theatrical movement that is attendant on his blindness.⁴⁵⁰ This movement, he clarifies, is visually apparent: "Full oft tis seen".⁴⁵¹ After he has been exiled at the end of 3.7 ("Go thrust him out at gates, and let him smell / His way to Dover"), Gloucester's entrance is described to the audience before he returns to the stage. The text of this line is debated: "But who comes here? My father, poorly led?" is a correction of Qu's "poorlie,leed [sic.]", corrected in Qc to "parti,eyed [sic.]".⁴⁵² In both versions, Edgar comments on the play-acting of blindness, drawing attention either to the fact that his eyes are discoloured (they are bleeding as he clarifies at line 57) or that he requires a guide to move across the stage.⁴⁵³ On meeting Poor Tom, Gloucester abandons the Old Man and takes (as his new guide) Tom, who begins to direct Gloucester as if he were an actor rather than a character in the

⁴⁴⁸ See Chapter 1 for this concern in ancient blinded characters, especially Polymestor.

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. *King Lear*, 4.6.231 where Edgar adopts yet another verbal disguise.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. Mido in *Jacob and Esau*, who, when he pretends to be his blind master Isaac, is concerned with the same attributes in performance: "How shall I grope the way, or who shall leade me then?" (1.4.10). Rebecca reproaches his "counterfaite" presentation of Isaac later in the scene (1.4.56-58).

⁴⁵¹ *King Lear*, 4.1.21.

⁴⁵² On the complex issue of textual revisions to *King Lear* and the two-text controversy, see Urkowitz (1980), Tayler and Warren (1983), and Ioppolo (1991), 1-5 and 161-7 for a summary of the editorial arguments.

⁴⁵³ The guide is established as a necessary prop of blindness in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* as well as in the metaphorical guides at the end of Seneca's *Oedipus*, and in the appearances of Tiresias accompanied by Manto. See Chapter 2, above.

scene. First, he shapes Gloucester's movement ("Give me thy arm, / Poor Tom shall lead thee") and his directing continues when the pair arrive in Dover.⁴⁵⁴

Simpcox's performance of blindness in *2 Henry VI* is even more specific than Gloucester's in *King Lear*, however. During the course of his cross-examination by Gloucester, Simpcox adds further details that are familiar from earlier drama: he is not only blind but lame – a common pairing in medieval drama – and the tree from which he fell when he injured his leg was a damson tree, recalling the link between sexual excess and blindness found in ancient myth.⁴⁵⁵ One particular detail, though, seems less obvious. When asked where he was born, Simpcox answers: "At Berwick in the north, an't like your grace".⁴⁵⁶ His birthplace is not entirely a surprise: Berwick is spoken of in *3 Henry VI* and mentioned in the chronicle narratives.⁴⁵⁷ It is also, moreover, the site of another pretend blindness, since it was at Berwick Grammar School that Aristotle Knowsley's *Oedipus* was performed during the 1590s.⁴⁵⁸

Simpcox's own play-acting of blindness specifically recalls Knowsley's blind *Oedipus* of the same decade.⁴⁵⁹ Both Knowsley's *Oedipus* and Shakespeare's Simpcox are spurred to action by a mysterious voice. In

⁴⁵⁴ *King Lear*, 4.1.82-3. Cf. Coker (2014), who examines only Poor Tom's performance of disability, not Gloucester's. Other pairings of disability in *King Lear* are more often commented on, e.g. Pierce (2012): "Gloucester's blindness is the physical equivalent of Lear's madness".

⁴⁵⁵ On the damson tree symbolising testicles in this period, see Partridge (1968).

⁴⁵⁶ *2 Henry VI*, 2.1.80; the episode is narrated in chronicle histories by Foxe, Grafton and More, but Shakespeare adds Simpcox's lameness and intensifies the references to Berwick.

⁴⁵⁷ *3 Henry VI*, 2.5.

⁴⁵⁸ See Wiggins (2012), vol. 4, 185. Knowsley's *Oedipus* also imagines himself to be lame, having been strung up from a tree by his ankles in an exaggeration of Sophocles' *Oedipus'* swollen feet.

⁴⁵⁹ There are more general similarities between the two plays, such as the large cast of extras that both playwrights add to their source material, and the fact that both end with the beginning of a war.

Knowsley's *Oedipus*, as in Seneca, Jocasta cannot decide on the manner of her death:

O deadlie pain
Shall I quyte through my brest it drive
or through my throte it thrust?⁴⁶⁰

and eventually concludes that Oedipus must strike her womb:

this hatefull wombe, then wound o wretch
this this with thine owne hand.⁴⁶¹

As she utters these words, Knowsley departs from Seneca, as his Oedipus hears a ghostly voice named Echo, but not echoing the thoughts of either Oedipus or his mother, instead (recalling Clytemnestra in the *Choephoroe*) encouraging Oedipus to "forebeare".⁴⁶²

In *2 Henry VI* Simpcox recalls the mysterious offstage voice of Knowsley's play not for its Oresteian echoes, but for its (Sophoclean and Knowsleyan) Oedipal credentials. Simpcox's performance of blindness is well-rehearsed, and his characterisation specific: he does not play at being blind here; rather, he plays an actor playing the famous blind theatrical role of this early modern Oedipus. When asked how he happened to be at the shrine of St Alban, he answers that (like Knowsley's Oedipus and Sophocles' Oedipus in the *Colonus*) he had been called by name by a mysterious voice:

God knows, of pure devotion; being called
A hundred times and oft'ner, in my sleep,
By good Saint Alban, who said, 'Simon, come;

⁴⁶⁰ Knowsley, MS Eliz 197 58r, cf. *Sen.Oed.*1036ff.

⁴⁶¹ Knowsley, MS Eliz 197 58r, cf. *Sen.Oed.*1039.

⁴⁶² Knowsley, MS Eliz 197 58r; The echo later reveals itself to be the voice of Nature, who pleads her case against the impending matricide, using the argument Clytemnestra makes in the *Choephoroe*, see MS Eliz 197 58r.

Come offer at my shrine, and I will help thee.⁴⁶³

More importantly, however, both blind characters share a sense that blindness, as a performance, lacks reality. Just as Simpcox's blindness from birth is proof that the offstage miracle of St Albans has been successful, Oedipus in Knowsley's play sets up his blindness as proof that he will kill himself offstage:

thou shalt well thinke that Oedipus
dissembleth not a whyt
but what his word hath warranted
his dede hath firmlie quit.⁴⁶⁴

The fact that Knowsley's Oedipus has removed his own eyes ought, he repeats to Antigone (who is given a much larger role in Knowsley's version than in Sophocles' and is permitted to address her father for much of the final moments of the play), to serve as proof that he is true to his word and will take his own life at the end of the play. His final exit from the stage is not, however, to his death as he suggests; nor is it into the house as in Sophocles, but into exile accompanied, as in Seneca's version, by a series of allegorical guides:

with me they goe: with me both grief
plague, pockes, botch, byle and all
the ils that either now you presse
or ever after shall.⁴⁶⁵

Blindness here is key to dismantling the relationship between word and action that is crucial for early modern spectatorship. Both the St Albans miracle in *2 Henry VI* and Oedipus' death in Knowsley's *Oedipus* are shown to be false

⁴⁶³ *2Henry VI* 2.1.86-89. Cf. Knowsley MS Eliz 197 58r, S.OC.1623-5.

⁴⁶⁴ Knowsley, MS Eliz 197 71r.

⁴⁶⁵ Knowsley MS Eliz 197 78r, Sen.*Oed.*1059-1061.

promises, existing only in speech and not in action, and each is revealed to be a performance.

While Simpcox's performance of blindness is unpicked onstage by Gloucester, Oedipus' relationship with his punishments is always performative. He remarks of his death that

now that which I should longe since have bene
I will performe at last

and commands his self-blinding as if he were commanding himself to assume a dramatic role:

a fine devise
for thee A [sic.] worthie fall
invent thou monstrous beast forthwith
a fall even worthie for
thy self invent.⁴⁶⁶

The "monstrous beast" that Oedipus here imagines himself becoming when he blinds himself recalls the performed blindness of Polymestor, who crawls on all fours and is compared to a beast in the moments immediately following his blinding.⁴⁶⁷ Indeed, at the moment of the self-blinding in Knowsley's *Oedipus*, the messenger reports that the protagonist takes on this beastly role:

like to a bloudie raging feend
and monstrous beast untamde.⁴⁶⁸

The performance of Oedipus' blindness, the messenger reminds us, focuses not on his eyes but on his bloody gnashing teeth:

⁴⁶⁶ Knowsley MS Eliz 197 54r.

⁴⁶⁷ See Chapter 1, above.

⁴⁶⁸ Knowsley, MS Eliz 197 54v.

him self from ground he reares
and rooteth out his wretched eyes
& sight a sunder teares
than gnasheth he his bloudie teethe.⁴⁶⁹

Both of the punishments threatened for Knowsley's Oedipus (blinding and death) are figured as a kind of performance. Crane's claim that the word "perform" was not used in a representational sense until *The Tempest* does not seem to hold true for Knowsley's *Oedipus*. When Oedipus promises to "performe" his death, he no doubt means "carry it out".⁴⁷⁰ Oedipus' promise goes unfulfilled, however, as he is persuaded by Antigone to go into exile rather than to take his own life - a metaphorical rather than an actual death.⁴⁷¹

However, even if Oedipus' death is "performed" in the pre-*Tempest* sense, his blindness is metatheatrically labelled as a beastly performance in the post-*Tempest* sense, involving, as Aristotle Knowsley had no doubt gleaned from his namesake, a tragic fall "even worthie" of Oedipus himself. Knowsley's Oedipus anticipates here a phenomenological approach to the theatre, performing his significant aspect - a blind character - and his self-given aspect - a sighted actor playing a blind character - simultaneously, by drawing attention to the fact that his blindness is a performance.⁴⁷² Simcox plays a sighted actor, playing a blind

⁴⁶⁹ Knowsley, MS Eliz 197 55r.

⁴⁷⁰ Just as Gage's *History of Suffolk* cites money paid to Oliver Mason "for performing a dore", that is, carrying out its installation, not playing its part, Snout in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does not "perform" a wall but "present[s] a wall". In *The Tempest*, the word "perform" has both senses - to represent as well as to carry out ("Hast thou, spirit / Perform'd to point the tempest that I bade thee?" and "Bravely the figure of this harpy has thou / Perform'd my Ariel"). See Crane (2001) for these examples.

⁴⁷¹ Cf. Chapter 2, above.

⁴⁷² States (2007), 32: "in the theater we see an object in its 'embodied form' as having a double aspect, one of which is significant, the other... self given". Sofer (2003) takes a similarly double approach to props, rather than characters.

character in Berwick, whose blindness is nothing more than a performance. That the character Simpcox, like the actor, has been sighted from birth is discerned by Gloucester, who takes over the role of Saint Alban to stage another theatrical miracle in curing the pilgrim's lameness.⁴⁷³ Like the sighted Gloucester in *2 Henry VI*, the spectators too become alert to the props, movements, and disguises of the blind characters and this knowledge enhances the metatheatrical status of all blind characters, even those who, like Oedipus, who are not engaged in any explicit inset performance.

"I shall not need spectacles"⁴⁷⁴: the paradox of theatrical blind-sight

Although Gloucester in *2 Henry VI* is sighted, his ability to see through theatrical disguises like Simpcox's blindness is characteristic of another Shakespearean Gloucester of only a decade later: the blinded Gloucester of *King Lear*.⁴⁷⁵ Gloucester in *King Lear* comes tantalisingly close to seeing through Edgar's disguise. When he returns to the stage in 4.1, led by an Old Man, he joins Edgar, disguised as a beggar, who has been onstage alone from the beginning of the scene. Gloucester demands that the Old Man leave him, but the Old Man refuses, protesting that "You cannot see your way".⁴⁷⁶ Gloucester replies:

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes:

⁴⁷³ Siebers calls this anxiety 'disability drag', in Siebers (2008), 96-119, and cf. the Introduction, above, for ways in which this performance of disability is analogous to identity theory's understanding of the performance of disability in real life. Coker (2013), 123-135 examines the 'disability drag' of *Volpone* in this way. Chess (2013) 107 reads the Simpcox scene as "an opportunity to stage the scientific process through which this deception was famously uncovered".

⁴⁷⁴ *King Lear*, 1.2.34-5.

⁴⁷⁵ That it should be a sighted Gloucester who sees through Simpcox's disguise in *2 Henry VI* and a blind Gloucester who sees through Edgar's disguise in *King Lear* is not surprising. His name is synonymous with theatrical disguise in this period: another Gloucester makes six changes of identity in *Look About You*. See Hyland (2011), 7.

⁴⁷⁶ *King Lear* 4.1.19.

I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen
Our means secure us and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. O dear son Edgar,
The food of thy abused father's wrath,
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,
I'd say I had eyes again.⁴⁷⁷

Like Sophocles' Oedipus before him, Gloucester calls on his children in his blindness, and it is only the final pair of lines in his speech that clarifies that he is wishing for the presence of his son rather than addressing the figure who "play[s] fool" onstage with him.⁴⁷⁸

In a display of insight-in-blindness, Gloucester declares that he has seen Edgar's Poor Tom before, in the storm the previous night, and remembers how on seeing him, he was reminded of his own son:

I'the last night's storm I such a fellow saw,
Which made me think a man a worm. My son
Came then into my mind, and yet my mind
Was then scarce friends with him.⁴⁷⁹

Gloucester's identification of the figure, although based on non-mimetic identification (he does not say that Poor Tom *looks* like Edgar), is more accurate than that of the sighted Old Man who acts as his guide but cannot see through Edgar's disguise. When Gloucester and his new guide, Poor Tom, arrive at Dover, Gloucester becomes bolder in his non-visual attempts to identify Edgar, asserting that Edgar has changed his voice ("Methinks thy voice is altered").⁴⁸⁰ Edgar replies that the only thing that has changed about him is the costume that Gloucester demanded he wear in 4.1 ("in nothing am I changed / But in my

⁴⁷⁷ *King Lear*, 4.1.20-26, cf. *S.OT*.1460ff and *S.OC*. 1-13.

⁴⁷⁸ *King Lear*, 4.1.40.

⁴⁷⁹ *King Lear*, 4.1.34-37; Henke (2015) 57 reads Gloucester's treatment of Poor Tom instead as a kind of socio-economic seeing of "the unjust superfluity enjoyed by the few at the expense of the many".

⁴⁸⁰ *King Lear* 4.5.7.

garments").⁴⁸¹ This blind Gloucester develops an auditory mode of seeing that penetrates his son Edgar's disguise, just as the Gloucester of *2 Henry VI* had appealed to information outside of the temporal scope of the play to unveil the sighted Simpcox.

In the anonymous *The Historie of Jacob and Esau*, the blind Isaac shares with the two Gloucesters the ability to see through a disguise. The play recounts the narrative of Genesis 27, in which Jacob, the younger son of Isaac and Rebecca, tricks the blind Isaac into thinking that he is the elder son Esau in order to persuade his dying father to make him his heir. In both the biblical narrative and the play, it is Isaac's blindness that allows Jacob, at the urging of his mother Rebecca, to deceive his father:

Ones good olde Isaac is blinde, and can not see
So that by policie he may beguiled bee.⁴⁸²

Just as the deception of Gloucester by Poor Tom in *King Lear* had involved Edgar disguising his voice, Jacob fears that his father will recognise him by touch. Rebecca disguises his skin with the hide of the goats he has hunted. Gloucester is not alone, it seems, in his ability to "see ... feelingly":

I have brought sleeves of kid next to thy skin to weare
They be made glovelike, and for eche finger a stall:
So that thy father's feeling beguile they shall.⁴⁸³

The goatskin gloves are a success, and it is not Jacob's smooth skin but his voice that Isaac recognises ("And yet the voice of Jacob sowreth in mine ear").⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ *King Lear* 4.5.9-10.

⁴⁸² *Jacob and Esau*, 2.4.

⁴⁸³ *Jacob and Esau*, 4.8. Cf. *King Lear*, 4.6.145.

Despite briefly seeming to see through his son's disguise as his own brother, Isaac is taken in by the trick and makes Jacob his heir in 4.11, though he maintains his conviction that the voice he heard was Jacob's, even after the blessing has been given:

But yet I will go see if I be deceived
For indeed me thought Jacob's voyce I perceived.⁴⁸⁵

Isaac's aural second sight does not prevent him from making his younger son his heir, but, as Rebecca reminds us, the situation that ensues at the end of the play is precisely the one that God had ordained. She clarifies that the act of disguise that she is preparing for her son Jacob is not in order to invert the rules of inheritance, but in order to correct them according to God's plan:

I shall devise howe, for no yll intent ne thought
But to bring to passe that I know God will have wrought...⁴⁸⁶

In the play, there is a theological stake in this moment: Jacob is elected, but Esau is not.⁴⁸⁷ At the moment of their birth, Jacob is said to have held on to his brother's ankles (אָקֶבֶת is Hebrew for 'ankle') and prevented him from being born first.⁴⁸⁸ Isaac seems aware of this himself, when he explains to Esau that he will not inherit his father's position and property because "another to thy blessing is predestinate".⁴⁸⁹ The deception that is at the centre of Jacob and Esau, then, is

⁴⁸⁴ *Jacob and Esau*, 4.10.

⁴⁸⁵ *Jacob and Esau*, 4.11. Isaac explicitly sets his hearing up as a kind of vision, here. For the almost synaesthetic approach to the senses in early modern drama, see Robson (2007), 15.

⁴⁸⁶ *Jacob and Esau*, 2.4.

⁴⁸⁷ This is recalled in *Romans* 9:13: "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated".

⁴⁸⁸ See Genesis 27:56: "he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and behold, now he hath taken away my blessing".

⁴⁸⁹ *Jacob and Esau*, 5.4. Cf. the often divine cause of blindness and prophetic knowledge in Greek tragedy.

nearly dismantled by the superior sight of the blind Isaac, but is itself subject to the superior sight of God who has seen through Esau's metaphorical disguise as the elder, elected twin. Isaac, although visually unaware, has seen through the earthly pattern of inheritance but, through a trick that hinged on his blindness, complied instead with the divine one.

For Mido, Isaac's guide, the act of disguise is not a theological but a theatrical one. When Isaac begins to press Jacob (disguised as Esau) on his changed voice, Mido comments "Now I see it true, the blinde eate many a flye".⁴⁹⁰ In doing so, he characterises the comedic undermining of Jacob's disguise with reference to a play popular in the early modern repertoire and known for its scenes of disguise. Although it is now lost, *The Blind Eat Many a Flye* was performed by the Worcester's Men shortly after their move to the Rose theatre in 1602, and the material of the play was by this time a well known comedic performance.⁴⁹¹ Isaac's aural second sight becomes, like Gloucester's, a tool that enables the blind character to undermine theatrical disguise and see through the spectacle. Their blind sight is paradoxically aligned with the sight of the spectators, since both are aware of the acts of disguise that have taken place (Gloucester and Isaac through their aural suspicions, the audience through information they have gleaned in previous scenes), enabling them to take on the role of privileged spectator of the inset spectacle.

⁴⁹⁰ *Jacob and Esau* 4.10.

⁴⁹¹ Knutson (2017), 246.

Blindness as 'ideal' spectatorship⁴⁹²

In his reading of the prologue to Jonson's (1631) *The Staple of News*, O'Connell comments that Jonson "seems indeed to yearn for a blind audience" (particularly in the opening lines, in which the Prologue wishes "Would you were come to hear, not see a play"), a wish that could be said to be fulfilled in the Dover Cliff scene of Shakespeare's *King Lear*.⁴⁹³ Here, just as Gloucester in *2 Henry VI* had instructed the onstage audience how to see through Simpcox's disguise, *Lear's* blind Gloucester proves to be an ideal spectator, though blind, for both the onstage and offstage audiences.

After Gloucester has fallen from the imaginary cliff, Edgar alters his voice again and addresses him, "Alive or dead?".⁴⁹⁴ He asks Gloucester to identify the man who he has left on the cliff-top, and Gloucester replies, "A poor unfortunate beggar", identifying Edgar's previous identity as Poor Tom.⁴⁹⁵ To these two characters who exist simultaneously in the body of the Edgar-actor, Edgar adds a third figure - the devil:

As I stood here below methought his eyes
Were two full moons. He had a thousand noses,
Horns whelked and waved like the enraged sea.
It was some fiend.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹² See n.424 above on this term.

⁴⁹³ O'Connell (2000), 121. See also Heywood's *Four Ages* plays, where the blind Homer explicitly becomes an ideal spectator for audiences who are invited to "see as Homer has seene" and reject their own dependence on vision in interpreting what happens onstage. Chapman's blind beggar Irus in *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* uses his Homeric blindness to justify his privileged spectatorship in this way, as well as showing himself to be particularly skilled in his disguise as Cleanthes. On the theatrical potential of blindness in these two plays see Kenward (2017) on Heywood and Coffin (2017) on Chapman.

⁴⁹⁴ *King Lear*, 4.6.45.

⁴⁹⁵ *King Lear*, 4.6.68.

⁴⁹⁶ *King Lear*, 4.6.69-72.

Gloucester's lack of visual awareness, either of the geography or of the number of bodies onstage, is exploited here by Edgar, who reveals a devil only to those who have no visual access to the scene and who believe in the illusion that he has constructed in speech.⁴⁹⁷ Both Greenblatt and van Dijkhuizen (and with them Egan) point to the way in which this scene presents Edgar's conjuring of the devil as a kind of metatheatrical examination of the process of creating illusion in the theatre.⁴⁹⁸ However, it is Gloucester's blindness that enables Edgar's diabolical invocation and ushers in this anti-mimetic mode of theatrical illusion.⁴⁹⁹

For noted antitheatricalist William Prynne, the ontological uncertainty that Gloucester's mode of blind spectating attributes to the conjured devil in this scene is the most important of the theatre's dangers.⁵⁰⁰ Writing in the early 1590s of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, he complains of:

... the visible apparition of the Devill on the stage at the Belsavage Playhouse, in Queene Elizabeths dayes (to the great amazement of the Actors and Spectators) while they were prophanely playing the

⁴⁹⁷ Though not without recalling that as in the earlier Poor Tom scene, Gloucester's blindness threatens to allow him to see through the disguise: "That thing you speak of / I took it for a man", *King Lear* 4.6.77-8. Cf. also *King Lear* 2.1.38-40 where Edmund describes Edgar "conjuring the moon".

⁴⁹⁸ Greenblatt (1988), 118; van Dijkhuizen (2007); Egan (1975), 20. See also Goldberg (1984).

⁴⁹⁹ Meek (2009), 127 points to the necessity of Gloucester's blindness for the success of Edgar's new mode of narrative theatre: "We might see Gloucester as a figure for the theatre audience and Edgar a figure for the playwright. Yet the only reason that Gloucester is taken in by Edgar's illusion is that he is blind". The scene has been understood to oppose two methods of making meaning in the theatre at least since McGuire (1994), 90 noted that it "was written to be spoken by an actor standing on a flat stage in a theatre".

⁵⁰⁰ For the author of *An Excellent Actor* (probably John Webster writing of Richard Burbage), this ontological uncertainty is central to the task of the actor, see Webster (1615), 10: "for what we see him personate, we think truely done before us", cited in Sofer (2013), 22. I adapt here the term 'ontological ambiguity' from Sofer (2013). Cf. Rebecca's warning to Mido in *Jacob and Esau* that his performance of blindness might cause blindness in real life as it is "to tempt God before thou have neede".

History of Faustus (the truth of which I have heard from many now alive, who well remember it).⁵⁰¹

Doctor Faustus specifically engages with the language and processes of early modern magic, which had grown to the height of its popularity by the 1580s; and onstage blindness, like onstage magic, was accompanied by the same ontological uncertainty.⁵⁰² Sofer compares conjuring the devil and theatrical performance in this way:

Mirroring the ontological ambiguity of performance itself, conjuring is poised on the knife-edge between representing (*mimesis*) and doing (*kinesis*).⁵⁰³

Indeed, it is unsurprising that it should be Gloucester's blindness that allows Edgar to exploit this ontological uncertainty in a highly performative way. Like conjuring, blindness onstage is a performative speech act: just as the devil appears onstage when he is called, characters become blind when their speeches and movements declare them to be so.⁵⁰⁴

In Henry Chettle and John Day's *The Blind Beggar of Bednall-Green* (c.1600, printed 1659), the actor Momford's movement between sight and blindness is explicitly described as a kind of conjuring. He instructs himself to take on the role in particularly theatrical language ("then play thy part"); and in a later scene he is accused of being a "Conjuror" by his daughter.⁵⁰⁵ Conjuratation in the modern sense, relating to magic and sleights of hand is not recorded in the

⁵⁰¹ Prynne (1633), *Histriomastix*, cited in Maclure (1979), 48. See Cox (2004), 107-126.

⁵⁰² Sofer (2013), 18ff.

⁵⁰³ Sofer (2013), 17.

⁵⁰⁴ See Austin (1962) and Sofer (2013), 18, who divides performance into two types: "performativity's transformative magic lies less in measurable changes in objective states of affairs (an actor cannot build a bridge by saying "I build a bridge") than in its phenomenological effects (an actor might blaspheme by blaspheming, just as he might laugh by laughing or eat by eating)".

⁵⁰⁵ Chettle and Day (1659), 14r, 27v.

OED until 1734, but conjurors appear throughout early modern theatre as entertainers, directors of theatrical spectacle and stock clown characters.⁵⁰⁶ It is in its theatrical sense that Rosalind famously uses the verb in *As You Like It*, when addressing the audience about the play that they have just seen: "My way is to conjure you".⁵⁰⁷ Sofer calls the verb conjure "another term for what I am calling the riddle of performativity, whereby some utterances are both constative and performative", and reminds us that "like performing itself, conjuring was a Janus-faced endeavour whose ontological stakes were uncertain".⁵⁰⁸

In keeping with this theatrical meaning, Momford's trick is a theatrical rather than a magical one, and is articulated in visual language:

I am no Conjuror, stay here but a while,
And I will bring the blind man to thy sight.⁵⁰⁹

His speech here relies on the understanding that blindness onstage is, like conjuring, a performative speech act. He will not conjure up the blind character, as he suggests, but will remove his disguise and reappear as the blind character. He tells Bess to go offstage to find her blind father, and while she is offstage, he provides an elaborate description of the empty costume she will find:

I wonder what she'll think, when she shall find
Only a staff, a scrip, a gown, a bonnet,
And nere a body to make use of them?⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ See Butterworth (2005) who thinks 'juggler' is a more appropriate term and Hopkins and Ostovich (2014), 20 for the popularity of conjurors and magicians onstage in popular theatre after *Doctor Faustus*.

⁵⁰⁷ *As You Like it*, Epilogue, 11.

⁵⁰⁸ Sofer (2013), 24.

⁵⁰⁹ Chettle and Day (1659), 27v.

⁵¹⁰ Chettle and Day (1659), 26r.

It is yet another Gloucester (who has himself appeared in disguise earlier in the play) who returns Momford to his own identity, commanding him in legalistic language to leave behind his theatrical role.⁵¹¹

Momford's blindness stretches the limits of the theatrical illusion, allowing both the blind beggar and his sighted brother to exist within the body of the same actor. Both Gurr and Kiernan, among others, see these "game[s] of deceit" as proof that early modern and particularly Shakespearean theatre was "positively anti-realistic".⁵¹² Performance is equated with conjuring, however, when it relies on a specific spoken contract with the spectator, requiring the spectator to ignore something about the identity of the actor in order to construct the fiction of the role. It is in this sense that Rosalind uses the term, reminding spectators of the epilogue that she has conjured a female character to appear from the body of a young male actor.⁵¹³ Like Rosalind, Momford conjures a blind character from the body of a sighted actor, highlighting his own sightedness by temporarily playing a sighted role (like Rosalind's "If I were a woman" in the epilogue) and encouraging the spectators to overlook the actor's sightedness on command.

It is not just the blinded Gloucester who models spectatorship for the audiences of *King Lear* by insisting on the ontological uncertainty of speech acts in non-naturalist theatre. It is also the moment of his blinding that undermines the visual mode of spectatorship *per se*. Gloucester's blinding occurs unexpectedly, and indeed it is Gloucester himself who unknowingly suggests the

⁵¹¹ However, on the early modern playhouse as a courtroom, see Beaumont's 1610 description of Blackfriars in *The Faithfull Shepherdess* and Mukherji (2006).

⁵¹² Gurr (1999), 374, see also Gurr (1970). See also Kiernan, (1996).

⁵¹³ See Shapiro (1996), 132 and Maguire (2004), 17 for the (now) standard reading of this epilogue.

punishment, as he explains that the very crime for which he is about to be punished was carried out in an attempt to relieve himself of the responsibility of serving as spectator to Lear's blinding:

Because I would not see thy cruel nails
Pluck out his poor old eyes.⁵¹⁴

Gloucester's blinding is the ironic fulfilment of his own wish: "See't shalt thou never" agrees Cornwall, and immediately removes one of Gloucester's eyes and stamps on it with his foot.⁵¹⁵

Gloucester's sudden inability to see (though, as Meek points out, Gloucester had been struggling both to see and interpret, even when sighted, since Edgar's letter in 1.2: "Come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles") unleashes an equally sudden interest in the impossibility of viewing from the onstage spectators.⁵¹⁶ Nunn links this new confusion about visual perception with Gloucester's blindness: "his blindness also marks the advent of a new breed of confusion for the play's spectators".⁵¹⁷

Cornwall's statement, "if you see vengeance" is an invitation to view the invisible, and is followed by a new difficulty for those onstage in interpreting visual signs.⁵¹⁸ The servant who witnesses Gloucester's onstage blinding seems to be unclear as to whether the act of violence has actually happened, suggesting

⁵¹⁴ *King Lear*, 3.7.55-6.

⁵¹⁵ *King Lear*, 3.7.66-7.

⁵¹⁶ *King Lear*, 1.2.34-5. Meek (2009), 134.

⁵¹⁷ *King Lear* 2.1.41. It is not until Regan is given the information aurally rather than visually ("Regan, I bleed apace") that she takes action. Nunn (2005), 174. See Diehl (1997), 149 on the subversion of 'ocular proof' *Othello*, and early modern tragedy: "instead of nurturing a mode of seeing that we would identify as modern - unified, focused, privileged - early modern tragedy elicits multiple and often incompatible ways of seeing, fracturing vision and decentering the spectator".

⁵¹⁸ *King Lear*, 3.7.80-1. On the different types of seeing at play in this scene, see Dhar (2015).

I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs
To apply to his bleeding face.⁵¹⁹

Their remedy is good practice: it is suggested in John Banister's *Treatise of Chyrurgie* (1575) as a method by which the sight might be protected in an eye that has been maimed (rather than blinded).⁵²⁰ Indeed, their hope that his sight will return is not entirely groundless, because Gloucester explicitly casts himself in the role of a performer. His performance is made explicit in a bear-baiting image ("I am tied to the stake and I must stand the course") as well as in his demand that his son Edmund return to the stage and

enkindle all the sparks of nature
To quit this horrid *act*.⁵²¹

The onstage blinding of Abilqualit in *Revenge for Honour* similarly undermines the spectators' vision by signalling the blinding as a theatrical act, in a play structured around the problems of watching and the failure of ocular proof.⁵²² At the centre of the play is an attempt to stage a false vision in front of an onstage audience that conflicts with what the offstage spectators have seen: Abrahen plots to frame Abilqualit for the rape of Caropia, despite Caropia's consensual love for Abilqualit in a previous scene. Since it is Abilqualit's eyes

⁵¹⁹ *King Lear*, 3.7.105-6. Cf. Regan's inability to assist Cornwall with the wound she can see until she receives the information aurally ("Regan, I bleed apace"), *King Lear* 3.7.96-7.

⁵²⁰ Banister (1575), 49.

⁵²¹ *King Lear*, 3.7. 57; *Macbeth* 5.7.1-2 employs the same bear-baiting image; the bear in question here is the blind Monsieur Hunkes, whose visual impact Dekker describes in *Work for Armourours*, see Höfele (2011). *King Lear*, 3.7.85-6, italics mine.

⁵²² A Stuart play of uncertain date attributed first to Chapman then to Glapthorne. Most of the critical attention to this play has been paid to its authorship and little else. So for example Walter (1937) and Bowers (1937). See also Beckingham (1935), who compares the play with *Othello* but calls *Revenge for Honour* "worthless" in his first sentence.

that Mura, Ceropia's husband, blames for the offence ("Those eyes that led him to unlawful objects"), his blinding seems, in the eyes of the fictional Arabian justice system, to be fair ("'Tis fit should suffer for't a lasting blindness").⁵²³ As his punishment is carried out, a crowd of Abilqualit's supporters gather outside of the stage space. Almanzor grows nervous, and makes a final command that Abilqualit be killed as well as blinded: "Muts, strangle him immediately".⁵²⁴ The blind Abilqualit falls to the ground watched over by the crowd of spectators, who by now have broken through the doors into the stage space ("Why do you stare so, traitors?").⁵²⁵

Eventually, after Almanzor has been killed by a poisoned handkerchief and Abrahen declared himself king of Arabia, the large number of characters who witnessed the act of violence exit, leaving only the corpse of the blinded and strangled Abilqualit onstage. Suddenly, the corpse stands up, opens his eyes and speaks:

'Tis well the Muts proved faithful, otherwise I'd lost my breath with as much speed and silence as those who do expire in dreams.⁵²⁶

Abilqualit's revival is a kind of theatrical conjuring, and indeed he announces it as a return to life rather than an evasion of death: "we are again among the living".⁵²⁷ In returning to life, however, Abilqualit shows his blinding and subsequent death to have been a performance: he is transformed "from helpless

⁵²³ Glapthorne (1654), 4.1, p.42.

⁵²⁴ Glapthorne (1654), 4.1, p.45.

⁵²⁵ Glapthorne (1654), 4.1, p.45.

⁵²⁶ Glapthorne (1654), 4.1, p.48.

⁵²⁷ Glapthorne (1654), 5.1, p.53. And when Abrahen later returns to the stage to find Abilqualit alive, he calls him "thou the greatest of divels", aligning once more the ontological uncertainty of blindness with the conjuring effect of demonology and performance.

victim of ruthless punishment into the mastermind of a spectacle played out through the mutilation of his own body".⁵²⁸ Abilqualit claims not in fact to have been blinded and strangled although the spectators have been witness to both of these punishments, and his theatrical escape undermines the spectators' vision, lending credence to the servants' uncertainty about whether Gloucester in *King Lear* has really been blinded.

Visual complicity and the suspension of disbelief

Although *Lear's* Gloucester calls for his son Edmund to return to the stage and reverse the theatrical transformation from sighted to blind that he has undergone, Edmund does not come. He has been banished earlier from the stage by Cornwall precisely because of fears that he would not engage in the appropriate kind of spectatorship required by his father's blinding:

Leave him to my displeasure. Edmund, keep you our sister company the revenges we are bound to take upon your traitorous father are not fit for your beholding.⁵²⁹

The ontological uncertainty about blindness makes all spectators, both onstage and offstage, complicit in the act of violence. Vision alone does not prove to spectators that a character is blind (as Abilqualit's rapid return to sightedness shows). Rather, their choice to suspend their disbelief and to imagine the

⁵²⁸ Nunn (2005), 180-1. In the final scene when he is slain by his brother, Abilqualit seems to accept that his death here is the real equivalent of the theatrical death he suffered in 4.1 ("but yesterday I playd the part in jest which I now act in earnest", Glapthorne (1654), 5.2, p.62) but after his blinding there can be no ontological uncertainty, and when an actor is resurrected to speak the epilogue he wishes to have "dy'd honestly", Glapthorne (1654), epilogue, p.63.

⁵²⁹ *King Lear* 3.7.6-9. Cf. *King John* 4.1.121-2 where Prince Arthur avoids being blinded by Hubert precisely because the poker would not be the appropriate kind of spectator ("And if you do, you will make it blush / And glow with shame of your proceedings, Hubert").

consequences of a speech act makes the speech act real. Spectators in a non-naturalistic theatre make a choice to *see* Gloucester as blinded in 3.7, and as a result, he is less 'blinded' by Cornwall's boot than by the spectators' suspension of disbelief.⁵³⁰ Since Edmund, like the "Muts" of *Revenge for Honour*, is likely to refuse to suspend his disbelief, he must therefore be removed from the stage in order for the blinding to be carried out and for the speech act to be made real.

The repeated emphasis in early modern drama upon blindness as a performance demands that the spectator take an active role in attributing ontological reality to the viewed action. Passive viewing cannot separate blind characters from sighted, since Momford does not look any less blind than Gloucester when he performs his blindness; and the stagepaint blood around Abilqualit's eyes does not conclusively indicate that he is blind. Instead, spectators must find non-visual means to confirm a character's blindness, and they become implicated in the violent acts of blinding both by their suspension of disbelief and by their decision to respect certain performances of blindness as ontological realities and to reject others as metatheatrical pretence. While Simpcox's tale of blindness is actively disbelieved by the onstage audience, the spectators both onstage and offstage of the other plays under discussion here are cast in the role not only of witnesses and co-perpetrators but also of judges, whose task it is to judge their performances as either reality or fiction.

This complicit viewing was famously problematic for Victorian critics like Bradley and Lamb who banished the blinding in *Lear* from the stage to "its

⁵³⁰ Cf. Nunn (2005) 159: "Even though viewers know that the actors are not being hurt, their willingness to suspend their disbelief at such heights of cruelty make them accomplices in inflicting the very horror that leads them to recoil".

proper world of imagination".⁵³¹ Early modern anatomical texts hint at a much earlier acknowledgement of the problems of visual complicity especially when looking at dissections of the eye (and even representations of such scientific experiments). Barrough comments in *The Method of Physick* (c. 1590):

... the eye which is wont with curious inspection to pry into all things, and to find out the nature and order of them, hath bin unable to unfold its owne wonderfull constitution, and hath bene alway blind in judging of it selfe, and in foreseeing the dicommodoties which attend upon it.⁵³²

As in antiquity, allusions to blindings not played out onstage are frequent in Shakespeare and elsewhere on the early modern stage.⁵³³ The ontological uncertainty of blindness in the theatre alters the mode of spectatorship required, demanding that audiences no longer rely on their vision to experience the onstage action passively, but actively construct their reading of the play by means of non-visual information. It is the blind characters themselves (and especially the string of meta-theatrically-aware Gloucesters in this period) who

⁵³¹ Bradley (1904), 232. Lamb (1818). Bloom (1998), 476 agrees with him "I begin sadly to agree with Charles Lamb that we ought to keep rereading *King Lear* and avoid its staged travesties".

⁵³² Barrough (1624), 161. Nunn (2005), 106, notes that blinded characters onstage become "self-revealing anatomies, inviting audiences to examine them" because they can no longer look back. Cf. also in Nunn (2005) a persistent unwillingness to depict the eye severed from the body. Walter Baley's *A brief treatise touching the preservation of eyesight*, printed before 1602 omits all images of the eye from the volume; Andreas Vesalius' *Fabrica* is by contrast richly illustrated but includes only two pages on the eye's anatomy. More strikingly, Johnson's translation of Paré's anatomical work includes the eyes in many images of skulls and neurological drawings, but confines dissected eyes to a single over-crowded page of the volume. It is only since Brook's production in 1962 that directors have consistently staged Gloucester's blinding.

⁵³³ In Sidney's 1590 *Arcadia* 2.10, commonly asserted to be the 'source' for the sub-plot of *King Lear*, the King of Paphlagonia's blinding is narrated twice after it has occurred. Cf. Meek (2009), 120: "[Shakespeare is] testing the limits of both narrative and dramatic spectacle". For verbal threats of blinding see *Measure for Measure* 4.3.111, *Macbeth* 2.2.57, *The White Devil* 2.2.240, *Revenger's Tragedy* 3.5.204-5 and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* 4.3 where the threat comes closest to becoming reality.

are the 'ideal spectators' in this new mode of spectating; and their blinded eyes warnings of its dangers.



Figure 3.

An etching of the stage space at Hôtel de Bourgogne, published by Jean Leblond, Paris c.1633 and held at the Metropolitan Museum, New York: six characters are onstage; at the centre an actor holds out his glasses, supported by another.

Chapter Four:

Blindness and Place

In his *Defence of Poesy* (1595), Sir Philip Sidney writes with telling skepticism about the creation of fictional places onstage:

What child is there that coming to a play and seeing 'Thebes' written in great letters upon an old door doth believe that it is Thebes?⁵³⁴

The imagined child's disbelief is called upon to illustrate that poets and playwrights do not lie, to the extent that physicians or astronomers do, because those who engage with the work of theatre makers do so on the assumption that what they watch is untrue.

In this comparison (written in the late 1570s, but not published until 1595, after his death), Sidney confronts the fluidity that is more commonly presented as an asset of the early modern stage, perhaps most famously in the prologue to Shakespeare's *Henry V* (c. 1599).⁵³⁵ Sidney's dissatisfaction with the sign attached to the door that represents Thebes suggests a separation between the physical space of the theatre and the imagined place projected onto it. His

⁵³⁴ Sidney, *Defence of Poesy*, 34.

⁵³⁵ On these "fluid stages" see Gurr (1970), 172-3 and Longman (1987), 151-7 for early definitions of an idea that is now common currency in early modern studies. Cf. Weimann (1978) 216 who uses instead the term "flexible platform dramaurgy"; Ichikawa (2013), 154 provides a helpful summary of the demands for cooperation that such stage spaces placed on their audiences, and Duxfield (2015) explores these ideas with reference to *King Lear*. See also Biet and Triau (2006), 314-318 on the impossibility of a "pur théâtre vide" (318), and 391-398 on the relationship between the signs of scenographic place and theatrical space.

choice of Thebes to represent this problem recalls the famous spatial "inconclusive conclusion" to Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.⁵³⁶

The spatial problem at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a simple one: Oedipus ought to be exiled at the end of the play, according not only to the oracle, but also to Creon, Tiresias and not least Oedipus himself. But in the final moments Creon refuses to subject him to the anticipated punishment, and instead sends him back into the house.⁵³⁷ Although Oedipus does not want to go into the house, he eventually agrees, on one condition: γῆς μ' ὄπως πέμψεις ἄποικον.⁵³⁸ Creon counters that this promise is not his to make, since Oedipus' fate will be at the gods' will, but Oedipus seems to understand that Creon has agreed to his exile, verifying this rather than arguing with him (φῆς τάδ' οὔν;).⁵³⁹ Rather than acknowledging that he has consented to send Oedipus away into exile, however, Creon responds cryptically (ἄ μὴ φρονῶ γὰρ οὐ φιλῶ λέγειν μάτην)⁵⁴⁰ in a phrase that Jebb takes to indicate at least provisional consent, pending the agreement of the gods.⁵⁴¹ Oedipus seems to take it as permission to

⁵³⁶ On the transformative capabilities of the performance space, see: McAuley (1999) and more recently Fischer-Lichte and Wihstutz (2013). Wiles (2003), takes a historical approach to the capabilities of performance space. Edmunds (1996) and Rehm (2002) have both made use of the transformative spaces of ancient theatre in their spatial readings. The description "inconclusive conclusion" comes from the title of Burian's (2009) account of the problems of this ending. See Fowler (1997), 19: "Sophocles has benefited more than any other ancient author from the modern trend toward opening out his endings". On this problematic ending see note 238.

⁵³⁷ Burian (2009), 103: "Exile becomes Oedipus as much as mourning becomes Electra". For these anticipations of exile see *S.OT*.100-1, 236-45, 417-23, 455-6, 816-20 and 1449-54. The problem of Oedipus' incomplete exile has prompted discussions of the final section's authenticity, at least since Graffunder (1885). Solutions to the spatial problem are offered by Taplin (1978) 46, and see also Knox (1957) 185-96, Davies (1982) and Gellie (1986), 39 on the possibility of reintegration.

⁵³⁸ *S.OT*.1519.

⁵³⁹ *S.OT*.1520

⁵⁴⁰ *S.OT*.1520.

⁵⁴¹ Jebb (1883), 197-8 *ad* 1520: "I now think that, on the whole, it suits the context better to take them as expressing consent (ἄ μὴ φρονῶ = what I do not mean to do). As

go into exile too, proclaiming ἄπαγέ νύν μ' ἐντεῦθεν ἦδη, and making no further protestation about his destination before his exit from the stage.⁵⁴²

Oedipus' destination is left implicit (ἐντεῦθεν does not specify to where he is going), and the chorus exploit the vagueness of place at the end of the play by suggesting that he has come to a number of unseen places that can only be metaphorical - a sea of troubles (κλύδωνα δεινῆς συμφορᾶς) and the boundary of life (τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάση).⁵⁴³ Oedipus has always struggled to determine where he is, as Rehm points out, noting the persistent punning on 'oidipou' and 'hopou' (especially 924-26). In the final moments of the play he seems to misunderstand the semiotics of the stage space: he is leaving the performance space via the *skene* doors, but seems momentarily unaware that these are the doors into the palace, rather than the doors to his longed-for exile.⁵⁴⁴

This chapter argues that Oedipus' spatial condition in the final moments of the play is characteristic of all blind characters, who not only necessarily struggle to see the fictional places that they occupy, but are also able to see through the semiotic association between the stage space and the fictional place that it represents. Oedipus' experience of his change of location in these final moments mirrors the spectators' own understanding of it: Creon tells the

this consent can be only provisional - depending on the approval of Apollo - it is not necessarily inconsistent with *S.OC.765ff*".

⁵⁴² *S.OT.1521*. The adverb ἐντεῦθεν leaves his destination unspoken, though see *S.E.1339* where the place suggested is the house.

⁵⁴³ *S.OT.1527* and *1530*. The inside of the house, equally, is an unseen place in Greek tragedy.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. Taplin (1986), 167 on "control of the door" can be taken semiotically here. The ring composition that he argues for extends not only to physical control of the door (the doors are thrown open for Oedipus at the beginning of the play, and at the end he is compelled to enter them), but also to knowledge of the city that it represents. When the doors open at the beginning of the play Oedipus knows who the suppliants are on the other side, and offers his help, but by the end of the play he seems not to know what is on the other side of the same door.

audience that Oedipus is going into the house, and he seems to go through the doors that represent the house; but Oedipus considers it to be a kind of exile. Audiences aware of the myth or (after the fifth century) of the later *Oedipus at Colonus*, know that his exit is indeed the prelude to his exile.⁵⁴⁵

Like Sidney's spectator, the blind character lacks the visual information required to read the stage space as a signifier of the fictional place of the play.⁵⁴⁶ Thebes, a mythical place both of blinding and mis-seeing (in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as well as the *Bacchae*) signifies, in Sidney's comment, the problem of representing place on the fluid early modern stage, a problem that is highlighted both in Sophocles' Thebes and elsewhere by the onstage presence of a blind character. Because of their lack of visual involvement with the theatrical semiotics of place, blind characters undermine the visual relationship between space and represented place, and invite an alternative, non-visual construction of fictional places that both mirrors and rivals the spectators' vision.

Imagined places: Gaza and Colonus

Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671) dramatises the way in which blind characters collapse the visually semiotic relationship between space and place in the theatre.⁵⁴⁷ The final moments of the blind Samson's life are enacted offstage, in

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. the slippage between stage space and fictional place in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988), 127-8: "at the end of the tragedy, Oedipus is hounded from Thebes just as the *homo piacularis* is expelled to remove the defilement". Pucci (1992), 171 "it might seem narrow-minded and literal to object that in this play Oedipus is not expelled, and does not even leave Thebes or his palace." Goldhill (2015) cites Pucci and Vernant and discusses these two positions with reference to the question of the end of the tragedy.

⁵⁴⁶ On the related semiotics of theatre building see Carlson's reading of Barthes *The Eiffel Tower* in Carlson (1989), 12-13.

⁵⁴⁷ The fact that it is a closet drama seems, rather than divorcing the play from its theatrical context, to have heightened Milton's interest in the non-visual means by which place can be established in the theatre. On the theatricality of closet drama see

an imagined theatre. The onstage action is interrupted by a loud noise offstage, the cause of which remains unseen to the sighted actors of the scene, who become its audience. Manoa breaks off mid-sentence in shock:

I know your friendly minds and – O what noise!
Mercy of Heav'n, what hideous noise was that!
Horribly loud, unlike the former shout.⁵⁴⁸

He presumes that his son Samson has been killed, but the Chorus are quick to correct him, even though their assumptions are based on similarly non-visual evidence:

Thy Son is rather slaying them, that outcry
From slaughter of one foe could not ascend.⁵⁴⁹

Having agreed that the noise they have heard must be the result of an attack on the Philistines, the Chorus and Manoa debate whether to leave the stage space for the fictional offstage place (one imagined theatre for another) in specifically visual terms: “What shall we do, stay here, or run and see?”. The Chorus advise Manoa to remain within the onstage space, justifying this with a reference to his son’s blindness:

Best keep together here, lest running thither
We unawares run into danger’s mouth.
This evil on the Philistines is fall’n
From whom else could a general cry be heard?
The sufferers then will scarce molest us here;
From other hands we need not much to fear.
What if his eyesight (for to Israel’s God
Nothing is hard) by miracle restor’d
He now be dealing dole among his foes,
And over heaps of slaughtered walk his way?⁵⁵⁰

Sauer (1998) on the political and meta-theatrical charge of closet drama, and Burberry (2007), 96-7, who argues that the implicit stage directions in *Samson Agonistes* require some kind of performance. Though cf. Reisner (2009), note 50, who finds this a stretch.

⁵⁴⁸ Milton (1752), l.1508-9.

⁵⁴⁹ Milton (1752), 1517-8.

⁵⁵⁰ Milton (1752), 1521-30.

Their assessment of the offstage action is soon interrupted by the Messenger, whose privileged vision (and position outside of the stage space) has allowed him to see the offstage theatre, which the chorus, Manoa and the audience of Milton's closet drama can only imagine.

When the Messenger enters, he complains of his vision, and characterises what he has seen as a specifically theatrical event:

O, whither shall I run, or which way flie
The sight of this so horrid spectacle
Which erst my eyes beheld and yet behold;
For dire imagination still pursues me.⁵⁵¹

Manoa's response contrasts the Messenger's vision with the onstage characters' imperfect hearing.⁵⁵² Finally, after being asked in repeated visual language ("eye-witness") to describe the offstage action, the Messenger gives a description of the theatre that exists outside of the stage space:

The building was a spacious Theatre
Half round on two main Pillars vaulted high,
With seats where all the Lords and each degree
Of sort, might sit in order to behold.⁵⁵³

He goes on to describe Samson's attack on the theatre as a kind of performance, culminating in his own self-destruction. The attack on an imagined theatre-building, a fictional place located in the wings of the imagined theatre of Milton's closet drama introduces a double separation of place and space. Samson's blindness does not shape this scene. In fact, when he is not within the stage space, his blindness does not seem to affect his actions at all, as is apparent

⁵⁵¹ Milton (1752), 1541-44.

⁵⁵² Milton (1752), 1521-30.

⁵⁵³ Milton (1752), 1605-08.

from the Messenger's narration. Rather, his blindness is refracted onto the onstage characters, who have no visual access to the offstage space, nor any knowledge of the place that it represents, because no visual cues are made available to them. This prompts the Messenger to describe the offstage place and to decode its semiotics for the audience, mirroring the audience's process of visual recognition of place in the theatre. Both the spectators and the blind characters recognise fictional place by means of non-visual cues, and these blind characters therefore challenge, like Sidney's child-spectator and Manoa here, the primacy of vision in the semiotic process of creating place in the theatre.

Studies of Milton's debts to Greek tragedy have accorded a special place to the relationship between *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Samson Agonistes* at least since Wilson Brewer's 1927 study, which allots specific chapters only to *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Prometheus Bound*.⁵⁵⁴ This ease of association between Milton and Sophocles' blinded heroes is so frequent in scholarship on the play as to have become almost axiomatic, assisted by Milton's directions towards the ancient tragedians in his epistle to the drama, *Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is called Tragedy*. Both *Samson Agonistes* and *Oedipus at Colonus* begin with a blind character staging an encounter with a new place. In both cases, the blind character shares an important aspect of his blindness with the audience – a lack of awareness (until instructed) of the place to which he has come.

Oedipus at Colonus begins with a prolonged process of establishing where the play takes place, for the benefit of the blind man onstage and the audience.⁵⁵⁵ Antigone sets out the onstage geography very clearly, referring to the material

⁵⁵⁴ vs. a critical reluctance to read the plays co-dependently, e.g. Newton's (1752) 197 "there is scarcely a thought the same in the two pieces" cited in Hoxby (2015) 139.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Korda and Harris (2002) 2 on the myth of the empty stage.

details like the walls of the city (πύργοι), and deduces by looking at the trees that the place is sacred.⁵⁵⁶ Edmunds notes that Oedipus' blindness precludes him from participating in the "dramatic reflexivity" of other characters because he does not operate in the same visual world as the audience.⁵⁵⁷ His comment, however, presumes a culture of extremely detailed scene painting for the ancient theatre.⁵⁵⁸ Whether or not Antigone's description is visually available to the audience, it is not until she describes the nightingales' music (418) that her words overlap with Oedipus' experience of the place in which they find themselves. As Antigone and her father discuss the place they have come to, their conversation is persistently informed by details that are perceived by non-visual senses. When Antigone tells her father that they are near Athens, for instance, he replies that he knows this because he was able to hear it from the people they met on the road.⁵⁵⁹

Milton's Samson, like Oedipus, describes place with recourse to his non-visual senses. It is the quality of the air that signifies for him the prison that he has just left, and the "breath of Heaven fresh blowing, pure and sweet" that reminds him that it is a feast day.⁵⁶⁰ Samson then asserts his own status as a viewed object, "Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze", which matches Manoa's description of his tomb (1734ff) as an object that will attract the gaze of

⁵⁵⁶ Soph.*OC*.14-18; cf. other attempts to establish what is happening in the stage space in this scene, e.g. the discussion about where Oedipus sits in Seale (1982), 114 and Taplin (1977) 441-2.

⁵⁵⁷ Edmunds (1996), 40.

⁵⁵⁸ More detailed even than the extravagant scenery Pickard-Cambridge (1946), 51 imagines. Cf. Arnott (1962), 99. On the evidence for ancient scenography see Dingel (1971) and Padel (1990) 346-54.

⁵⁵⁹ Soph.*OC*.25. For the non-visual geography of Colonus, see Chapter 1, above.

⁵⁶⁰ Milton (1671), 7-8, 10.

others.⁵⁶¹ Samson contrasts his own experience of the natural world around him with the audience's expectation: "The sun to me is dark".⁵⁶² In *Samson Agonistes*, as in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, sight is not the primary means of identifying fictional place.

The audience of *Samson Agonistes*, however, are also deprived of their vision by the nature of Milton's closet drama. Neelakanta reads the audience's restricted vision alongside the effacement of the divine spectator in the play, evident at the moment of God's definitive withdrawal from the newly blinded Samson:

But now [God] hath cast me off as never known
[...]
Left me all helpless with th'irreparable loss of sight.⁵⁶³

Neelakanta's concludes that "Milton's closet drama, a determinedly non-spectacular genre, exposes *theatrum mundi* as the theater of the blind".⁵⁶⁴ Yet her observation ignores the close relationship that this closet drama shares with *Oedipus at Colonus*. It is not just closet drama, as Neelakanta asserts, but the blind character within it that transforms Milton's play into the "theater of the blind", just as Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* subverts the reliance on a visual mode of recognition of place, and offers an alternative, non-visual semiotics of the stage space.

"Wherefore to Dover?": 'Fluid stages' and unseen places

The Dover cliff scene in *King Lear* is the *locus classicus* for the blind character's

⁵⁶¹ Milton (1752), 34.

⁵⁶² Milton (1752), 86.

⁵⁶³ Milton (1752), 641-6; See Neelakanta (2011).

⁵⁶⁴ Neelakanta (2011), 34.

inability to recognise place visually.⁵⁶⁵ In *King Lear*, like in *Samson Agonistes*, the techniques by which the blind Gloucester establishes place are non-visual, anticipated by Regan's command:

let him smell
His way to Dover.⁵⁶⁶

Just as Oedipus, after his blinding, casts the roads, glade, coppice and narrow paths in the role of witness to the offstage patricide that precedes the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, so too does Lear invest the cliff of Dover with a kind of sight:

There is a cliff whose high and bending head
Looks fearfully in the confined deep.⁵⁶⁷

Act 4, scene 6 opens with a confrontation between the blind Gloucester and Edgar, still dressed as Poor Tom and now taking on the role of guide. Gloucester employs here the same skepticism of which his namesake in *2 Henry VI* is master: when told that he is climbing up the hill to the cliff he responds "Methinks the ground is even".⁵⁶⁸ Edgar moves away from visual description and instead engages Gloucester with aural aspects of the landscape ("Hark, do you hear the sea?"⁵⁶⁹). Gloucester is eventually won over when Edgar describes the cliff to him using a series of oppositions between how objects seem (to his vision) and how they really are: "Methinks he seems no bigger than his head" and calling his sight "deficient".⁵⁷⁰ Gloucester's blindness becomes the focus of Edgar's trick, as he is misled about where he is by Edgar's false description of

⁵⁶⁵ On this scene see Schleiner (1985).

⁵⁶⁶ *King Lear*, 3.7.92-3.

⁵⁶⁷ S.OT.1399-1401, *King Lear*, 4.1.76-7

⁵⁶⁸ *King Lear*, 4.6.3; for these Gloucesters see Chapter 3, above.

⁵⁶⁹ *King Lear*, 4.6.4.

⁵⁷⁰ *King Lear* 4.6.16 and 23.

place. That the cliff from which Gloucester 'jumps' might not physically exist on the stage at all is made explicit by Jan Kott's argument that "this pantomime only makes sense if enacted on a flat and level stage".⁵⁷¹

Edgar draws the audience's attention to the disjunction between the raised cliff Gloucester has been instructed to 'see' and the flat stage that both Edgar and the audience know is before him: "Look how we labour" seems to be an instruction to the unsure Gloucester, but its visual imperative can only be addressed to the audience. Gloucester cannot "look", but the audience do, and perceive the blind Gloucester walking as if up a steep hill across a flat stage. The scene therefore enacts a confrontation between blind character and sighted audience, as well as between the place portrayed and the theatrical space it inhabits. By the end of the scene both Gloucester and the audience have a clear sense of what the onstage space looks like, but Gloucester "sees" a steep cliff and the audience see a flat stage.

The visual trick Edgar plays on Gloucester also mirrors the role of the audience's imagination in the construction of places onstage. Sprague lists the cliff at Dover alongside the forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Macbeth's castle and the forest of Arden as places that exist on a verbal rather than a visual level.⁵⁷² As Jernigan has more recently pointed out, however, the cliff of Dover is

⁵⁷¹ Kott (1964), 101. This assumption is implicit in earlier readings, however, such as Wilson Knight (1930), who reads the scene as a grotesque comedy.

⁵⁷² Sprague (1935), 26; this word-painting is, as Meek (2009), 9 suggests, linked to the rhetorical practice of *enargeia* described by Quintilian. Harris and Korda (2002), 2 caution against the 'myth of the empty stage', and recall that since Henslowe records "the city of Rome", "a set of stairs for Phaethon" and "a tree of golden apples" among props made for the Admiral's men it cannot straightforwardly be assumed that it is impossible to construct a cliff for the theatre. Rather, like the stool in *Macbeth* that Calderwood (1971), 12-13 shows to be polysemic, the properties and set of the theatre are able to shift in meaning and this undermines reliance on the visual to establish ontological reality in the theatre.

unlike other places in Shakespeare – Edgar and Gloucester never actually arrive at the place described.⁵⁷³ The scene constitutes a kind of meta-theatrical subversion of the convention of word-painting. It is not until the aside

Why do I trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it⁵⁷⁴

and later, more obviously

Had he been where he thought,
By this had thought been past⁵⁷⁵

that the audience are let in on the joke, and learn that the cliff that Gloucester is told about is not physically present on the stage, or even consistently imagined.

The scene has typically been used, alongside the prologue to *Henry V*, as an example of the “fluid stages” of early modern theatre, with critics involving the visual imagination of the audience within the spectating process in the theatre.⁵⁷⁶ Modern criticism has treated these “fluid stages” more favorably than Sidney who, alongside his imagined child-spectator’s difficulty with Thebes, was dismissive in his *Defense of Poesy* of the theatre’s ability to assume multiple places, sympathizing with the difficulty of the act of perception required of the spectators:

you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived? Now you shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers:

⁵⁷³ Jernigan (2008), 32.

⁵⁷⁴ *King Lear*, 4.6.33-4

⁵⁷⁵ *King Lear*, 4.6.43-4

⁵⁷⁶ See Longman (1987), 157 who uses the term ‘fluid stage’ to refer to early theatre’s ability to encompass a multitude of places in a single setting; Ichikawa (2013), 154 on the centrality of the audience’s imagination. See Fitzpatrick (1995) reading of the stage doors in Act 2 of *Macbeth* as simultaneously the doors to Duncan’s chamber and the south entry, and Fitzpatrick (2011).

and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of shipwreck in the same place: and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke: and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave.⁵⁷⁷

The "miserable beholders" of *King Lear*, however, face an additional challenge. Like the blinded Gloucester, the audience of Act 4, scene 6 is tricked by Edgar's verbal word-painting, and discover the contingency of their own vision upon the theatrical spectacle. Sun responds to the question, "Wherefore to Dover?" repeated throughout Act 3, scene 7, by linking the fact that Dover proves to be the end point of the lives of most of the characters in *King Lear* as well as the end of Britain, stating simply that "Dover figures in the play the principle of the limit".⁵⁷⁸ As well as the limit to life, the limit of the conflict with France and the limit of the play, Dover is also the place where the spectators discover, thanks to the geographical trick played by Edgar specifically because of Gloucester's blindness, the limits of their own spectatorship. In both of the Sophoclean Oedipus plays, this takes the form of an unseen and / or invisible mythical geography to which the audience have only aural access (the crossroads, or the grove of the furies), whereas in *King Lear* this is played out as an opposition between fictional place and theatrical space.

When Nahum Tate returns to the cliff scene in his 1681 version of *King Lear*, the blinded Gloucester's exile is not to Dover, but to Cambray. The Duke of Cornwall (echoing Regan in 3.7, 92-3) demands:

Turn out that Eye-less villain and let him smell

⁵⁷⁷ Sidney, *Defense of Poesy*, 1270ff.

⁵⁷⁸ Sun (2010), 67.

His way to Cambray.⁵⁷⁹

The political implications of this change in place have been noted by Hirota, who compares the exile command in *King Lear* with the appearances of the Duke of Cambria in *Mirror for Magistrates* (as Gonoril's husband) and Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene* (as Regan's husband), seeing it as an attempt to rewrite the political landscape of the play.⁵⁸⁰ The Duke of Cambria never appears onstage in Tate's play, though the rivalry between Cornwall and the offstage Cambria is felt throughout, and the spectre of Dover remains, with Gloucester asking Poor Tom for directions to Dover, not Cambray.⁵⁸¹ The setting of the cliff scene remains ambiguous, seeming to take place both at the imagined cliff of Dover and at Cambray. The cliff that is merely a visual trick in *King Lear* becomes even more distant, here, as the audience are unable to identify the precise place in which the scene takes place.

The Duke's demand, however, is not simply a displacement of the scene from *King Lear*, or a request for further imaginative work on the part of the audience. It also invites a mode of non-visual, but intertextual 'seeing'. In embellishing Shakespeare's "him" with "that Eyeless villain", Tate recalls another famously "eyeless" character in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, published only a decade earlier.⁵⁸² It is not only this epithet that Gloucester takes from Milton's Samson, but also his staged environment. After his blinding, Tate's Gloucester leaves the stage, describing a kind of performance that follows from his blinding and will precede his leap from a cliff:

⁵⁷⁹ Tate (1681), Act 3, p.39. *King Lear*, 3.7.92-3. On the lack of specificity in the stage directions of Tate's play see Murray (2001), 157ff.

⁵⁸⁰ See Hirota (2014).

⁵⁸¹ Tate (1681), 4.2.

⁵⁸² Murray (2001), 165 compares the blindness of Tate's Gloucester and Milton's Samson.

No, with these bleeding Rings
I will present me to the pittying Crowd,
And with the Rhetorick of these dropping Veins
Enflame 'em to Revenge their King and Me;
Then when the Glorious Mischief is on Wing,
This Lumber from some Precipice I'll throw,
And dash it on the ragged Flint below;
Whence my freed Soul to her bright Sphear shall fly,
Through boundless Orbs, eternal Regions spy,
And like the Sun, be all one glorious Eye.⁵⁸³

The audience of Tate's *Lear* do not see this performance, which happens offstage, but it is described by the officer in the scene that follows:

At last day's publick Festival, to which
The Yeoman from all Quarters had repair'd
Old Gloster, whom you late depriv'd of Sight,
(His veins yet Streaming fresh) presents himself.⁵⁸⁴

As in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, a public festival is taking place in an imagined offstage space, and is attended by the blind character but not by the audience. The blindness of Samson and Gloucester is shared with the audience by the establishment of this offstage place through messenger reports. In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Gloucester's blindness is objectified, and the audience watch the blind man navigate a place he cannot see, satirising an aural tradition of word-painting on which the audience have relied throughout the play. In Tate's *King Lear* the alignment of Gloucester's blind navigation of space with the audience's reliance on word-painting is made total, as the blind Gloucester is witness to an offstage space to which the audience have no access. Like Gloucester in both plays, the spectators of Tate's play rely entirely on verbal report in order to construct the unseen place.

⁵⁸³ Tate (1681), Act 3, p.39.

⁵⁸⁴ Tate (1681), Act 4, p.41.

"Where am I?": Non-visual perception of place

Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus: A Tragedy* is prefaced by a gesture towards a playwright who, although "admirable everywhere" has specific characteristics as a result of being "one of the greatest Men in *Athens*".⁵⁸⁵ Although placing themselves into a lineage of Oedipus playwrights including Seneca and Corneille, Dryden and Lee consider Athens to be a remote fictional setting, arising in a theatre irreconcilably different from the Duke's Theatre in London: "But the Athenian Theater (whether more perfect than ours is not now disputed) had a perfection differing from ours".⁵⁸⁶ The Prologue includes reference to a remote time and place (WHEN *Athens* all the *Graecian* State did guide /And *Greece* gave Laws to all the World beside,⁵⁸⁷), and this explanatory attitude towards the setting of the play is vindicated at the beginning of the first scene, which opens with Alcander's uncertainty about where they are standing:

MEthinks we stand on Ruines; Nature shakes
About us; and the Universal Frame
So loose, that it but wants another push
To leap from off its Hindges. ⁵⁸⁸

Oedipus: A Tragedy, like *King Lear*, undermines the vision of the spectators and sighted characters onstage from the very beginning of the play, through an orchestrated disjunction between the visual picture onstage and its description in word-painting. Despite the Duke Theatre's reputation for spectacular effects, the confusion about the set on which the play opens unpicks

⁵⁸⁵ Dryden and Lee (1679) preface, 3r.

⁵⁸⁶ Dryden and Lee (1679) preface, 3r; Winn (1987), 314.

⁵⁸⁷ Dryden and Lee (1679), prologue, 4r.

⁵⁸⁸ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 5r.

the infallibility of the spectators' visual interaction with the action of the play.⁵⁸⁹ Diocles follows Alcander's description of the "Universal Frame" with an equally invisible and Senecan detail of the dark Sun.⁵⁹⁰ He personifies the sun beyond anything the audience might be able to see on the vista stage:

No Sun to chear us; but a Bloody Globe
That rowls above; a bald and Beamless Fire;
His Face o're-grown with Scurf: the Sun's sick too;
Shortly he'll be an Earth.⁵⁹¹

Alcander moves further from the visual sphere, personifying summer and "Blind Winter", and narrating their imagined meeting.⁵⁹² Invisible events continue to be narrated for the remainder of their dialogue, including various manners of death from the plague and the appearance of a "Troop of Ghosts".⁵⁹³ The challenge to the spectators' sight is compounded, however, when Creon enters, describing what he has seen offstage:

Betwixt the Bride and Bridegroom have I seen
The Nuptial Torch do common offices
Of Marriage and of Death.⁵⁹⁴

Creon's small-scale messenger speech, as well as recalling an offstage action in the past, foreshadows Jocasta's death after the revelation of incest at the end of the play, and is immediately followed by the play's first mention of Oedipus.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁸⁹ Orrell (1985) sees the innovation at the Duke's Theatre to be crucial to the development of an architecture for special effects at the Cockpit, Drury Lane. See also Milhous (1984), 41 on the "Dorset Garden spectaculars". On developments in scenography in this period see Mullin (1970); Tidworth (1973), 75ff, and in particular the illustrations; Baugh (2007) and Keenan (2017). On the spectacular effects of the Dryden and Lee *Oedipus* see Macintosh (2009), 57-64.

⁵⁹⁰ *Sen.Oed.1ff*, Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1.2, 1.1.5.

⁵⁹¹ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 5r.

⁵⁹² Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 5r.

⁵⁹³ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 6v.

⁵⁹⁴ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 6v.

⁵⁹⁵ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 6v.

This disjunction between seen place and described place is amplified with the entrance of the blind Tiresias and (as in Seneca), his guide Manto. Their conversation directly opposes aural and visual evidence for the geographical location of their scene. Tiresias asks the question outright: “Where are we?” and Manto replies using non-visual evidence:

Under Covert of a wall:
The most frequented once, and noisy part
Of *Thebes*, now midnight silence reigns ev'n here;
And grass untrodden springs beneath our feet.⁵⁹⁶

Seven characters have frequented the stage since the beginning of the scene, as if to emphasise that this is indeed the “noisy part of Thebes”, and Manto and Tiresias' conversation is punctuated by offstage sounds and a “tumultuous noise... Thrice echo'd”.⁵⁹⁷ This is the first we have heard of the wall mentioned here, however. Indeed, this visual detail does not seem to orient Tiresias within the city, since he immediately demands “a Sunny banck” on which to rest, a place Tiresias himself confirms does not exist, and that the spectators, having been told that the sun is no longer light, know to be impossible.⁵⁹⁸

This confusion about the physical setting of the play continues, prematurely including in Dryden and Lee's *Thebes* the grove of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. In Act 3, scene 2, Haemon seems convinced that the grove in which the scene takes place is the same one occupied by the furies in the *Oedipus at Colonus*:

I think the Furies,

⁵⁹⁶ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1. 8r.

⁵⁹⁷ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 8r.

⁵⁹⁸ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 8r. On the levels of staging in this play see Smith (1988), 94ff and Slaney (2016), 176ff.

To whom this Grove is hallow'd, have inspir'd you:
Now, by my soul, the holiest earth of *Thebes*
You have profan'd with war.⁵⁹⁹

And Adrastus confirms the relevance of this setting to the action of the play, noting that he would not have threatened Creon if he had known “the honours of this place”.⁶⁰⁰ The presence of the grove at Colonus in Thebes also brings forward Oedipus’ exile, at least in rhetorical terms, to before his blindness, to Corinth:

From *Thebes* and you my Curse has banish'd me:
From *Corinth* Fate.⁶⁰¹

However, the grove at Colonus is not the only intertextual place in Dryden and Lee’s *Thebes*. At the end of the fourth act, the blinded Oedipus foresees the collapse of the roof of the theatre building:

O that, as oft I have at *Athens* seen
The Stage arise, and the big Clouds descend;
So now in very deed I might behold
The pond'rous Earth, and all you marble Roof
Meet, like the hands of *Jove*, and crush Mankind.⁶⁰²

The ending Oedipus hopes for here, happens not in his own native Thebes: it is clearly the death of Milton's Samson at Gaza that is evoked here.⁶⁰³ Just as the Thebes of Oedipus’ blinding parallels the Thebes of Agave’s mis-seeing, so too does the Thebes of Dryden and Lee’s blind Oedipus recall both Sophocles’ Thebes and Colonus, as well as Milton's Gaza.

⁵⁹⁹ Dryden and Lee (1679), 3.1, 23v.

⁶⁰⁰ Dryden and Lee (1679), 3.1, 23v.

⁶⁰¹ Dryden and Lee (1679), 3.1, 28r.

⁶⁰² Dryden and Lee (1679), 4.1, 37v.

⁶⁰³ On Milton and Dryden see Ferry (1968) and on *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Samson Agonistes* cf. Hall and Macintosh (2005), 14-15.

The Furies to whom the dark grove at Thebes is sacred, according to Haemon, are also evidence of another means by which Dryden and Lee's Thebes unsettles the spectators' visual relationship with these theatrical places. Like in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the Furies have an invisible presence throughout Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus*. It is Eurydice who first acknowledges their presence, calling Creon the "foulest Fury".⁶⁰⁴ Eurydice also addresses Creon as "thou poyson to my eyes", and he agrees that he is "an offence to sight", highlighting the role of special vision in the characterisation of the Furies – a characterisation Sophocles achieves in the use of πάνθ' ὀρώσας to describe them.⁶⁰⁵

That it should be Eurydice who states the connection between the Furies and sight most clearly emphasises her own displacement from a myth of wrongful seeing, and recalls her second death as a result of her husband's gaze, famously *avidus videndi*.⁶⁰⁶ Dryden and Lee's Eurydice is the un-Sophoclean daughter of Laius, who Oedipus cannot marry because "T'is too like incest", but she nonetheless retains her Orphean past.⁶⁰⁷ Indeed, Eurydice herself insists on the connection to her previous existence in a myth of dangerous seeing, offering in her first line, "cast round your eyes", the opposite command to that given to her husband in Ovid's version of the myth: *ne flectat retro sua lumina*.⁶⁰⁸ These invisible mythical characters (Orpheus is mentioned throughout the play but does not appear) activate an unseen mythology that presents an alternative lens through which to 'view' the play. Adrastus offers a reading of this when he tells Oedipus "Let's gaze no more, the gods are humourous", advocating a

⁶⁰⁴ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 8v.

⁶⁰⁵ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 7r and 8v; Soph.*OC*.42.

⁶⁰⁶ see *Ov.Met*.10.56, see also *Virg.G*.453ff.

⁶⁰⁷ Dryden and Lee (1679), 1.1, 13v.

⁶⁰⁸ Dryden and Lee (1679), 7v; *Ov.Met*.10.51; that Eurydice in *Oedipus* has special knowledge of the Furies is unsurprising, they weep at her death in *Ov.Met*.10.45-6.

mythological reading (that is, one that takes into account the invisible presence of gods left over from the Greek versions of *Oedipus*) over a visual one.⁶⁰⁹ In Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus*, blindness challenges the spectators' sight across the play as a whole.⁶¹⁰

"Où suis-je?": Seeing through the illusion of place

If blindness deconstructs the necessary semiotic relationship between place and space in the English theatre, then this can be seen to an even greater extent in French drama, where the rhyming of "lieux" and "yeux" (particularly in Alexandrine couplets) makes sight the obvious sense with which to perceive place. This axiomatic relationship is exploited in Corneille's *Œdipe* (1659) notably in Act 5, scene 3, where Iphicrate explains to Phorbas that it is Oedipus, not Thésée who doubles as the murderer of Laius:

IPHICRATE: Ce n'est point lui, mais il vit en ces lieux.

PHORBAS: Nomme-le donc, de grâce.

IPHICRATE: Il est devant tes yeux.⁶¹¹

The use of the verb *vivre* here conveys another advantage French has in carrying over the associations between blindness and death that are apparent in ancient drama. Just as Greek drama embraces the ambiguity of seeing / knowing inherent in the verb form οἶδα, so too do French dramatists exploit the

⁶⁰⁹ Dryden and Lee (1679), 2.1, 14r.

⁶¹⁰ In comedies of this period, this challenge to the spectators' sight is used to comic effect, e.g. when the offstage cornhouse is set ablaze in Howard's (1696) comedy *The Blind Lady*, only Caeca is aware that there is a fire.

⁶¹¹ Corneille (1995) 1751-1752. See Biet (1999), 42 on the slippage of place in tragedy: "Le théâtre, au contraire de la loi, ne se contente pas de nommer les places de chaque individu, de dire que les enfants ne sont pas des parents et que les parents ne sont pas des enfants, que le roi n'est pas son sujet ou que les sujets ne sont pas le roi, il se mêle à brouiller les places". See also the politics of this period's interest in the figure of Oedipus in Biet (1994) and (1999).

convergence in forms of the present of *vivre* and the simple past of *voir*: “Qu’il vit et ne vit plus” Dymas hopes, forecasting both Oedipus’ blindness and his metaphorical death.⁶¹² Both Corneille and Voltaire’s *Oedipes* share a connection between blindness and the visual recognition of place, with place proving to be telling of Oedipus’ crime in Corneille, and Voltaire’s (1718) Oedipe learning of his crime and immediately forgetting where he finds himself (“Où suis-je?”).⁶¹³

The inability of the blind character to recognise the onstage place, however, is not simply an accident of morphology, nor is it a remnant of the Sophoclean Oedipus’ desire to leave both Thebes (unfulfilled) and the stage (fulfilled) immediately after his blinding. The difficulty of visually establishing place in the theatre space that had plagued early modern theatre-goers at least since Sidney in the 1570s, took on a particular resonance in neoclassical French tragedy. Theoretical understandings of representation, together with developments in scenography prioritised *vraisemblance* that was accessed almost exclusively by vision, a quality assumed to have been derived from Aristotle’s demand that tragedy observe a unity of place.⁶¹⁴ In fact neither Aristotle’s *Poetics* nor Horace’s *Ars Poetica* mentions a unity of place, though this becomes a founding principal of neoclassical rules for tragedy, with D’Aubignac and Corneille locked into an influential discussion about whether a number of different fictional places could be seen to occupy the theatrical space at the same time.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹² Corneille (1995), 1982; Other metaphorical uses of the language of sight and blindness are fully exploited by Corneille, cf. 1758.

⁶¹³ Voltaire (2002), 5.4, in Ligier-Degauque (2002).

⁶¹⁴ See Wygant (2007), 123ff. On the sceneographic and architectural developments that make this new mode of life-like representation possible see note 589.

⁶¹⁵ See Slaney (2015), 142 on the importance of vision to both Aristotle and Horace, and Wygant (2007), 123ff on this debate.

Though with varying degrees of orthodoxy to what they believe to be classical rules of tragedy derived ultimately from Aristotle, adherents to this neoclassical movement increasingly valued representation that seemed if not lifelike, at least visually consistent. The "fluid stages" of earlier theatre, where spectators could be called upon to transform the stage from Africa to Asia, and into the gates of Thebes, with only the addition of a sign bearing its name, were inimical to this new mode of representation, which relegated the spectators off the stage to take their seats now built for viewing rather than for being viewed.⁶¹⁶ The "Où suis-je?" of Voltaire's *Oedipe* is not only the expression of a newly blinded character's sightlessness, but also the beginning of the blinded king's recourse to an older, non-visual access to the fictional place around him.

Blind characters present, in this sense, a clear opposition to the new *vraisemblant* mode of theatrical representation, and this could be used to melodramatic ends. In Kenney's *The Blind Boy* (1808, adapted from the French version by Caigniez, *L'Illustre Aveugle*, 1806 and performed at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden), when we first meet the blind Edmond onstage he is teetering on the edge of a bridge over a river, unable to see either the place he is in or its immediate dangers.⁶¹⁷ Although it opens with a crisis that relies on Edmond's inferior awareness of place, throughout the play Edmond's non-visual mode of seeing proves to be superior to the visual spectatorship of the audience and the other characters. As soon as Edmond dismounts from his precarious (but

⁶¹⁶ On this change from fluid stages to representational scenography see Lopez (2002) on realism pre-dating the shift; Pelletier (2006), 77-80 on the relegation of the spectators from the stage and contingent "new relationship between the place of performance and the spectators" (80). See also Powell (1984), 15 on the candle light focussing the attention of the audience.

⁶¹⁷ Kenney (1808), 7. Subsequent references to page numbers of Kenney (1808) are given in brackets in the text.

unknowing) position on the bridge, he immediately perceives, using his ears, something that the sighted Elvina and the audience cannot: "Hark! Elvina, don't you hear the sound of the horn?" (8) Edmond asks Elvina, certain that the hunt must be approaching from the forest, as yet unseen: "There is certainly someone hunting in the forest" (8). Elvina and Oberto are not able to hear the hunt's approach, and conclude "surely you're mistaken, Edmond" (8). Eventually, the hunt comes close enough to the stage space that Oberto and Elvina are able to hear the horns, and have to agree that "Edmond is right" (8).⁶¹⁸

The spectators remain blind to the hunt, however, although they are reminded throughout the following scenes that it is approaching. Mouolino opens the next scene by standing on the bridge and calling Oberto to the edge of the stage space to see the hunt approach: "Neighbour, neighbour, come and see, come and see - the hunters are coming out of the wood, and seem to take this way." (9). It is not until Mouolino sees them "close by" (9) and begins to describe their actions in detail ("there they dismount", 9) that the stage directions demand "a horn is heard nearby", and the audience are able to hear it, as Edmond was able to do much earlier. Eventually the anticipated hunting party arrives in the stage space and, although it had only existed aurally previously, becomes a visible entity (10).

Like Samson, who equally seems untroubled by his blindness when he is offstage, the vision of the blind Edmond extends beyond the stage space and proves to be more accurate than that of the sighted characters and the spectators. Just as Edmond undermines the perception of the sighted characters

⁶¹⁸ Cf. Kenney (1808), 8-9 where Edmond, unprompted, thanks Elvina for the display of pink flowers around his window, adding "None of the attentions you lavish on me can ever escape my observation".

by 'seeing' the hunt arrive from offstage when they cannot, he undermines the dangers of the fictional space depicted onstage by his refusal (and inability) to see them. This is a direct confrontation with the doctrine of *vraisemblance*. Rather than simply mis-seeing, the blind character is able to see-through the *vraisemblant* illusionistic mode of representation, and to offer an alternative mode of spectatorship that reaches beyond the visual semiotics of the stage space. Blind characters reject the visual nature of *vraisemblance*, and their privileged access to a non-visual reading of the stage space directly confronts the popular neo-Aristotelian mode of spectacular theatre.

While practices such as the use of an inner stage (the scene) at theatres built in England during the 1660s like Drury Lane, Dorset Garden and Lincoln's Inn Fields increasingly rendered the invisible visible to the spectators, the position of the viewed and its precarious relationship (through the suspension of disbelief) to reality continued to shift.⁶¹⁹ The visual techniques of the Restoration playwrights may have made the theatre more *vraisemblable*, but the *vraisemblable* overlapped only rarely with what we would now call 'realism', and not at all with what we might call 'reality'. As audiences were required to do less and less construction of the visible, they responded not by passively accepting that the sets they saw in front of them really did represent the spaces they had previously been asked to imagine, but rather by attempting to see through the techniques involved in these illusionistic practices. One 1726 commentator fittingly uses the character of Oedipus as an example of the way that he had begun to see through increasing Restoration methods of illusion:

⁶¹⁹ On these new spectacular capabilities see Marsden (2000). On the scene and its relationship to the *ekkyklema* of Greek tragedy see Hall and Macintosh (2005), 18, and on the scene and its significance see Powell (1984), 42-3.

[Dryden and Lee's] Oedipus makes a beautiful Harangue, which he concludes, comically, by throwing himself out of the window... Nevertheless, it is not the actor that represents Oedipus, who throws himself out of the window, but a Man of paste-board, made like him, which is thrown down....⁶²⁰

Like Gloucester's seeing-through of Edgar's description when he refuses, initially, to believe that they have come to the cliff at Dover, audiences increasingly began to share with the blind characters the ability to control their own suspension of disbelief and to see through the illusion of onstage place. Baugh links this to the removal of spectators from the stage space and their relegation into the auditorium, noting that the audience no longer shared the same "condition of reality" as the actors.⁶²¹ But the credibility problem that Sidney had outlined much earlier had a long-lasting effect on audiences, who decoded both enthusiastically and often cynically the realistic representation of place that is made possible by scenographic development.

Just as the relationship between vision and reality is undermined by illusionistic theatre practices, so too is the seventeenth-century conviction that vision is the ultimate mode of experiencing *vraisemblant* illusion (articulated perhaps most strongly in d'Aubignac's gloss of 'spectateurs' as "regardans & non pas auditeurs") undermined by the alternative (and often privileged) mode of spectatorship offered by the blind character.⁶²² Underlining his initial tentativeness about the link between *vraisemblance* and vision, Corneille does not allow his Oedipe to return to the stage after he has been blinded.⁶²³ Instead,

⁶²⁰ Scholion to the *Letters* of Muraly, cited in Visser (1980), 86 and discussed in Slaney (2015), 119.

⁶²¹ Baugh (2007), 44.

⁶²² d'Aubignac (2001), 407.

⁶²³ Hubert (1985), 47 considers differences between the two plays to be so great as to call Corneille's play an "anti-Œdipe"

Dymas enters, recalling Oedipe's final words and informing those onstage that

Là, ses yeux arrachés par ses barbares mains
Font distiller un sang qui rend l'âme aux Thébains.⁶²⁴

Although the final words of the Corneille's *Oedipe* are Dymas' announcement that they will now leave the stage in order to witness Oedipe's self-inflicted blindness ("Allons voir cependant ce prince infortuné"), the spectators are never permitted to see the blinded Oedipus.⁶²⁵ D'Aubignac's condemnation of Corneille's *Oedipe* revolves not around these final moments, but around what he perceives to be the implausible backstory that Corneille concocts for Oedipe. We might also expect d'Aubignac to take equal issue with Corneille's relegation of an act of violence that might struggle to be represented in a *vraisemblable* sense were it performed onstage.⁶²⁶

For Corneille, this offstage space is a solution to the necessity of *vraisemblable* representation. He notes that the dramatist ought to consider whether the action "n'est point si cruelle, ou si difficile à représenter, qu'elle puisse diminuer quelque chose de la croyance que l'auditeur doit à l'histoire", and recommending that such events be staged in an offstage space.⁶²⁷ However, Corneille's use of d'Aubignac's rejected term "auditeur" to describe those seated in the audience betrays the importance of the final moments of *Oedipe*. The audience believe what they are told by Dymas because they experience it as if there were blind characters. Just as Edmond's heightened perception makes him aware of the hunt approaching offstage although neither he nor the spectators

⁶²⁴ Corneille (1995), 1995. Before this he has to tell them "Il n'est point mort". On this relationship between blindness and death see Chapter 2.

⁶²⁵ Corneille (1995), 2008.

⁶²⁶ See Harris (2014), 64.

⁶²⁷ Harris (2014), 80. Corneille (1660).

are able to see it, so the spectators of Corneille's *Oedipe* are invited to bear witness to something (with their ears) that is happening offstage, but that they cannot see. Spectators are invited to see through what is presented to them visually by seeing through the eyes (and ears) of the blind characters.

Seeing and Scenography in *Caesar Borgia*

At the end of Lee's *Caesar Borgia* (1680, roughly contemporaneous with Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus*), the behaviour of the blinded Seraphino, who is onstage only for a few brief moments, shows a profound scenographical shift in the relationship between viewed place and imagined place since the imagined Dover of 1606. After being blinded by the initially unwilling Alonzo, Seraphino is brought onto the stage to his father. He immediately performs a trick that, as we have seen, is a trope typical of blind characters: he 'sees' that his father is armed with a weapon, although he cannot see it ("O Father, you are arm'd, and have a Sword").⁶²⁸ As he enters, however, he pictures himself as part of a prolonged spatial simile - "But am like one benighted in a Wood" - which his father develops in response: "A Wood indeed; / But oh the Brambles there have us'd thee vilely". Unlike in the "flexible platform dramaturgy" of *King Lear*, by the time of *Caesar Borgia*, there is no threat that Seraphino will believe himself to be in these woods because he shows himself to be capable of a superior sight in spite of his blindness.⁶²⁹ More importantly, however, the ambiguity of Shakespeare's Dover cliffs scene is lacking here because developments in scenography mean that the

⁶²⁸Lee, *Caesar Borgia*, p.67 Though he misunderstands his father's intention, despite the fact that the persistent link between blindness and death portends his murder by his father.

⁶²⁹ Duxfield (2015), 82-3.

audience will no longer be called upon to imagine the presence of woods that are not physically present on the stage.

Although relatively early in these developments, *Caesar Borgia* shows some of the impatience with the techniques of the early fluid stages, that by the early nineteenth century would become commonplace. The *Times'* review of the 1828 Drury Lane pantomime *Queen Bee* is representative of this later disdain:

When our memory glances back a few years and we compare in the mind's eye the dingy, filthy scenery which was exhibited there - trees, like inverted mops, of a brick-dust hue - buildings generally at war with perspective - water as opaque as the surrounding rocks, and clouds not a bit more transparent - when we compare these things with what we now see, the alteration strikes us as nearly miraculous.⁶³⁰

Although sighted, Borgia claims a kind of second sight for himself, first accessed by hearing (he thinks he hears his guards approaching) then by sight. The guards that he hears, unlike the hunt that the blind Edmond hears, never arrive, and the place that he tells us he sees defies any kind of *vraisemblant* staging:

And see, the Heav'ns, and Earth, and Air are all
On fire: the very Seas, like Moulten-glass,
Rowl their bright Waves, and from the smoky deep
Cast up the glaring Dead: the Trumpet sounds,
And the swift Angels skim about the Globe
To summon all Mankind.⁶³¹

Though in *King Lear* it might have been possible to fill the Globe with angels simply by speaking of them, and to threaten to create a cliff simply by asking the audience to imagine it, in the Dorset Garden in 1680 Borgia's

⁶³⁰ *The Times*, 27 December 1828, cited in Baugh (2007), On Clarkson Stanfield and the diorama see Merwe (1979).

⁶³¹ Lee, *Caesar Borgia*, p.68. He continues by attempting to summon devils by name who do not arrive onstage. The conjuring speech acts discussed above in Chapter 3 no longer have their effects for sighted characters on the new stages of the Restoration where vision is what confers realistic representation.

summoning of place is unsuccessful. He repeatedly misunderstands what he is seeing around him in these final moments, even denying his own death when the spectators watch it happen in front of them; and it is confirmed in the final speech of the play that "The mighty soul there forc'd her furious passage, / And plunges now in deep Eternity". The sighted Borgia is not seeing through the onstage scenery here, as Edmond, Seraphino or Samson do, nor is he summoning up these places without visually representing them, as Edgar is able to toy with in *King Lear*. Throughout the change of place that he is describing, Borgia remains in the same place, his descriptions unwittingly referring not to an aural transferral from one place to another, or from one scene to the next, but rather to his own death.

Although blind characters continue to be permitted to see beyond the increasingly *vraisemblant* stages of the Restoration, the sighted Borgia is not, and his attempts to conjure a place to which the spectators will have no visual access prove unsuccessful. The alternative mode of spectatorship that blind characters offer in contradiction to the increasing insistence upon visually-accessed *vraisemblance* does not extend to sighted characters, and Borgia is betrayed by the spectators' vision of his death. The blind characters onstage in this period do not only give access to the older model of spectatorship that was being increasingly eroded by the insistence upon a new model of life-like representation; they also undermine both the new reliance on the visual in the establishment of place and the precarious illusions attendant on new technological advancements in scenography.

Chapter Five:

Blindness and Insight

When asked to comment on why people spend time with beautiful things, Aristotle reportedly replied that this was a question that only a blind man could answer (τυφλοῦ... τὸ ἐρώτημα).⁶³² Although this does not appear to be an accurate quotation from any of Aristotle's works, the philosopher does offer in the *Eudemian Ethics* one reason why a person with a visual impairment might be able to answer any given question better than a sighted person: οἱ τυφλοὶ μνημονεύουσι μᾶλλον.⁶³³ Since they lack one sense, Aristotle explains, οἱ τυφλοὶ are released from the distractions of sight and are able to access a different kind of knowledge through their superior faculty of memory.

The axiomatic relationship between blindness and knowledge is evident throughout the history of philosophy, but is inextricable from its polar opposite: the axiomatic relationship between vision and knowledge, or blindness and ignorance. It is to ὄψις that Plato, for example, ascribes all knowledge in the *Timaeus*, relating all of cosmogony to a visual relationship with the solar

⁶³² According to the biographer Diogenes Laertius: D.L.5.1.20.

⁶³³ Arist.*EE*.1248b. Though Aristotle does not understand blindness to be on a scale of visual impairment, using the mole as an example of complete privation in Arist.*Metaph*.1022b.

system.⁶³⁴ For the prophets of tragedy, however, it is blindness rather than vision that is the cause of their privileged knowledge.⁶³⁵

The twin metaphor for blindness, standing both for the acquisition of almost divine knowledge and for ignorance, is central to what Bolt understands to be a metanarrative of blindness in literature of the twentieth century, noting that "the senses of the blind oscillate between being superhuman and subhuman".⁶³⁶ Paulson places the changeability of the epistemological associations of blindness at the centre of the metaphor's popularity, explaining its role in philosophy:

... summoned to bear witness before the bar of philosophy, the blind man is of interest to his hearers for his prior sensory lack, for his negativity, for the unused portion of his understanding where certain acquisitions have not yet been made. He also interests them in so far as he can be cured, made suddenly like (and yet unlike) one of the seeing.⁶³⁷

Paulson relates the interest in the shifting relationship between vision and knowledge from the twentieth century onwards to medical developments (particularly cataract surgery), which enabled what had previously been matter for philosophical enquiry to be examined at an experiential level.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁴ *Pl.Ti.*47a. Elsewhere in philosophy the idea that what is seen is of greater epistemological importance than what is heard is apparent to Heraclit.B101a in Diels and Kranz (1951), and is remarked on by historians *Hdt.*1.8.2 and *X.Mem.*3.11.1 for example.

⁶³⁵ On these prophets see Chapter One, and most importantly *S.OT.*370-1 where Tiresias' blindness calls his sanity (and his hearing) into question for Oedipus, who fails to appreciate Tiresias' superior knowledge. Calame (1996), 22 connects the accusation that Tiresias lacks knowledge with his superior knowledge here.

⁶³⁶ Bolt (2014), 72. For the way that blindness can signal a sensory lack beyond the eyes as well as superhuman ability, see Lowenfeld (1974), 223 and Dobree and Boulter (1982) 113.

⁶³⁷ Paulson (1987), 26.

⁶³⁸ Paulson (1987), 15-16.

Paulson's assessment of the ocularnormative relationship between vision and knowledge relies on what Jay terms the "spectatorial epistemologies" of philosophy.⁶³⁹ It is not just philosophy, for which the acquisition of knowledge is figured as a visual process, but the ocularcentrism of literary modernism is also often remarked upon, related by Jay and others to "the Greek celebration of sight".⁶⁴⁰ For Bolt, this ocularcentric epistemology is a Victorian concern, echoing Flint's sense that the Victorians were "fascinated with the act of seeing, with the question of the reliability - or otherwise - of the human eye".⁶⁴¹ Bolt points to an increasing number of blind characters in the Victorian novel, especially by the 1890s when, as Gitter has noted, the embittered, ignorant blind man and the unknowing, innocent blind woman become almost stock characters.⁶⁴²

Through these characters a particular aspect of the relationship between blindness and knowledge becomes dominant in the literature of the 1890s: blindness as a metaphor for ignorance (and, by extension, other modes of helplessness). Dick Helder in Kipling's 1899 novel *The Light That Failed* repeatedly confuses night and day, and Alfred Yule's blindness in Gissing's 1891

⁶³⁹ Jay (1993), 150. Jonas (1966), 135-156 compares the relationship between knowledge and various senses and finds "the ancient claims for sight substantiated and at the same time qualified".

⁶⁴⁰ Jay (1993), 28-9. See the introduction to Blundell, Cairns, Craik and Rabinowitz (2013) for a historical approach to this ocularcentrism. On the Greeks as *Augenmenschen* vs. the importance of the word in Judaism and reason in the post-Cartesian tradition see Malten (1961) and Cairns (2005), 126ff.

⁶⁴¹ Bolt (2014); Flint (2000), 1. See also Altick (1978) on viewing in Victorian London. Altick (1978) begins with Bulwer-Lytton (1831): Victorian Britain is a "staring nation".

⁶⁴² Gitter (1999). For these characters see in this decade: Gissing's *New Grub Street*, James' *The Glasses*, Kipling's *The Light That Failed*, Kingsley's *Westward Ho* and Tagore's *The Gift of Sight*. Other Victorian novels that involve blind characters include: Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge* and *The Cricket on the Hearth*, Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. On real life blindness in this period see Carpenter (2010), 128-148.

New Grub Street brings with it the "debility of premature old age" and renders him unable to continue his work as a literary critic.⁶⁴³

The theatre of the 1890s is not exempt from this spectatorial epistemology, with Maeterlinck's (1890) *The Blind* serving as proof of symbolism's engagement with blindness as a metaphor for ignorance. The end of the decade, however, saw Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) return to the figure of Oedipus, who would prove to be key to modernism's restoration of the blindness-as-insight motif on a Greek model. Sight and insight are no longer equal opposites in the modernist theatre: instead, insight-in-blindness is repeatedly shown to be a more accurate means of perception than the vision of either the sighted characters or the spectators.

Another Oedipus - this time Sophoclean as well as Freudian - enshrines the metaphor of blindness-as-insight within theatrical understandings of blindness. Yeats' interest in the figure of Oedipus (prompted by preparations for what would eventually be his 1926 *Oedipus the King*, but was conceived as early as 1903) returns modernist theatre to the Greek model of blindness via his 'Irishing' of Jebb's version, through the incorporation of the blind bardic figure of the Irish saga.⁶⁴⁴ This chapter examines the shift that takes place at the end of the 1890s from Maeterlinck's blindness-as-ignorance to the Yeatsian blindness-as-insight, and looks to Beckett and Friel for the ways in which this metaphor of

⁶⁴³ Gissing (1891), p.414.

⁶⁴⁴ On the 'Irishing' of Oedipus, and the further 'Irishing' of Jebb's version, see Macintosh (2008), 529-539. On Jebb's commentary see Easterling (2005). Biographers have hinted at a Freudian influence beyond the obvious political motives for the production of a play at the time censored in England, e.g. Foster (2003), 1.334, Macintosh (2008), 528 and Hall and Macintosh (2005), 534-8. See Buchanan (2010), 94-5, who disregards Bloom and reads Yeats' allusion in the *Anima Hominis* 46 to "doctors of medicine" who "have discovered that certain dreams... are the day's unfulfilled desire" as a gesture towards *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

insight becomes dominant in the performance of blindness in the second part of the twentieth century.⁶⁴⁵

Maeterlinck and blindness as a symbol of ignorance

Maeterlinck's play *Les Aveugles* (1890) begins (on the page) with a lengthy description of the *très ancienne forêt septentrionale* in which the six blind men and six blind women find themselves.⁶⁴⁶ Before describing the men and women who will propel the rest of the play, Maeterlinck introduces the figure of a dead priest propped up against the trunk of an oak tree, which separates the blind men from the blind women:

Au milieu, et vers le fond de la nuit, est assis un très vieux prêtre enveloppé d'un large manteau noir. Le buste et la tête, légèrement renversés et mortellement immobiles s'appuient contre le tronc d'un chêne énorme et caverneux. La face est affreusement pâle et d'une immuable lividité de cire où s'entr'ouvrent les lèvres violettes (75).⁶⁴⁷

Whether on the page or on the stage, the priest in *Les Aveugles* is an epistemological marker of difference: the audience see the body and recognise it as the body of the priest, the very same priest that the blind characters will spend the play looking for. The absence of the priest who has led the blind characters to the forest preoccupies the rest of the play, creating an epistemological imbalance since the information that the blind characters

⁶⁴⁵ For the relationship between Maeterlinck, Yeats and Synge see Worth (1978), 140-157.

⁶⁴⁶ Maeterlinck (1892), 75. See Worth (1985) on the performance of Maeterlinck. Subsequent references to page numbers in Maeterlinck (1892) are given in brackets in the text.

⁶⁴⁷ The death-like description of the late priest continues with details about his eyes, hair and hands.

require is permanently visibly available to the spectators in the middle of the stage space.

The characters begin the play by posing a series of questions, indicating that their sightlessness excludes them from knowing where they are ("il faudrait savoir où nous sommes", 77), what time it is ("Quelle heure est-il? / Je ne sais pas - Personne ne le sait", 90), or whose footsteps they are hearing by the end of the play. Throughout, their blindness indicates ignorance and vulnerability, emphasised by the ocularcentric conception of time and space in the play (they are unable to tell whether it is midnight or midday because although they hear the chimes of a nearby clock, they cannot tell whether it is light or dark). These questions will not be answered in the play, which, as McGuinness points out, will instead focus on the twelve blind characters attempting to find non-visual methods by which to perceive the space around them: "the duration of *Les Aveugles* is the time taken for the purely seen to become physically touched".⁶⁴⁸

Even as information gradually reveals itself through touch as well as other senses, the blind characters do not gain the knowledge that they require to understand where they are and what has happened to the priest. The play maintains the ocularnormative assumption that only vision would allow the characters to experience the space accurately.⁶⁴⁹ The Premier Aveugle-Né offers hunger as a way to perceive time ("Moi, je sais qu'il est tard quand j'ai faim, et j'ai faim", 91) with some success, but the alternative sense perception that he offers is rejected by the Troisième Aveugle-Né, who demands instead a further attempt

⁶⁴⁸ McGuinness (2000), 179.

⁶⁴⁹ Bolt (2014) rightly points out the ableism of the philosophical point that Maeterlinck is using the symbol of blindness to make here.

at vision: "Mais regardez le ciel; vous y verrez peut-être quelque chose!" (91).⁶⁵⁰ Other senses offer imperfect attempts to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the play, with the *Le Plus Vieil Aveugle* confirming that the resonance of their voices implies that it is late in the evening ("Je crois plutôt qu'elle résonne ainsi parce que c'est le soir", 92); and two of the other characters claim to feel the moon's brightness on their hands and to hear the stars in the sky. Even their hearing cannot bring them to knowledge, however, since they are unable to understand what they hear ("Je ne connais pas la nature de ce bruit", 93); and touch only serves to further reinforce the ocular normative relationship between sight and knowledge: "les yeux en savent plus que les mains" (107).

Although only the baby in *Les Aveugles* is sighted, all of the characters use the language of sight to articulate knowledge. Their attempts to discover what has happened to the priest are repeatedly spoken of as attempts to see ("Allons voir!", 126) and characters focus each others' attention by demanding: "regardez!" (141). Knowledge remains visually accessed, as is expressed in the blind characters' helplessness as well as in their recurring interest in what they have seen (and known) in the past before they were blind. Bolt relates this to the play's interest in aesthetic concerns:

... the play's fixation on what has never been seen is indicative of the notion that aesthetic qualities are perceived by exclusively visual means and as such has epistemological implications.⁶⁵¹

When the dog arrives and guides the *Premier Aveugle-Né* to the corpse of the priest at the centre of the stage, the blind characters become aware that it is the

⁶⁵⁰ And later smell: "J'ai senti des fleurs dans le vent" (115).

⁶⁵¹ Bolt (2014), 98. Feeney (2007) also considers the literary trope that excludes the blind from access to aesthetics, but does not include Maeterlinck in his discussion.

body of the priest and, eventually, that he has died. Still, however, they seek visual confirmation. The Premier Aveugle-Né wonders whether he had been ill, and Le Plus Vieil Aveugle responds "Nous ne savions rien... Nous ne l'avons jamais vu" (130).

The play ends shortly after the revelation that the body of the priest lies at the centre of the stage, as the blind characters attempt to interpret what they understand to be the footsteps of someone approaching. McGuinness comments "the play must end when the characters possess the same amount of knowledge as the spectator"; and although the balance of knowledge is not completely equalised, Maeterlinck restricts the visual knowledge of the audience in the final moments. Unlike the problem posed by the beginning of the play, to which the audience knew the answer, by the end of the play neither the blind characters nor the audience know who is approaching. Although the blind characters repeatedly refer to the footsteps that they can hear, the stage directions indicate only the actions of the blind characters and the baby. The final stage direction, "Silence. L'enfant pleure plus désespérément" (142), provides the audience with no more knowledge than is available to the blind characters.

Maeterlinck's creation of an ignorant audience is not simply a symbolist refraction of the metaphor of blindness onto the sighted spectator, but fits into a broader Victorian pattern. Earlier in Victorian drama, and especially in melodrama, it is precisely the ignorance of the blind character that marks him or her out for a sympathetic audience response.⁶⁵² This is apparent in Kenney's (1808) melodrama *The Blind Boy*, where an emotional reaction is demanded of

⁶⁵² The link that Holmes (2001) makes between blindness and inherited venereal disease no doubt contributes to the perceived helplessness of the blind character.

the audience at precisely the moment when Edmond's ignorance is at its most dangerous - as he teeters vulnerably at the edge of a precipice over a fast flowing river. The same model remains popular four decades later in Wilkins' (1850) *The Blind Wife*, in which Millicent's asexuality marks her as both unknowing and unfit for marriage.⁶⁵³ The final moments of *Les Aveugles* allow the spectators to participate in the state of epistemological uncertainty for which blindness is a symbol in the play.⁶⁵⁴

Blindness and insight via the search for an Irish Oedipus

When Yeats' *Oedipus the King* was eventually performed in 1926, Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear that he had succeeded in making the play "bare and natural, like a saga".⁶⁵⁵ In fact, Yeats' process of making Oedipus "like a saga" had been ongoing since at least 1903, when he first mentioned the project in a letter to Gilbert Murray. When Murray refused to translate the play (because "it is a play with nothing Irish about it") for performance at the Abbey, Yeats set about adapting existing translations of the play, among them Gogarty's, and eventually Jebb's, "altering every sentence that might not be intelligible on the Blasket Islands".⁶⁵⁶ The envisaged production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* had obvious political motives: the English stage subject to the laws of censorship could not (until Max

⁶⁵³ On *The Blind Boy* and *The Blind Wife* see Holmes (2001). On *The Blind Boy* see Larrissy (2007), 14ff, who notes that Edmond does have an auditory compensation for his blindness (by which he escapes death) but it is his ignorance that drives the plot of the play.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. Mallarmé's fears about the performance of Maeterlinck's text: "Je crains que Maeterlinck n'ait tort de livrer *Les Aveugles* au Théâtre Libre, c'est dénaturer cette œuvre toute de lecture", see Mirbeau (2005), 295.

⁶⁵⁵ Letter to Olivia Shakespeare 7 December 1926, in Kelly (2002), vol.4. See Foster (2003), 338.

⁶⁵⁶ Yeats, 'Plain Man's Oedipus', *New York Times*, 15 January 1933. See Clark and McGuire (1989), 37.

Reinhardt's production, using Gilbert Murray's text, in 1912) stage the play, and when Yeats' version was eventually performed in 1926 the phrase "we are amid our troubles" had obvious political weight.⁶⁵⁷ But Yeats' adaptation of Jebb goes much further than his initial description of the project to Lady Gregory, and by 1912 he writes that he is "turning it into an Abbey play".⁶⁵⁸

Altering the language of Jebb may have contributed to the process of turning *Oedipus* into an Abbey play, but Yeats wrote much earlier of the close relationship between the Irish and the chorus of Greek tragedy in the *Samhain* of 1904, shortly after refusing to stage a *Hippolytus* at the Abbey on the grounds that it would "stray away from Irish subjects".⁶⁵⁹ Crucial to Yeats' victorious comparison between his *Oedipus the King* and saga poetry, however, was the Irishing of Oedipus' blindness at the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. As Larrissy points out, the Celtic blind bard figure is usually given its origins in Macpherson's *Ossian*, but in fact goes back at least to 1584, when Richard Stanihurst writes of the blind harpists in *De Rebus in Hibernia Gestis*.⁶⁶⁰ The second sight that Yeats (with him Synge and later Beckett and Friel) identifies in the blind figure is not mentioned in Stanihurst. As early as 1634, Geoffry Keating described Stanihurst's neglect of the blind harpists' capacity for insight as slanderous in his Irish-language history, *Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn*.⁶⁶¹ Turning *Oedipus* into a saga, for

⁶⁵⁷ See Macintosh (1994), 13 and (2008), 545 and Walton (2002), 3, See also Walton (2002), 10 on the "consciously Irish setting" of Yeats' *Oedipus at Colonus*, and Macintosh (2008) on the performance history of *Oedipus* in England, and the incest motif.

⁶⁵⁸ Letter to Lady Gregory, 7 January 1912, in Kelly (2002), vol. 4. On the transformation of Jebb see Macintosh (2008), 530.

⁶⁵⁹ Letter to Lady Gregory, 2 January 1904, in Kelly (2002), vol. 3. Jebb had not only provided the text for the Cambridge Greek Play production of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* in 1887, but was also himself a Dubliner. See Macintosh (1994), 118-120 and (2008), 529, Grab (1965), 162-215, Arkins (1990), 128-133.

⁶⁶⁰ Larrissy (2007), 36-63.

⁶⁶¹ Keating (1902), 40.

Yeats, then, meant not only adapting the translation of Jebb, but also assimilating Oedipus' blindness to a wider Irish tradition.⁶⁶²

Yeats adapts Jebb in the moments following the return of the blinded Oedipus onstage in ways that make blindness synonymous with knowledge. First, by emphasising Oedipus' active knowledge where both Sophocles and Jebb present the knowledge as passively acquired. Yeats' Oedipus recognises his friends and exclaims, "I know that you are there; blind though I am, I recognise your voice", making his hearing a direct equivalent of his sight, whereas for Jebb this knowledge is passive: "Thy presence is not hid from me", reflecting Sophocles' οὐ γάρ με λήθεις.⁶⁶³ Yeats' Oedipus later claims that he knows that Creon will give Jocasta an appropriate burial ("I know that you will give her that lies within such a tomb as befits your own blood", 515), an assurance that Jebb's Oedipus does not share, instead demanding that Creon "give to her who is within such burial as thou thyself wouldst" (1447-8).⁶⁶⁴ And, just as hearing and sight had been made direct equivalents in Yeats' version of Oedipus' recognition of the chorus, touch and sight become equivalents when he asks to see his children: "I would believe, could I touch them, that I still saw them" (515). For Jebb, by contrast, touch indicates only presence, "Ah could I but once touch them with my hands, I should think that they were with me, even as when I had sight...." (1469-70).⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶² For Irish-language engagements with Classics more broadly, see Stanford (1976), 73-89; and Currie (forthcoming).

⁶⁶³ Yeats (1934), 513. Jebb (1883) 1325, S.O.T.1325. Subsequent references to page numbers of Yeats (1934) and line numbers of Jebb (1883) and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* are given in brackets in the text.

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. S.O.T.1447-8: τῆς μὲν κατ' οἴκουσ ἀυτὸς δὲν θέλεισ τάφον / θοῦ: καὶ γὰρ ὀρθῶσ τῶν γε σῶν τελεῖσ ὕπερ.

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. S.O.T.1469-70: χερσί τᾶν θιγῶν / δοκοῖμ' ἔχειν σφᾶσ, ὡσπερ ἠνίκ' ἔβλεπον.

Where Yeats makes cuts to Jebb's lengthier speeches, these too reflect a subtle focus on the knowledge that Oedipus has acquired in his blindness. Oedipus' long speech in Sophocles and Jebb 1370-1416 becomes in Yeats' version two much shorter speeches. The first deals with the question of why he blinded himself; and the second reworks Sophocles' and Jebb's apostrophe to Cithaeron, Corinth, and other places that Oedipus has visited. Sophocles' and Jebb's long apostrophe to the places that received Oedipus

Alas Cithaeron, why hadst thou a shelter for me? When I was given to thee, why didst thou not slay me straightway, that so I might never have revealed my source to men? Ah Polybus - ah, Corinth, and thou that wast called the ancient house of my fathers [...]. O ye three roads, and thou secret glen - thou coppice and narrow way where three paths meet... (1391-1399),⁶⁶⁶

is in Yeats' version divorced from Cithaeron and Corinth. In Yeats, the apostrophised places stand alone as a list of moments that Oedipus can now reinterpret according to the knowledge that he gains in his blindness:

O three roads, O secret glen; O coppice and narrow way where the three roads meet; you that drank up the blood I spilt, the blood that was my own, my father's blood... (514).

The knowledge that Yeats' Oedipus receives seems to go some way to redeeming his blindness. In his response to the chorus' assertion that "You were better dead than blind", Yeats' Oedipus counters "No, it is better to be blind" (513) the opposite sentiment to Jebb's "Show me not at large that these things are not best done thus: give me counsel no more" (1369-70).⁶⁶⁷ The redemption of blindness for Yeats' Oedipus persists into the final moments of the tragedy,

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. S.O.T.1391-99.

⁶⁶⁷ Cf. S.O.T.1370-1371: ὡς μὲν τάδ' οὐχ ᾧδ' ἔστ' ἄριστ' εἰργασμένα / μή μ' ἐκδίδασκε, μηδὲ συμβούλευ' ἔτι.

where the past tense in Jebb ("was a man most mighty", 1525) becomes in Yeats' version the present tense (albeit in reported speech) "That is a fortunate man" (517).⁶⁶⁸

These subtle alterations to Jebb's Sophocles shift the focus onto the knowledge that Oedipus now enjoys in his blindness, but they also answer a question that the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* leaves open (though an answer is provided by the *Oedipus at Colonus*): the question of whether or not Oedipus will eventually go into exile as he desires, or remains in the house into which Creon sends him at the end of the play (as in Euripides' *Phoenissae*). Yeats reduces the number of times that Oedipus makes his demand for exile from Creon. In Jebb's (and Sophocles') version, Oedipus first asks the chorus to send him into exile (1340-1346) and then, after Creon's entrance, makes a similar request of the new king (1436-7); and repeats his request again at 1449-1451. Yeats' Oedipus asks the chorus ("Hide me somewhere out of this land for God's sake", 514), followed by a command that he makes to Creon only once, as an imperative:

Banish me from this country. I know that nothing can destroy me,
for I wait some incredible fate; yet cast me upon Cithaeron, chosen
by my father and my mother for my tomb (516).

In Yeats' version, Oedipus does not seem to doubt the efficacy of his demand to Creon, and he does not repeat it. In this final conversation with Creon in Yeats' version, both Oedipus and Creon are convinced that the god will eventually send

⁶⁶⁸ Translating the imperfect ἦν in S.O.T.1525.

Oedipus into exile. Yeats' Creon replies: "I would not say it if I did not mean it" (517), when asked whether he is certain that Oedipus will be banished.⁶⁶⁹

Yeats' Creon is less ambivalent, and this, coupled with an Oedipus who knows that he does not need to ask for exile twice, turns the blinded king's pleas for exile into a kind of prophecy (they only become prophetic in Sophocles and Jebb when they are realised at the beginning of the *Oedipus at Colonus*). Jebb notes the double-reading of Sophocles' line here:

His words here could mean: 'No, I do not promise for I am not wont to speak vain words when I lack knowledge' [...] i.e. I cannot tell how Apollo may decide. But I now think that, on the whole, it suits the context better to take them as expressing consent.⁶⁷⁰

Whether Yeats simply takes Jebb's note seriously, or has in mind the prophecy that accompanies blind bards in Irish mythology, that is of such importance to Keating, is uncertain. However, he would return to this model of Hiberno-Hellenic blindness with the second sight of the blind characters in his *Mythologies* and in the non-classical blind characters elsewhere in his drama and poetry.⁶⁷¹

Insight in Yeats' *On Baile's Strand* and Synge's *The Well of the Saints*

In 1904 and 1905, when the early stages of Yeats' plans for *Oedipus the King* took shape, two plays featuring blind characters were staged at the Abbey: Yeats' *On*

⁶⁶⁹ Creon in Jebb (1883), 1520 registers a greater uncertainty, responding "'Tis not my wont to speak idly what I do not mean".

⁶⁷⁰ Jebb (1887), 1520.

⁶⁷¹ On the relationship between Yeats' theatre and his other work (especially the prose work *A Vision*), see O'Donoghue (2006), 110 and Macintosh (2008), 531-2, who also notes the blind poet Anthony Raftery as a source of the relationship between blindness and wisdom from the 1890s. On the role of Oedipus particularly at the end of Yeats' career, see Arkins (1990), 124-141.

Baile's Strand (1904) and Synge's *The Well of the Saints* (1905).⁶⁷² Although Maeterlinck may have influenced Yeats in his symbolist espousal of anti-illusionistic theatre, the two interpret the metaphor of blindness in starkly opposing ways.⁶⁷³ The opening lines of *On Baile's Strand* are a denial of the simplistic equation in Maeterlinck's play between blindness and ignorance: "What a clever man you are though you are blind! There's nobody with two eyes in his head that is as clever as you are", the Fool exclaims, proceeding with a list of topics about which the blind man has extraordinary knowledge.⁶⁷⁴

However, it is not simply the relationship between blindness and ignorance in Maeterlinck that Yeats disavows, but the specific Maeterlinckian deficit of knowledge about the stage space. As we have seen, the opening stage direction in *Les Aveugles* informs the reader (and visible presence on the stage informs the spectators) that the body of the priest is centre stage. Yeats introduces what seems at first to be a similar distinction: his stage is full of chairs and the reader is informed that "One of these chairs, which is towards the front of the stage, is bigger than the others" (246). For a moment it seems that this unseen object on the stage, like the body of the priest, will remain unknown to the Blind Man in Yeats' play (when he first touches it he says only "Ah!", 247). Soon, however, Yeats' Blind Man is able to recognise it by touch and to invest it with meaning: "I know the big chair. It is to-day the High King Conchubar is coming. They have brought out his chair" (247).

⁶⁷² See Macintosh (2011) 98 on Tiresias' ability to predict the political fate of Ireland as early as Bartholomew's 1845 translation of *Antigone*, and 100-102 on the saga tradition again 'Irishing' a Greek tragedy about the Labdacid family in *Deidre of Sorrows*, performed at the Abbey in 1907, on which see further Macintosh (1994) 60-1, 143-5.

⁶⁷³ On the relationship between Maeterlinck and Yeats see Worth (1978), Cnudde-Knowland (1984) and Rose (1989).

⁶⁷⁴ Yeats (2008), 246. Subsequent references to page numbers in Yeats (2008) are given in brackets in the text.

While the blind characters of *Les Aveugles* remain unable to identify the priest until the very end of the play or to tell the time by non-visual means, the Blind Man of *On Baile's Strand* has special knowledge of this prop, and is able to draw from it the precise date and occasion. Touch and hearing (later in the same scene the Blind Man identifies Cuchulain's steps by sound alone: "There is a step outside - Cuchulain's step", 249) are able, in Yeats' play, to convey knowledge equivalent to that conveyed by sight and occasionally even to surpass vision. When Cuchulain and Concubar arrive in the wings, similarly, the Blind Man is able to identify them long before the Fool or the sighted audience. Responding only to "a murmur of voices in the distance" the Blind Man declares "There's somebody coming... It is Cuchulain is coming. He's coming back with the High King" (250). On hearing that it is Cuchulain who is arriving, the Fool leaves the stage by the side door and an offstage sequence takes place, prolonging the knowledge deficit between the Blind Man's identification of the two characters who remain offstage, and the spectators' sighted recognition of them: "While they are still outside, Cuchulain's voice is heard raised in anger" (251).⁶⁷⁵

The Fool, though sighted, is repeatedly reminded that he has "no wits to understand such things" (247), and even Cuchulain lacks knowledge of the story that the Blind Man begins to tell ("How would he know that with his head in the clouds?", 249). The Blind Man by contrast presents his knowledge without explanation ("I know who that young man is", 248, and "I know whose son it is", 249); and when the Fool asks to know who the secret young man in the story is, the Blind Man reveals that "it flows in upon me that it is Aoife's son" (249),

⁶⁷⁵ Cf. the arrival of the dog in Maeterlinck where the audience are the first to realise who it is and the blind characters' inability to identify the steps at the end of *Les Aveugles*.

presenting his knowledge as if it were superhuman and inexplicable. Even the sighted Conchubar seems to consider vision and hearing to be epistemologically equal methods of perception, when he notes that Cuchulain was unaware of the young man's arrival because "He came to land / While you were somewhere out of sight and hearing" (251).⁶⁷⁶

In the final moments of the play, the question of whether knowledge gained by sight or insight in blindness is the most epistemologically trustworthy resurfaces. The Fool confronts the Blind Man, claiming that the story of Cuchulain's demise at the hands of his own son must be false:

That Blind Man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That Blind Man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him (266).

It is only in the final 100 lines of the play that it is revealed that not only is the unidentified young man who has been killed the son of Cuchulain ("It is his own son he has slain", 267), but that this knowledge will lead directly to Cuchulain's death. Cuchulain rushes from the stage after hearing the news and runs straight into the sea (an offstage event described by the Fool who is standing in the doorway looking out, 268-9). Cuchulain suffers from a momentary lapse of vision and attacks the waves as if they were Conchubar ("He sees King Conchubar's crown on every one of them", the Blind Man informs us, 268), but the play ends with the Blind Man's prophetic tale proven to be correct, as Cuchulain dies ("the waves have mastered him", the Fool reports, 269). As he leaves the stage,

⁶⁷⁶ Cf. later in the play when Conchubar is unable to identify the Young Man by sight alone and demands that he speak his name: Yeats (2008), 259.

Cuchulain confirms a link between non-visual perception and the acquisition of special knowledge, asking "Did you know, old listener at doors?"(267).

The Blind Man's confidence in his own prophecy echoes Yeats' Oedipus at the end of *Oedipus the King*, whose refusal to repeat his demand for exile as Sophocles' and Jebb's Oedipuses do hints at a confidence that his demand will be revealed eventually as prophetic.⁶⁷⁷ It also, however, refashions the blind harpists that Keating describes. The Blind Man of *On Baile's Strand* prophesies through storytelling; and prophetic knowledge (even of sighted characters) is figured in the play as a kind of second sight, as is apparent when the three women prophesy ("the Ever-living have shown me what's to come", 264). Though the women themselves are sighted, they are accompanied at their entrance by "harp-players" (255) and what they see is prophetic rather than literal, recalling the blind harpists of Irish folklore.⁶⁷⁸

In his preface to Synge's *The Well of the Saints*, written during rehearsals for its performance at the Abbey, it was precisely this seeing beyond reality that Yeats praised in Mary and Martin Doull:

... those two blind people of *The Well of the Saints* are so transformed by the dream that they choose blindness rather than reality. He tells us of realities, but he knows that art has never taken more than its symbols from anything that the eye can see or the hand measure.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁷ For other links with Greek tragedy, see Macintosh (1994) and (2016).

⁶⁷⁸ Three female prophets (Moirai, Parcae, Norns etc) are a common feature of Indo-European myth, as discussed by West (2007), 379-386, though he also mentions a pattern of seven spinning goddesses in an early Irish text, the hymn of *Fer fío macc Fabri*.

⁶⁷⁹ Synge (1995), 55. Subsequent references to page numbers in Synge (1995) will be given in brackets in the text. For Synge, the relationship between blindness and knowledge had real-life relevance. In his diaries *The Aran Islands* (1907), Synge recall with affection his blind Irish teacher on Inishmaan and other visually impaired Gaelic speakers, see Synge (2008), 2: "'A little after midday when I was coming back one old

In *The Well of the Saints*, as in *On Baile's Strand*, auditory and haptic knowledge is epistemologically equal to vision. Like the Blind Man's recognition of the larger chair in *On Baile's Strand*, *The Well of the Saints* begins with the blind characters (Mary and Martin DouL) asserting their knowledge of the stage space and time:

MARY DOUL: What place are we now, Martin DouL?

MARTIN DOUL: Passing the gap.

MARY DOUL: [*raising her head*] The length of that! Well, the sun's coming warm this day if it's late autumn itself (59).

The blind characters, moreover, accurately confirm the spatial knowledge provided to the reader in the stage direction ("low loose wall at the back with gap near centre", 59) and to the spectator in the onstage set. Throughout this opening scene hearing and vision are shown to be direct equivalents. Martin DouL teases his wife that although he does not know what she looks like, he can draw an accurate picture from her voice since "for the time I was a young lad, and had fine sight, it was the ones with sweet voices were the best in face"(59). Like the Blind Man in Yeats' play, the blind couple in *The Well of the Saints* are able to identify characters who enter by the sound of their steps ("There's someone coming on the road", and later "I know it when Molly Byrne's walking in front", 61); and their knowledge of the characters' identities predates the audience's own by several lines (Martin's "That's Molly Byrne, I'm thinking" comes before her entrance onto the stage, 64). Later in the same scene Timmy comments on the knowledge that the blind characters acquire by touch: "for the like of you do have great knowledge in the feeling of your hands" (66).

half-blind man spoke to me in Gaelic". On Synge's Irish language skills, see Kiberd (1993).

Synge's play, unlike Yeats', however, grants sight to the blind characters at the end of Act One and throughout Act Two. After the saint has cured them of their blindness, what remains of Act One is taken up with the now sighted pair struggling to recognise each other. This recovery of sight is repeatedly spoken of as a deficit of knowledge ("He doesn't know her at all", Timmy says, 69). The saint comments that they have been given vision but not sense ("May the Lord who has given you sight send a little sense into your heads", 71); and this is confirmed in Act Two when the sighted Martin is attacked by Timmy after his attempt to seduce Molly Byrne ("He's no sense surely", 80). At the end of Act Two, Mary and Martin lose their sight again, but when the priest returns in Act Three they actively avoid his second attempt to cure them because "it's more sense is in a blind man, and more power maybe than you're thinking at all" (93).⁶⁸⁰ As soon as their vision fades, the two blind characters make much of their return to the non-visual acquisition of knowledge that sustained them in Act One, with Mary Doul describing the landscape as she now perceives it:

There's the sound of one of them twittering yellow birds do be coming in the spring-time from beyond the sea, and there'll be a fine warmth now in the sun, and a sweetness in the air... (86)

Both Yeats' *Blind Man* and Synge's *The Well of the Saints* tell stories of unseen events that prove to be true. Whereas in *On Baile's Strand* the story that

⁶⁸⁰ Their attempts to avoid cure also contain a kind of religious scepticism. Throughout the play their blind knowledge is shown to be greater than the knowledge of the saint (Mary Doul exclaims on his first entrance that "Well, the saint's a simple fellow, and it's no lie", 65) and the play dramatises a failed miracle. It also overturns the relationship between sin and blindness: although the priest calls Martin and Mary "blind sinners" throughout the play, it is when they are sighted that they are at their most violent, adulterous, lazy and irreligious. On the religious scepticism of this play see Collins (2016), 186 who sees the saint allowing "Synge to demonstrate that the efficacy of Catholic ritual is predicated on spurious beliefs" and Burke (2009), 48 who reads in this play "overtones of the evangelical Protestant tradition within which the young Synge had been raised".

the Blind Man tells is contested until his foresight proves accurate at the end of the play, in *The Well of the Saints* the anonymous tale of a saint who can cure blindness is reported by Timmy:

Did you ever hear tell of a place across a bit of the sea... There's a green ferny well, I'm told, behind of that place, and if you put a drop of water out of it, on the eyes of a blind man, you'll make him see as well as any person is walking the world (62).

Although the sighted Timmy narrates this story, it is only Mary and Martin who are able to comprehend it through their knowledge that making a blind person see "as well as any person is walking the world" means reducing not increasing their capacity to perceive knowledge.⁶⁸¹

Both plays elevate the non-visual perception of the blind characters beyond the vision of the sighted characters and the spectators, who are often the last to become aware of the identity of an offstage presence. Although this is an inversion of the paradigm of blindness as ignorance established in Maeterlinck, it also constitutes an engagement with the aesthetics of symbolism. The final line of Yeats' preface to Synge's play is a programmatic statement about the Abbey Theatre's own aesthetic. After a description of the non-illusionistic scenery ("in one or two flat colours and without detail", 56), Yeats concludes that this is appropriate because: "we know that we are seeking to express what no eye has ever seen" (56). Here, we detect a clear debt to Maeterlinck on the part of Irish modernism and of Yeats in particular.⁶⁸² Maeterlinck denies his characters the ability to have a visual relationship with the material world of the stage, whilst

⁶⁸¹ See Feeney (2007), 62 who reads this preference for what he calls "transcendence" over vision into Martin and Mary's encounters with the saint throughout the play.

⁶⁸² See Ingelbien (2005), 184 on how the relationship between Yeats and Maeterlinck destabilises national categories of modernism (e.g. English modernism).

reinforcing the ocularnormative understanding that they would only be able to know the world around them if they could see it. Yeats and Synge, in contrast, develop this rejection of materialism further by granting an understanding of the staged world only to those who cannot see it.

Endgame and the knowledge of Beckett's blind spectators

As early as *Human Wishes* (a fragment of an early play about the life of Samuel Johnson), Beckett equates hearing and sight.⁶⁸³ Worth notes Beckett's general interest in Greek tragedy, as well as his attendance at productions of Yeats' Oedipus plays at the Abbey while an undergraduate at Trinity College, Dublin in 1926 and 1927.⁶⁸⁴ Despite being blind, Beckett's Mrs Williams is aware of what the other characters onstage are doing, and reminds them: "I may be old, I may be blind, halt and maim, I may be dying of a pituitous defluxion, but my hearing is unimpaired".⁶⁸⁵ Cohn comments that "In later plays, Beckett exploits blindness more dramatically", but this attention to non-visual knowledge in *Human Wishes* links Mrs Williams with the earlier generation of Irish-Greek blind characters, Yeats' Oedipus and the blind characters of *On Baile's Strand* and *The Well of the Saints*.⁶⁸⁶ In *Rough for Theatre I* (1950s, published 1976 in English) the blind musician figure A explains, in the final moments of the play, that "I once had a

⁶⁸³ *Human Wishes* is published in Beckett (1984) by Ruby Cohn, to whom Beckett had presented the abandoned draft. On the play see Cohn (1980), 143-62, Pilling (1997), 163-6, Sidnell (2010), 36-49 and Worth (2002), 304-8.

⁶⁸⁴ Worth (2004).

⁶⁸⁵ Beckett (1984), 156

⁶⁸⁶ Cohn (2002), 47. When Mrs Williams shows her poetic skill later in the fragment by declaring a quatrain to Miss Carmichael, her blindness becomes even more closely aligned with the blind harpists that Yeats' Oedipus drew on.

little harp".⁶⁸⁷ Although the pair of characters in *Rough for Theatre I* function as a traditional blind man and guide partnership, this does not diminish the special knowledge that B seeks from A, asking him towards the end of the play "What does my soul look like?" (231).

In *Endgame* (1957), the function of the guide is similarly undercut by the blind Hamm's particular knowledge of a world outside the stage space. Hamm is aware of a world beyond the boundaries of the stage and of life: "Outside of here it's death" (96), which he rephrases later as "Beyond is... the other hell"(104).⁶⁸⁸ Hamm later reveals that his special knowledge extends to the inside of his own body ("Last night I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore.", 107), and that he is able to read meteorological instruments.⁶⁸⁹ Like Yeats' and Synge's blind characters, Hamm also benefits from a heightened sense of touch (he is able to perceive details about the unfinished dog that Clov is crafting for him) and prophetic insight. His prophecy that "One day you'll be blind like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me" immediately follows Clov's confession that his eyes are "bad" and they seem to worsen throughout the play (109). This special knowledge is coupled with Clov's inability to tell the time - a difficulty that belongs to the blind in Maeterlinck's play too - responding only "zero" to Hamm's questioning (94). When Hamm tells the story of "a madman" (113), who believed that the end of the world had come, he casts it as a tale warning of the dangers of trusting in vision. Although he is

⁶⁸⁷ Beckett (1986), 233. Subsequent references to page numbers in this complete works are given in brackets in the text.

⁶⁸⁸ Worth (2004) 268 calls Hamm "both sufferer and Tiresias-like 'seer'".

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. Henry's father in *Embers* who is both blind and able to look out to sea.

sighted, the man mis-sees ("All he had seen was ashes", 113), undermining the efficacy of vision for the perception of reality.

For Hamm and Clov, as for Mary and Martin Doul, vision is not preferable to blindness, and the presence of another visually impaired couple who prefer the onset of blindness to sight (when Nagg tells Nell that he can hardly see her, she responds "So much the better, so much the better", 99) makes the connection between Hamm and the Douls even closer. Similarly, in *Waiting for Godot* (1953, English 1955), Pozzo's blindness immediately leads Estragon to assume that he has prophetic knowledge ("Perhaps he can see into the future", 79), which is followed by an unsuccessful attempt on the part of the sighted characters to determine what time of day it is based on visual information alone (79-80).

In *All That Fall*, written in English in 1956, the blind Dan Rooney comes closest to being deficient in knowledge relative to his sighted guide as he is led from the train station. However, in the radio play *All That Fall*, Dan Rooney's blindness finds its analogue in that of the audience. Here, Dan's blindness does not limit his knowledge of the space any more than the audience's lack of vision, attendant on the medium of radio drama. Puchner reads Beckett's abandonment of gesture in favour of narrative as evidence of an antitheatrical shift in his work, but Beckett's characters in their different genres come to learn, as Yeats' Oedipus and Synge's blind characters had already, that privileged knowledge is not brought about by vision but by blindness.⁶⁹⁰

Sight that "had no meaning" in Friel's *Molly Sweeney*

⁶⁹⁰ Puchner (2002), 157ff.

Friel's immediate concern in *Molly Sweeney* (1994) is with the audience's visual awareness of her blindness. The opening stage direction specifies:

Most people with impaired vision look and behave like fully sighted people. The only evidence of their disability is usually a certain vacancy in the eyes or the way the head is held. Molly should indicate her disability in some such subtle way. No canes, no groping, no dark glasses, etc.⁶⁹¹

Tellingly it is not the audience's visual knowledge but Molly Sweeney's non-visual awareness that opens the dialogue. The play opens, as Synge and Yeats' plays do, with an exposition of the blind characters special knowledge. Molly recalls being in the garden with her father as a young child, learning the names of plants ("you're such a clever little missy" she recalls him commenting, 455). Molly recalls her father encouraging her sense of touch, hearing and smell to the point at which they become equivalents for sight. His command "Now, Molly. Tell me what you see" (456) is metaphorical: Molly does not see the petunias but touches and smells them, but she continues to respond to her father's questions about them as if she were sighted ("How many petunias did you see?" prompts the response "Twenty", 456).⁶⁹² At the end of their lesson, Molly's father praises her special knowledge again ("You *are* a clever lady", 456), refers to her as a "scholar" and calls her blind experience an "excellent testimony" of the garden (457). This interest in Molly's knowledge acquisition is not limited to these visits with her father, but we learn later in the play that Molly's husband Frank has collected "extracts from essays by various philosophers on the relationship between vision and knowledge, between seeing and understanding" (460).

⁶⁹¹ Friel (1999), 455. Subsequent references to page numbers in Friel (1999) will be given in brackets in the text.

⁶⁹² This equivalence of touch and smell with sight continues throughout the play and even when Molly's sight has been restored she is able to identify flowers by touch and smell more accurately than by vision(497).

Molly Sweeney follows the structure of Synge's *The Well of the Saints*, and similarly presents a cure for blindness as an eventually undesirable possibility. The saint of Synge's play is replaced by an ophthalmologist, Mr Rice, who occasionally seems to lapse into the parodic Catholicism of Synge's saint, such as his initial comments on meeting Molly that: "She was Molly. Reminded me instantly of my wife, Maria" (458); and his medical practices are cast in religious terms ("if, oh my God, if by some miracle pull it off perhaps...", 460; when the operation has been successful he calls Molly "Miracle Molly", 490, and a newspaper article refers to it as a "miracle cure", 499).⁶⁹³ Like Synge's saint, Mr Rice lacks insight into his practices. In the final months of Molly's life, Mr Rice diagnoses her with a condition that he calls "blindsight":

She was indeed receiving visual signals and she was indeed responding to them. But because of a malfunction in part of the cerebral cortex none of this perception reached her consciousness. She was totally unconscious of seeing anything at all (498)

Frank recalls a different diagnosis, one which makes even more explicit Mr Rice's misunderstanding of the relationship between seeing and knowledge. He recalls his conversation with Mr Rice:

'It's called "gnosis",' he said.
How do you spell that?
'G-n-o-s-i-s.'
'And what is it?'
'Is a condition of impaired vision, Mr Sweeney.'
He really was a right little bastard at times.
Anyhow, I looked it up in the library, and interestingly,
interestingly, I could find no reference at all to a medical condition
called 'gnosis'. But according to the dictionary the word meant a
mystical knowledge, a knowledge of spiritual things! (496)

⁶⁹³ See also Frank's confusion of the relationship between vision and knowledge with belief encoded in the condition Agnosia (464).

Throughout Friel's play, the two sighted characters make the assumption that vision and knowledge are synonymous, and they are shown by the end of the play to have been mistaken. Their two visual types of knowledge are repeatedly opposed, with Mr Rice discrediting Frank's knowledge (calling him "Mr Autodidact") in favour of his scientific method and Frank's casting himself in the role of various philosophers, especially Molyneux:

If you are blind, said Molyneux - he was an Irishman by the way and in fact his wife was blind - if you are blind you can learn to distinguish between a cube and a sphere just by touching them, by feeling them, right? Right. Now, supposing your vision is suddenly restored, will you be able - by sight alone, without touching, without feeling - will you be able to tell which object is the cube and which the sphere? (463)

Both erroneously explain that the process of acquiring knowledge entails sight. Frank explains that in order to recognise someone "the sight of him connects with the imprint, the engram. And bingo - instant recognition!" (462); and Mr Rice discovers after the operation that restores Molly's sight that "From a psychological point of view she was still blind" and she would now have to "learn to see" (493).

However, it is not only that the sighted characters are suspicious of each other's methods of acquiring knowledge, they also both misunderstand the relationship between Molly's blindness and her knowledge.⁶⁹⁴ That her blind perception exceeds theirs is apparent from Frank's failed prophecy. Molly's prophetic skills are established early in the play when shortly after a first date with Frank at a dance Molly foresees their marriage: "And I knew too, after that

⁶⁹⁴ Even the cautionary tale of the blind badgers, who do not want to be released from the darkness of their underground setts, does not seem to make an impact on Frank's understanding of blind knowledge (502-3).

night in the Hikers Club, that if he did ask me to marry him, for no very good reason at all I would probably say yes" (480). That her prophecy here comes true is already apparent to the audience, who meet Frank for the first time at the beginning of the play when the two are already married, and hear about their initial meeting only in Molly's memory narrative. Molly's successful prophecy is contrasted later in the play with the failure of Frank's. When he is summoned to the hospital for the removal of Molly's bandages after the operation that Mr Rice hopes will restore her sight, he mistakenly asserts that "And of course by then I knew the operation was a disaster" (485).⁶⁹⁵ His certainty is shattered only a few moments later when Molly relates that "Mr Rice said he couldn't have been more pleased with my progress" (490). Frank's sighted prophecy incorrectly foresees an event that does not play out, whereas Molly's prophecy is shown to be true from the beginning of the play.

Even before her operation, Molly worries that being restored to sight will disconnect her from the particular kind of knowledge that she has gained in her blindness. The evening before the surgery is due to take place, surrounded by her friends at an impromptu party, she confesses:

I was afraid that if things turned out as Frank and Mr Rice hoped, I was afraid that I would never again know these people as I knew them now, with my own special knowledge of each of them, the distinctive sense each of them exuded for me" (473).

Again, it is Molly's fears about the future that prove to be justified. Shortly after her operation we hear that she is no longer friends with Rita and that the things she was able to see with her renewed vision "had no meaning" (483). Now that

⁶⁹⁵ His earlier moment of prophecy - "Molly was going to see! I knew it!" - (467) is also shown to be false in the final moments of the play when Molly is "totally sightless" (505).

she is able to see, her favourite pastime has become a kind of feigned blindness: "And the only escape - the only way to live - was to sit absolutely still; and shut the eyes tight" (492). From the beginning Molly is able to see through the scientific experiment that Mr Rice and her husband stage, aware "that her blindness was his latest cause and that it would absorb him just as long as his passion lasted" (460). She begins and ends the play in equivalent epistemological sightlessness: sight cannot confer on her more knowledge than she had access to by touch, smell and prophetic insight when she was blind.

Symbolist blindness and modern(ist) vision

Molly's ability to see beyond the visual when blind and her inability to understand what she sees when sighted inverts the privileging of sight as the locus of knowledge that is found in the nineteenth-century novel and in Maeterlinck's symbolist play. Yeats' fascination with the blind harpist tradition of Irish myth, in combination with his increasing interest in the figure of Oedipus had enabled him to depart from the nineteenth-century assimilation of blindness and ignorance. In its place, he re-established the ancient connection between blindness and knowledge that he encountered, both in the Irish saga tradition, and especially in his reading of Greek tragedy.

Molly's final blind vision draws together these influences on her modern blindness. Both Frank and Mr Rice struggle to understand 'gnosis', the condition from which Molly suffers at the end of the play, because they fail to see the relationship between blindness and knowledge that is encoded in the Greek word. Molly's final act of *gnosis* however, is one that recalls not the insight of the blind Oedipus, but the kind of insight that is common in Irish mythology: visions

of the dead.⁶⁹⁶ As Martin Martin explains in 'An Account of Second Sight, that the Irish Called *Taish*' (c.1695, in *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*), *taish*, the Irish term for second sight, encompasses two specific modes of prophecy: visions of the dead and forecasts of marriage - both specific prophecies that Molly makes in *Molly Sweeney*.

Molly's blindness is the culmination of a longstanding Irish engagement with Greek tragedy, but it also counters other metaphorical understandings of blindness.⁶⁹⁷ For Molly, death, exile and ignorance are consequences not of blindness but of knowledge. The party that takes place before the operation that restores Molly's sight "is beginning to feel like a wake" (470) by its end, and Molly suddenly realises that "it was the dread of exile, of being sent away" (473) that is causing her to fear the events of the following day.

Modernism's obsession with vision inscribes blindness within a changing approach to the visual, beginning with symbolism's retreat from materialism and culminating in a reversal of the traditional relationship between vision and knowledge.⁶⁹⁸ However, although Maeterlinck's *Les Aveugles* is committed to the metaphor of the blind character as a symbol of ignorance, its aesthetic dethroning of the visual dimension of the theatre leads the way for Yeats, Synge, Beckett and Friel. The Irish playwrights reject Maeterlinck's equation of sight and knowledge and, instead, champion a non-visual epistemology that supersedes the centrality of sight.

⁶⁹⁶ She is visited by Lou, the wife of Dan McGrew who sings of his late wife at the party before Molly's operation (507).

⁶⁹⁷ On these broader Irish engagements with tragedy see Macintosh (2016).

⁶⁹⁸ On this see Jacobs (2001) for a reading of modernism's engagement with vision and the "new kinds of visual relations" (2) in the first half of the twentieth century. Cohen (1998) distinguishes postmodernism's crisis in spectacle from modernism's interest in vision, but in these plays we see an Irish modernist tradition pre-dating this. Cf. also Murray (2014) on Friel's increasing interest in the immaterial on stage.

Chapter Six: Blindness and Spectatorship

In January of 1995 two plays opened in London theatres. Both were set in confined spaces (one, a hotel room in Leeds, the other a trailer in Texas); both included the abuse of young, innocent female characters at the hands of trained killers; and both featured onstage homosexual rape and made extensive use of black comedy. But while the overwhelmingly negative critical reaction to Sarah Kane's *Blasted* at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs has become emblematic of the in-yer-face movement in the 1990s, critics responded to Tracy Lett's *Killer Joe* rather differently.⁶⁹⁹ Unlike *Blasted*, *Killer Joe* was praised for the way the onstage violence created "outraged delight", with Paul Taylor writing in the *Independent* that "Lett's career is clearly one to watch".⁷⁰⁰

The difference between the critical reactions to the two plays has in recent years been acknowledged, as part of a reassessment of *Blasted* and the in-yer-face genre. The *Guardian*'s Claire Armistead explained the reaction as a response to *Blasted*'s lack of interest in either traditional narrative or social realism:

[*Blasted*] fundamentally challenges the very precepts by which you write: linguistic, logical, linear narrative structures – the instinct is to feel intimidated and react by saying 'this is not theatre'.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁹ See especially Tinker branding the play "a disgusting feast of filth" in the *Daily Mail*, 19 January 1995.

⁷⁰⁰ Taylor, *The Independent*, 24 January 1995.

⁷⁰¹ See Langridge and Stephenson (1997), xvii-xviii. Saunders (2002), 10 comments on these early reviews.

This was a critical reflex that Kane commented on herself in her assessment of the initial reaction to *Blasted* in 1995: "I suspect that if *Blasted* had been a piece of social realism it wouldn't have been so harshly received".⁷⁰²

Billington and Tinker, the two critics who notoriously castigated Kane's debut, both compared the play to Letts's *Killer Joe*. Billington focussed on the way Kane's characters are divorced from "social context": "one reason why Tracy Letts's *Killer Joe* is bearable – in a way that Sarah Kane's *Blasted* at the Theatre Upstairs is not – is that it recognises the imperatives of art. In other words, the violence of Letts's brilliant play is related to social context and the human character".⁷⁰³ Tinker, on the other hand, showed a concern for linear narrative: "His [Letts'] play grips you with its narrative every step of the way and its shocks and horrors spring legitimately from the characters, their background and their motivation. Ms Kane on the other hand, offers her audience scarcely a clue as to why her characters should behave as they do".⁷⁰⁴

Social realism, as Billington points out, is only "one reason" for the difference in the critical reactions to the two plays. For Prichard, it is Kane's interest in non-traditional subject matter that makes *Blasted* difficult for reviewers, whereas for Greig it was the reviewers' reluctance to read the play alongside appropriate examples of non-realistic violence that caused critics to unanimously deride Kane's play: "What about Beckett, Artaud, Sartre, Heiner Müller, Howard Barker, Genet, almost all Greek tragedy, come to think of it?".⁷⁰⁵ Both plays are structured around the relationship between a young woman,

⁷⁰² Kane's assessment of her own plays is rarely serious: she called *Phaedra's Love* "my comedy" in an interview with Nils Tabert, cited in Saunders (2002), 78.

⁷⁰³ Billington, *Guardian* 23 January 1995.

⁷⁰⁴ Tinker, *Daily Mail*, 27 January 1995.

⁷⁰⁵ Prichard in Benedict, *Independent*, 22 October 1997; Greig, letter to the *Guardian*, 24 January 1995.

whose age cannot be determined, and who experiences moments of lost consciousness, and an older man who kills for a living (Joe is the 'Killer Joe' of the title, whereas Ian's occupation seems to shift between a journalist reporting on homicide and a soldier). In *Blasted*, however, there is an extra act of violence: Ian's blinding. Although Dottie uses metaphors of blindness to describe Joe, and seems to allude to the possibility of a problem with his eyes ("your eyes hurt" and "your eyes are just black as night"), Joe's blindness never becomes visibly apparent to the audience.⁷⁰⁶ In 1995, the blinding of Ian in Sarah Kane's *Blasted* returned critics and audiences to the question of what should and should not be seen onstage.

Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, Peter Rose's *Snatch* and moral responsibility

The blinding of Ian by the soldier in *Blasted* in 1995 was followed three years later by the blinding of Simon by Beth in Peter Rose's *Snatch*. The blindings in both plays happen onstage, and both signal a shift in the position of the onstage spectator. In *Blasted*, the soldier who blinds Ian does so because he witnessed the blinding of his girlfriend Col by an offstage soldier. The blinding is preceded by a lengthy description of the horrors to which he has been witness during the war that is taking place offstage ("Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs trying to leave town...").⁷⁰⁷ As he blinds Ian, the soldier reminds us of what he has seen:

He ate her eyes.
Poor bastard.

⁷⁰⁶ Letts (1995), 36 and 63.

⁷⁰⁷ Kane (1995), 50.

Poor love.⁷⁰⁸

The soldier, who has previously been a spectator of this act of violence (though we hear that he has been actively involved in other violent behaviour offstage), becomes, at the moment of Ian's blinding, a perpetrator. For Ian, the soldier's behaviour is inconsistent with his earlier threats. He asks "Are you going to kill me?", and the soldier seems to threaten both murder and rape before he blinds him, prompted by his memory of watching his girlfriend's blinding.⁷⁰⁹

In Peter Rose's *Snatch*, performed at the Pleasance Theatre on the 4 November 1998, a blinding, coming late in the play, again alters the relationship between a spectator and the action.⁷¹⁰ Two students, Paul and Simon, have raped Beth, who suddenly gets up from where she has been left at the back of the stage and addresses them: "It could be worse, I could be you", she says. Paul tries to rape her again, while Simon looks on. A sudden flash of light causes Beth and Paul to exchange bodies, leaving Paul in the woman's body. Beth, now in the body of Paul, tattoos the word "RAPIST" across her forehead and encourages Simon to assault Beth's (now Paul's) body. Beth, who had been the victim, has become the bystander, and Paul, who was initially the perpetrator of the rape, becomes its victim. Beth cuts off her (Paul's) penis, and in another flash of light their identities are restored to their bodies. Beth blinds Simon, and leaves the stage. Simon's blinding marks his transformation, through the return of Beth and Paul to their rightful bodies, from perpetrator to bystander (and from participant in the violence to its spectator).

⁷⁰⁸Kane (1995), 50.

⁷⁰⁹ Kane (1995), 50.

⁷¹⁰ There is no published edition of this play. Sierz (2001) 3-4 begins his book on the 'in-ner-face' genre with a description of it.

Sierz retells the action of this play in order to define the term 'in-yer-face' theatre, and his interest is in how the audience reacts to the violence by imposing upon themselves a kind of blindness: "Some people hid their eyes".⁷¹¹ He makes the connection with *Blasted* through the violence that provoked this reaction:

Watching *Snatch*, I was reminded of the gut rage of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, the gender issues of Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*, and the fearsome violence of Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator*.⁷¹²

These three plays share with *Snatch*, in addition to the violence that came to epitomise the in-yer-face genre of this decade, an interest in the position of the viewer relative to the violent onstage action. At the centre of *Shopping and Fucking* (1994) is the viewing of a violent robbery on a CCTV screen; and *Penetrator* (1993) follows the soldier Tadge, who after his return from an offstage conflict zone acts towards his friends with increasing violence inspired by acts to which he has been witness offstage (and to this list could be added Marber's *Closer* and Neilson's *Normal* of 1997 and both Crimp's 1993 *The Treatment* and 1997 *Attempts on Her Life*). The figure of the inset viewer is at the centre of these plays, and the distinction between the viewer and the violent action viewed is broken down by the multiple moments of onstage blinding that bookend this decade.

That it should be blinding that causes a character to move between the categories of victim, perpetrator and bystander (or spectator) relative to the violent action is explained by Kane's final play, *4.48 Psychosis* (performed for the

⁷¹¹ Sierz (2001), 3.

⁷¹² Sierz (2001), 4.

first time in 2000 after Kane's death). In it, Kane makes much of a tripartite relationship to violence, marking out the "Victim. Perpetrator. Bystander" distinction that is essential to recent trauma theory-led readings of the play as an examination of the role of the witness.⁷¹³ The initial production, directed by James McDonald at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, made these three facets of violence apparent at the level of bodies on the stage: the production divided the lines (unallocated in Kane's text) between three actors, who alternated between the roles of victim, perpetrator and bystander often in the same scene. The spectators, too, were invited to take the roles both of witnesses and of perpetrators, when a large mirror was suspended above the stage space, placing the audience in the position of both spectators and spectated.⁷¹⁴ Kane positions one of the first-person voices of the text as a viewer who, by witnessing events on the news, is complicit in their violence:

I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the Arabs, I fucked small children while they begged for mercy, the killing fields are mine, everyone left the party because of me, I'll suck your fucking eyes out send them to your mother in a box and when I die I'm going to be reincarnated as your child only fifty times worse and mad as all fuck I'm going to make your life a living fucking hell I REFUSE I REFUSE I REFUSE LOOK AWAY FROM ME⁷¹⁵

The speaker here is both a viewer of images (the 'bystander' of Kane's three-part separation) and by extension a perpetrator of violence, but also comes by the end of the speech to recognise his / her own position as the unwilling object of spectatorship.

⁷¹³ Kane (2000), 231. See Tycer (2008), 31 whose reading "suggests how *4.48* complicates conventional power dynamics by compelling audience members to perceive of themselves in multiple power positionings".

⁷¹⁴ See Billington, 'How do you judge a 75 minute suicide note?' *Guardian*, 30 June 2000, on this staging.

⁷¹⁵ Kane (2000), 227.

This unnamed character's exhortation "LOOK AWAY FROM ME" will be undermined in the final moments of the play by the speaker's repeated command "watch me vanish".⁷¹⁶ But the speech also recalls the specific circumstances of the soldier's blinding of Ian in the earlier play *Blasted* ("He puts his mouth over one of Ian's eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it").⁷¹⁷ In interviews after the initial critical reaction to *Blasted*, Kane frequently linked her writing of the play to her own viewing of specific scenes of real violence taking place in Bosnia:

At some point during the first couple of weeks of writing I switched on the television. Srebrenica was under siege. An old woman was looking into the camera, crying. She said: 'Please, please, somebody help us. Somebody do something.' I knew nobody was going to do a thing. Suddenly, I was completely uninterested in the play I was writing. What I wanted to write about was what I'd just seen on television.⁷¹⁸

In Rose's *Snatch* a flash of light followed by a blinding makes Simon the victim of violence to which he has previously been a spectator. Similarly, in Kane's play a "blinding light, then a huge explosion", followed by Ian's blinding, remove Ian's distanced and journalistic view-point on the violence of the war in Bosnia and turn him into its victim (though he never ostensibly leaves his Leeds hotel room).⁷¹⁹

The audience of *Blasted*, too, are thrust into the position of spectators to Ian's blinding; and Kane remarks upon the difference between her own plays and

⁷¹⁶ Kane (2000), 227, 244.

⁷¹⁷ Kane (1995), 50.

⁷¹⁸ Sierz (2001), 101. It was at this time that Kane also returned to Edward Bond's *Saved* (though she had read it much earlier) in which the now infamous baby stoning scene is watched by an onstage witness, Len, who is later implicated in the baby's murder ("I saw the pram... I should a stopped yer"). Kane's work is often compared to Bond's, e.g. the "canon" that Aston (2003), 77 alludes to.

⁷¹⁹ Kane (1995), 39.

Greek tragedy, noting that her distaste for Greek tragedy was the result of its offstage violence ("it all happens offstage, and what's the point").⁷²⁰ In *Blasted*, Kane rewrites the traditional messenger speech of Greek tragedy, in which an eyewitness account of an offstage action is given to the audience, who must then reconstruct the violence in their own minds if they are to visualise it. In Kane and Rose's plays the role (traditionally the messenger's) of bystander and witness to the blinding is transferred onto the audience. Blinding in these modern plays coerces the spectator into a new kind of direct spectatorship (to which the critics of *Blasted* initially reacted), but also makes them aware of the dangers of spectating, linking the soldier's witnessing of Col's blinding to his perpetration of Ian's blinding. Kane extended this fear about the relationship between viewing and perpetrating violence to her own viewing experience:

I don't like violent films, that's true, and I don't like violent scenes; and the reason I don't like violence is when I happen to see *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction* or other films of that type I feel like using violence.⁷²¹

That a non-naturalistic plot line of the kind lamented by initial reviewers of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* requires a more active mode of spectatorship is apparent to scholars like Lehmann and Malkin.⁷²² For Lehmann, the spectator's activity is required to piece together a non-naturalistic plot, whereas for Malkin it is the enactment of the violence at the level of language (necessary if confined to a studio theatre like the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs) that requires an active mode of spectatorship:

⁷²⁰ Kane, interview with Nils Tabert, cited in Saunders (2002), 72.

⁷²¹ Saunders (2009), 102.

⁷²² Lehmann (1999) and Malkin (1992). See also Heim (2016), and Biet and Triau (2006), 888ff on the active role of the spectator.

These plays demand the audience's active participation in decoding the systems which determine it no less than the characters onstage. If the power of language can destroy, then the audience both shares in that power and is itself in its thrall.⁷²³

However, the close relationship that *Blasted* shares with the images broadcast on television of the war in Bosnia also requires the positions of victim, perpetrator and bystander to be conceived of as interchangeable. In her analysis of photographs of abuse and torture at the Abu Ghraib prison camp in Iraq that came to light a decade after *Blasted*'s first performance, Judith Butler suggests a more direct equivalence between bystander (or spectator) and perpetrator:

If the photograph not only depicts, but also builds on and augments the event - if the photograph can be said to reiterate and continue the event - then it does not strictly speaking postdate the event, but becomes crucial to its production, its legibility, its illegibility, and its very status as reality.⁷²⁴

It is precisely this legitimising role of the spectator that the speaker of *4.48 Psychosis* points to when she commands the audience to "watch me vanish".⁷²⁵

It is not simply, as Kane explains, the fact that watching violence onscreen causes violent behaviour, though this point was made by a number of academics in the 1990s and 2000s, including Bourke's understanding of the visual relationship between pornography and rape.⁷²⁶ Rather, the willing blindness of the audience required by non-naturalistic representation and plot imposes a moral responsibility. By actively constructing the visual image in front of them spectators are also - like the cameramen and women at Abu Ghraib in 2003 -

⁷²³ Malkin (1992), 228.

⁷²⁴ Butler (2009), 83, and later "Perhaps the camera promises a festive cruelty: 'Oh good, the camera's here: let's begin the torture so that the camera can capture and commemorate our act!'".

⁷²⁵ Kane (2000), 244.

⁷²⁶ Bourke, 'Torture as Pornography', *Guardian*, 7 May 2004.

morally responsible for constructing the violent scenes that appear in front of them. By their comprehension of the symbols of violence onstage, spectators legitimise and make real the acts of violence depicted in front of them. When the soldier in *Blasted* is transformed from bystander-spectator to victim and perpetrator (a transformative possibility that Beth will exploit later to turn Simon from bystander into victim by blinding him in *Snatch*), he undergoes the same transformation that the spectators of *Blasted* are subject to during each performance.

The Treatment: learning to see the frame

Martin Crimp's *The Treatment* (1993) similarly revolves around the way in which viewing causes violence, and, like Kane's *Blasted* and Rose's *Snatch*, Crimp's *The Treatment* remains open to the possibility of non-naturalistic representation.⁷²⁷ Anne (who Crimp will explore more fully in another play about the relationship between theatre and television, *Attempts on Her Life*) begins the play as the victim of sexual violence who has been summoned before a team of television producers to tell her story, which will form the basis of a documentary film. The three-part distinction that Kane describes in *4.48 Psychosis* and expresses throughout *Blasted* is apparent in the very first scenes of *The Treatment*. The television producers take Anne out for lunch, to a nearby sushi restaurant, where Jen attempts to defend her appalling treatment of the waitress on the grounds that she has previously worked in the service industry and been subject to such treatment. She sums up her change of role in a

⁷²⁷ See the prefatory note in Crimp (1993): "A Crowd is required in Act 4.1. If a real crowd is not feasible, it must be presented or implied by non-naturalistic means".

distinction that Kane's "Victim. Perpetrator. Bystander." will later echo: "Waitress. Customer. Victim. Oppressor."⁷²⁸

The positions of victim and oppressor are shown in *The Treatment* to be interchangeable, just as they are in *Blasted* and *Snatch*. Crimp's play also shares with these two plays a fascination with the bystander / spectator figure. Here, too, it is blindness that is at the centre of the playwright's exploration of the role of the spectator-witness. Anne, who bears witness to Jen's treatment of the waitress in the earlier scene, meets the blind taxi driver shortly after (in 1.4). As she gets into the car, Anne expresses a desire to adopt her own kind of blindness in order to avoid contemplating the depravation she is witness to in the city ("I can't / look"), and the pair have driven through several blocks of the city before Anne realises that the taxi driver is blind. He ascribes an almost mythical origin to his blindness: "Because I was born out of wedlock and my mother was just a child, they thought this blindness was a judgment from God" (33). Anne demands that he stop the car, but changes her mind when she (and the audience) see his face for the first time ("very slowly, the DRIVER turns his face towards her", 23). Although we discover in 3.1 that Anne does not know her way around the city, she becomes in the first taxi scene a guide to the blind driver.

It is not the taxi driver's blindness but another blinding that transforms Anne from victim to perpetrator, however. Clifford, the film's script writer, is blinded in 3.4 by Anne's abusive husband Simon (the subject of the documentary film) in revenge for his rape of Anne in an earlier scene. Simon's motives are clear, and his only line while carrying out the onstage blinding is the single word "revenge" (77). But it is in this moment when Anne's passive spectating and

⁷²⁸ Crimp (1993), 19. Subsequent page references are given in brackets in the text.

position as a bystander to the violence is transformed into active participation. As Simon stabs the fork into Clifford's eye, Anne calls out "TWIST IT", and is then responsible for repeating the same act on Clifford's second eye (77).

As if to reinforce the relationship between Anne's position as the victim of violence and her active spectating of it, Clifford's blinding is directly followed by the première of the film (4.1). Like the explosions in *Snatch* and *Blasted*, however, the blinding is responsible for an even bigger shift. In Act 4, Scene 2, Andrew visits Simon and Anne at home. Rather than complaining that she is being restrained in the flat against her will, as she did in the opening scenes of the play, Anne tells Andrew that the blinding has made her value the situation that she had previously understood to be abusive:

But now I see how wrong I was to crave [leaving the flat] and how right he was to keep me in. Because last time we went out together we did something really really terrible. (*Lowers voice.*) You won't believe this, but we put out a man's eyes (88).

This scene undermines the audience's acceptance of Anne's report of the abusive relationship that is the subject of the film. Simon repeats "she can always go out, but she chooses not to", and when in the final moments of the scene Anne does seem to want to leave the flat, she is stopped and shot by Jen as she leaves.

As the scene ends on this note of uncertainty as to whether what we have watched has been reality or fiction, Crimp reminds the audience of the blindness that has altered the point of view. Clifford has the final words of the scene, and uses them to call for a taxi; and at the beginning of Act 4, Scene 3 we see Clifford being picked up by the blind taxi driver. Neither of the two characters is able to see where they are in the city, and Clifford repeatedly asks "where are we

going?", to which the driver responds "I've got no idea, Clifford. But isn't that one of the joys, one of the great joys of this city!" (94).

Writing in the *Guardian* in 2008, David Edgar dated the theatre's interest in the witness to a renewed political focus as a result of the War on Terror:

The war on terror brought politics back on to the world stage, and it's no surprise that politics returned to theatrical stages as well. But the predominance and resilience of verbatim, witness and testimony theatre needs explaining.⁷²⁹

The period immediately following 9/11 is also, according to Forsyth and Megson, the moment of the emergence of documentary theatre.⁷³⁰ This interest in the witness in response to the war on terror, however, is already apparent in the wake of the first Gulf War, dubbed the first "Nintendo war" by General Norman Schwarzkopf among others.⁷³¹ This precarious position of the witness is played out in *The Treatment* when the two blind characters drive off into the sunset with a more accurate view of the city around them than their sighted counterparts, who had not only attempted to hide their eyes from the city around them in an earlier scene, but also made a film representing a narrative as true that proved, after Clifford's blinding, to be false.

The theatre had been keenly aware that the vision of its spectators could be misled since at least as early as 1982, when Mary Whitehouse attempted to prosecute the director of Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* for procuring an act of gross indecency, claiming that she had seen an actor expose his penis onstage during a scene depicting an anal rape. The prosecution's most important

⁷²⁹ Edgar, 'Doc and dram', *Guardian*, 27 September 2008.

⁷³⁰ Forsyth and Megson (2009).

⁷³¹ The same precarious position of the witness underlines the now infamous claim in Baudrillard (1995), 61 that "the Gulf War did not take place", published first in Baudrillard (1991). See Barry (1997), 283.

witness, Graham Ross-Cornes was forced to admit, after interrogation by Jeremy Hutchinson QC, that since he had been sitting at the back of the theatre during the performance, he could in fact have jumped to conclusions about the actor's thumb.⁷³² That eye-witnessing is an unreliable means of establishing fact recurs throughout plays of the 1990s and 2000s, and is expressed most acutely in Dominique Morriseau's *Night Vision* (2000), in which a husband and wife give different accounts of a murder that they have both simultaneously witnessed.⁷³³

In *Torture and the Ethics of Photography* (2009) Butler, reading Sontag, describes a growing awareness in the late 1990s and into the new millennium of the process of embedded reporting, and the contingent "frames" that condition the images of conflict broadcast by mainstream media.⁷³⁴ By 2004 she notes a shift in the public's reading of these images: "the image, which is supposed to deliver reality, in fact withdraws reality from perception".⁷³⁵ The realisation is well-documented, especially in the American press after the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, but the theatre engages with the ability of images to deceive viewers much earlier, as we have seen.⁷³⁶ It is through this metaphor of

⁷³² The legal process is discussed at length by Lawson in 'Passion Play', the *Guardian* 28 October 2005, and Lawson includes the detail that Whitehouse, when challenged on her decision to bring the case, argued that those who witnessed the sexual violence of *The Romans in Britain* would find themselves encouraged to replicate it in their own behaviour.

⁷³³ See also Norton-Taylor's legal process plays of the mid-1990s, especially the journalistic approach in *Half the Picture* (1994), a dramatisation of the inquiry leading to the Scott Report.

⁷³⁴ See Finburgh (2017) on the way in which contemporary theatre engages with the growing spectacle of war. Virilio (1989) 8 gestures in this direction: "Weapons are tools not just of destruction but also of perception - that is to say, stimulants that make themselves felt through chemical, neurological processes in the sense organs and the central nervous system, affecting human reactions and even the perceptual identification and differentiation of objects".

⁷³⁵ Butler (2009), 75, drawing on Sontag, 'Regarding the Torture of Others', *New York Times*, 23 May, 2004. On the paradox of seeing a false image see Guerin (2015).

⁷³⁶ See for example Carter 'Pentagon Ban on Pictures of Dead Troops Is Broken', *New York Times* 23 April 2004; Thomas, 'Pentagon Manages War Coverage by Limiting Coffin

blindness that both Butler and the theatre of the 1990s examine this growing awareness of the frame through which images of war were presented:

To learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see is no easy matter...This "not seeing" in the midst of seeing, this not seeing that is the condition of seeing, became the visual norm, a norm that has been a national norm, one conducted by the photographic frame in the scene of torture.⁷³⁷

The blind characters of Crimp's *The Treatment* acknowledge the frame of the image: as the blinded Clifford loses pages from the script he is clutching in the final scene, the blind taxi driver proudly reports that his wife watches Clifford's programmes on television. The process by which visual material is excluded from the screen is played out onstage, made apparent by Clifford's blindness (he does not see that he is dropping the pages of the script). The taxi driver, by alluding to his sighted wife's viewing of the images as they are broadcast, allows the spectators to witness the manipulation of images and imposition of a frame, of which the taxi driver's wife will never be conscious.

On Blindness and Going Dark: the dangers of total television⁷³⁸

In 2004, the year that Butler points to as the culmination of a process of recognition that the images of war circulated in the press could be false, the theatre companies Paines Plough, Frantic Assembly and Graeae collaborated on a new writing piece called *On Blindness*. In it, two plots unfold simultaneously in the same stage space. In the first, Edward, an audio describer, goes on a date

Pictures', *The Boston Channel*, 29 October 2004; Barrett, 'US TV Blackout Hits Litany of War Dead', *Guardian*, 30 April 2004; Millbank. 'Curtains ordered for Media Coverage of Returning Coffins', *Washington Post*, 21 October 2004 etc.

⁷³⁷ Butler (2009), 100.

⁷³⁸ For the term 'total television' as shorthand for the proliferation of (potentially false) images in the 1990s and 2000s, see Colleran (2012). The term is attributed to Nielsen Media Research by Butler (2012),

with Maria, a woman who is blind. In the second, Shona (who is also Edward's flatmate) models for the artist Gaetano who unveils the painting to her boyfriend, Dan. Like in *The Treatment*, vision is understood to be necessarily limited, and it is not until Edward is thrust into darkness while walking back from the pub with Maria that he develops a mode of viewing that is not limited by a frame:

And the stars! I'd almost forgotten what they looked like. All the light pollution in the city, all that interference, you can't get any idea of them at all.
But out there in the darkness you could see everything.⁷³⁹

In 2012, another collaboration, this time between Sound&Fury and Fuel on Hattie Naylor's *Going Dark*, established a similar link between darkness and the ability to see the stars: "On a clear night, without the glare of city lights, you will probably be able to see between two and three thousand stars", and later Max introduces again the idea that darkness will enable better vision:

Hello everyone and welcome. My name's Max and I'm your guide to the night sky today. I'm going to dim the lights straight away because I'd like to show you something.⁷⁴⁰

However, it is not just the enduring sense that blindness might be a more accurate means of perception than sight that these plays share. Both are also concerned with the danger implicit in the act of viewing for the spectator.

On Blindness opens in Edward's studio. He is at work, recording an audio description of a pornographic scene. Suddenly Shona enters and, as soon as she sees what he is watching on the screen, chides him: "Ah... you'll go blind,

⁷³⁹ Cannon (2004), 82. Subsequent page references to this play are given in brackets in the text. Cf. Shaffer's *Equus* (1973) 109, which ends with Dysart proclaiming "I need - more desperately than my children need me - a way of seeing in the dark".

⁷⁴⁰ Naylor (2012), 14 and 21. Subsequent page references to this play are given in brackets in the text.

Edward"(4). The ancient association between blindness and excessive sexual behaviour recurs throughout the play, resurfacing for example in the first scene set in Maria's house, in which the young Greg seems to be taking advantage of her blindness to masturbate in her presence (12). It is not until much later in the play that Edward discovers that Maria not only knew what Greg was doing, but has been encouraging him to return. In *Going Dark*, by contrast, the images that cause Max's blindness, however excessive, are not sexual: Max works in a planetarium and has made his career out of seeing things that are not visible to the human eye. When Max first appears blind onstage, however, his blindness does not follow one of the many scenes of star-gazing in the play. Instead, he emerges blind for the first time following a sequence that takes place in a dark room, and brings to life an idealised memory of his childhood home as a photograph.

As well as returning to the idea that photographs and images do not create a visual link with reality, Naylor's play also suggests that Max's viewing of a recorded image, like Edward's, risks causing him to become blind. Max returns repeatedly to the question "How far do you think you can see?", both in his job as a planetarium guide and in indulging his six-year old son's interest in astronomy. From the beginning of the play, however, Max's viewing of the solar system is separated from his vision. In one of his lectures at the planetarium, Max explains to the audience that successfully viewing the galaxy Andromeda requires star-gazers to engage their peripheral vision:

Andromeda is elusive if you look at her directly - you'll need to use your peripheral vision. She is faint but if you look out of the corner of your eye, you'll see her (8).

It is precisely this type of vision, which Max has declared as necessary to view Andromeda, that he seems to lose first ("*Max catches himself in the mirror; he notices something in his peripheral vision is not quite right. He tests his visual field...*", 6).⁷⁴¹

As early as 1983, the threat that viewing stars might cause blindness was established in Brenton's *The Genius*. Brenton's play depicted a nuclear physicist worried about becoming overly engaged with the consequences of his own work, and drew on Brecht's (1938 though not performed until 1943) *Life of Galileo*. Though neither Edward nor Max is literally blinded by looking at the sun, as Galileo is, both bear witness to the dangers of viewing in a society suffering from a surfeit of violent and sexual images.⁷⁴² Max, after gradually losing his sight in *Going Dark*, makes a link between the kind of dangerous planetary seeing that he and Galileo suffer from and theatrical seeing. He narrates a dream of darkness, paralleling the darkness of the planetarium, but concludes towards the end of his speech that he has been describing the darkness of a theatre space:

The room is empty except, in the foreground, there is a throne, and there is a man sitting on the throne. But everything is in miniature - it's a model set for a theatre; the throne is a little miniature throne with a tiny king with this big drape behind him (26).⁷⁴³

In linking the kind of superhuman seeing that causes both his and Galileo's blindness with the kind of seeing prompted by a theatre space, Max writes a

⁷⁴¹ Cf. 35 where Leo seems to understand something of Kane, Rose and Crimp's interest in the way in which blindness alters the relationship between the spectator and the victim, worrying that he too will go blind having seen his father's blindness ("I will see you unless I go blind").

⁷⁴² The connection with *Galileo* is made explicitly at the beginning of *Going Dark* when Max reminds Leo that "Grandad's got his new telescope", Naylor (2012), 6.

⁷⁴³ The programme note hinted at the company's interest in the relationship between planetaria and theatre spaces: "A very early impulse for *Going Dark* was to set a story inside a planetarium. We were attracted to the theatrical and intimate quality these buildings have."

modern means of superhuman viewing into an ancient tradition of the dangers of excessive viewing.⁷⁴⁴

In *Going Dark*, however, the relationship between dangerous theatrical / planetary seeing and blindness is taken a step further. It is not only Max the astronomer who slowly develops blindness through the course of the play, but the audience, who are not only blind to Max's dream sequence messenger speeches, but to repeated audio-only scenes that punctuate the action of the play. The spectators' access to these scenes is entirely aural:

Total darkness. Sound.

We leave the Planetarium into a maniacally busy street with relentless traffic. It is rush hour and raining heavily. People's voices brush in and out of earshot, swiping past us, as they hurry for shelter. We approach the sound of a pelican crossing, its bleeps getting closer. All the while Max's white stick is tapping its way through this melee, barely heard. The traffic gets louder as we approach and the pelican stops bleeping and as if a dam has burst a surge of traffic collectively opens throttles surging past and away into a rumble. An angry horn dopplers past as if Max may have misjudged the edge of the pavement.

Fade. (12)

These audio-only scenes, in many ways, grew out of the first of Sound&Fury's projects, *War Music*, a performance of Christopher Logue's poem about the Trojan War staged in total darkness.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴⁴ A connection with documentary film images that were the source of dangerous, excessive vision for Edward in *On Blindness* would perhaps have been more apparent in March 2012, when *Going Dark* was in the middle of its regional tour and Curiosity rover landed on Mars wielding its hand-held camera. Rebellato (1999) 160ff sees a resurgence of anti-theatrical sentiment in writing on British theatre since 1956, but ascribes this to the perception of a close relationship between the theatre and homosexuality.

⁷⁴⁵ Sound&Fury reminded audiences in their programme note of this lineage, describing how "their artistic interest is in developing the physical and sonic elements of theatre, offering audiences new ways of experiencing performance and stories in an immersive environment by heightening the aural sense" and noting that "it was inevitable that at some point we would want to tackle the fascinating subject of perception and sight", in the prefatory material to Naylor (2012).

The uncertainties that *On Blindness* ascribes to the blind Maria are projected in *Going Dark* onto the spectators, whose vision, like that of the sighted characters in *The Treatment*, does not help them to establish what is really going on in the scene that they are watching. Their newly active position as spectators requires them to conjure Max's blindness, while simultaneously making them aware of the threat that these images pose to their own vision.

***Blasted*: "blasted" Oedipus and the "blasted heath"**

When Leo, Max's young son in *Going Dark*, is told of the onset of his father's blindness, he asks "Can you still cry if you go blind?".⁷⁴⁶ His question is answered by an earlier blind character, Seneca's Oedipus, who had returned to the British stage in 1968 in Ted Hughes' translation, blaming his tears specifically for his blindness:

suddenly he began to weep everything that had been torment
suddenly it was sobbing it shook his whole body and he
shouted is weeping all I can give can't give my eyes any
more let them go with their tears let them go eyeballs too
everything out is this enough for you you frozen gods of
marriage is it sufficient are my eyes enough⁷⁴⁷

Although critics after the 2001 revival of *Blasted* (and after Kane's death) used the idea of an ancient literary heritage to defend Kane's first play from charges of offensive modernity, its initial reception was marked by allusion to Shakespeare's *King Lear* rather than Sophocles or Seneca's Oedipus plays.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁶ Naylor (2012), 36. Earlier in this conversation, Naylor (2012), 34, Leo has been concerned about the potential his father's blindness raised for his own transformation from bystander to victim, worrying that his father's blindness will cause Leo equally to struggle to see.

⁷⁴⁷ Hughes (1969), 51.

⁷⁴⁸ See for example Sierz's comment in Sierz (2001) 10 that Ian could be "Oedipus, Gloucester or Hamm".

Both *Blasted* and *The Treatment* were compared to *King Lear*, with Sierz commenting of *The Treatment*:

From the theme of voyeurism to the play's final image, when the blinded Clifford and a blind cab driver drive together through New York, there are constant references to sight, insight and seeing. In this way, *The Treatment* rewrites *King Lear*.⁷⁴⁹

Kane herself positioned the blinding in her play as a prerequisite for *Blasted*'s relationship with *King Lear*:

There was a point at which I realised there was a connection with *King Lear*. And I thought: 'I'm writing about fatherhood. There's this scene where he goes mad; and there's this Dover scene with Gate when she unloads the gun - is she going to give him the gun or is she not?' And the only thing I didn't have is blindness.⁷⁵⁰

Although the association between Kane's *Blasted* and the blasted heath of *King Lear* came late in the process of its composition ("it was only when I was into about the fourth draft I thought 'of course, it's the blasted heath!'"⁷⁵¹), it has remained at the forefront of critical responses to the play. In 1996, Kane's *Phaedra's Love* unmasked Kane's professed lack of interest in ancient drama, and particularly in Seneca. She had, she admitted in an interview with Nils Tabert, read Seneca's *Phaedra* once before adapting it as *Phaedra's Love* (1996), and had seen and appreciated Caryl Churchill's 1994 version of Seneca's *Thyestes* performed only seven months before *Blasted* and directed, like *Blasted*, by James Macdonald at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs.⁷⁵²

⁷⁴⁹ Sierz (2006), 41.

⁷⁵⁰ Sierz (2000), 102. Cf. also Saunders (2004) on the relationship between *Blasted* and *King Lear*.

⁷⁵¹ Interview with Graham Saunders in Saunders (2002), 58.

⁷⁵² Interview with Nils Tabert: "I chose Senecan because Caryl Churchill had done a version of one of his plays which I had liked very much", cited in Saunders (2002), 72. See Bexley (2011) on *Phaedra's Love* and the circumstances of its composition (and its

These Senecan preferences indicate a further influence in *Blasted's* blinding: Ted Hughes' *Seneca's Oedipus*. When Oedipus returns from his offstage blinding he is greeted, in Seneca and Hughes, by the chorus who describe his change of position from sighted viewer to blind viewed object. The chorus direct the spectators' vision first to Jocasta, then to Jocasta's viewing of her son:

look at Jocasta why has she stopped look at her she's
staring at her son she hardly knows what's happening
darkness is nearly swamping her there he stands blasted
his blind mask turned to the sky...⁷⁵³

The 'blasted' that would form the title of Kane's play - a play that as we have seen uses blindness to transform characters from spectators to victims and from viewers to viewed objects - is used here to describe Hughes' Seneca's Oedipus' new position as blind object of the spectatorship of Jocasta, the chorus and the audience.

Though it may have been a Hughesian vogue for Seneca that provided the title for Kane's *Blasted*, after the play's revival in 2001 the renewed interest in the blinding of the play and its classical analogues may well be explained not with reference to Oedipus but to another ancient tragic blinding. It was Euripides' *Hecuba*, above all, that responded to the dawning realisation of the importance of the frame in television reporting on conflict in 2004. Between 2004-2005 *Hecuba* received three productions (at the Donmar Warehouse, the Royal Shakespeare Company and a touring production by Foursight Theatre

relationship with Seneca and Euripides), though see Billington (1996), 2 and Hall (1996), 20 on the role of Euripides.

⁷⁵³ Hughes (1969), 53.

Company).⁷⁵⁴ These productions, like the new writing of this period (most famously David Hare's *Stuff Happens* which critiqued news coverage of the Iraq war), took a strong position on the problems of total television and the frame of media reports. Like *Blasted*'s relationship with the documentary Kane had seen about Bosnia, Foursight Theatre Company's *Hecuba* had a relationship with a specific documentary. Naomi Cooke, the production's director, made reference in the programme note to "the morning after the end of the siege of Beslan", which had been the subject of a BBC 2 documentary *Children of Beslan* documenting the events of September 2004.⁷⁵⁵ The Foursight *Hecuba*'s explicit commentary on the morality of documentary journalism crossed into reviews of the other productions of *Hecuba* even when the connection was made less explicitly. Quentin Letts commented on the Donmar Warehouse *Hecuba*: "After the killings in Beslan it is hard to fathom quite how the cast got through rehearsals for this astonishing performance".⁷⁵⁶

Hecuba's obvious topicality and references to the lost lives of children no doubt contributed to the play's resurgence in the early 2000s. However, the fact that this play in particular should have had so many performances in the wake of 2004 specifically may well relate to the way the blinding at the end of the play causes a renegotiation of the categories of victim, perpetrator and bystander.⁷⁵⁷ While Oedipus is his own victim at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and even more so in Seneca's *Oedipus Rex* (where Apollo is less obviously jointly

⁷⁵⁴ Hemming had already commented in a review of Kneehigh Theatre's 2004 *Bacchae* that "despite being dead for over 2,000 years, Euripides is the man of the moment", *Financial Times*, 9 November 2004.

⁷⁵⁵ See Cousin (2007), 121.

⁷⁵⁶ Letts, 'Review', *Daily Mail*, 15 September 2004.

⁷⁵⁷ Reviewing the *Hecuba* plays, Clapp, *Observer*, 19 September 2004, linked them both to the blinding in *King Lear* and to Kane's *Blasted*.

responsible for his blinding), it is in *Hecuba* that the special knowledge of the future that Polymestor receives at the moment of his blinding allows him to forecast a change in status for Hecuba. When Polymestor returns from the tent, he is transformed not only from sighted to blind but also from viewer to viewed object, and from perpetrator to victim. His blindness, furthermore, allows him to forecast the same transformation for Hecuba. His new helplessness and victim status is made apparent in his movement on the stage and his characterisation of himself as a τετράποδος θηρὸς.⁷⁵⁸ It is precisely this state that he foretells for Hecuba at the end of the play: κύων γενήσῃ πύρσ' ἔχουσα δέργματα.⁷⁵⁹ Neither of these canine transformations actually happens within the confines of the play. The spectators, like the spectators of Kane and Crimp's non-naturalistic acts of violence, enable these scenes by viewing them. Euripides' *Hecuba* therefore anticipates in the blinding of Polymestor a mode of spectatorship that returns in the modern theatre in response to the proliferation of images in the 1990s and the recognition of their curated frames in the mid-2000s.

Although the development of visual technologies in the 1990s is crucial to the way in which blinding highlights the proliferation of images in this period, it has long been accepted that messenger speeches in Greek tragedy require a mode of active spectatorship.⁷⁶⁰ Characters in tragedy often react to the eyewitness report of the messenger by wishing that they had themselves been permitted to witness the offstage action; and the messengers themselves

⁷⁵⁸ *E.Hec.*1058. See further Chapter 1, above.

⁷⁵⁹ *E.Hec.*1265.

⁷⁶⁰ Cf. Rabinowitz (2013) 10 on the way in which Hecuba's offstage death allows her to die as an imagined female character rather than as a male actor. On the messenger speech recreating vision see further the narratological reading of de Jong (1991), Barrett (2002), 102-131 and Dickin (2009).

describe their relationship to the action as one of theatrical spectating.⁷⁶¹ There is only one account in extant tragedy of a messenger narrating not his own account of the events but an account that he has heard from someone else (E.*Heracl.*849-61). The messenger, then, performs the role of viewer offstage, but becomes an object of vision both of the chorus and of the audience when he arrives onstage.⁷⁶²

The offstage scenes of theatrical violence in ancient plays place the spectators into an active position: they must imagine the violence for themselves, based on the narration of an eyewitness. Although the violence in a play like Sarah Kane's *Blasted* takes place on the stage, the moral responsibility for the violence rests with the spectator. This moral responsibility exists not only because viewing images gives them credence, as Butler suggests in her discussion of the Abu Ghraib photographs; but the moral implication of the audience also occurs because onstage violence relies on a history of violence caused and substantiated by the spectators' active imagination.

A tradition of problematic spectatorship

Blindness has, in recent years, become the dominant metaphor through which to explore the relationship between vision and reality. This is the case not least because of a general postmodern retreat from positivist sense perception.

⁷⁶¹ See Stanzel (1979) 262-7 on the narratological difference between the *Ich-Erzähler* of Homeric witness narratives and the *periphere Ich-Erzähler* of tragedy. The suppliants in E.*Supp.*618-22 wish that they could be witnesses themselves. For examples of theatrical seeing of the witness / messenger, see de Jong (1991) 9-10 and cf. especially the messenger of the *Suppliants*, who calls himself a θεατής (652).

⁷⁶² Indeed, messengers often seem to fear that they too will be transformed from bystander into victim of violence, e.g. the near-violence in the conversation between Oedipus, the Messenger and the Shepherd in S.*OT.*1146. The shepherd wishes a plague on the messenger later in the conversation, as if he could convert this viewer to the position of the soon-to-be blind Oedipus.

However, the metaphor has persisted also as a result of plays that respond to the tyranny of total television and the framing of information by film and stills cameras. The blindings in these plays find their analogues in classical blindings precisely because Greek tragedy foregrounds the moral and epistemological responsibility of the spectator confronted with an eyewitness messenger. Butler's assessment of the role of the camera in not only documenting but creating the scenes of torture at Abu Ghraib is apparent in contemporary drama's awareness of the moral responsibility of the spectator. Drawing on a tradition of blindness as punishment for immoral seeing in ancient myth, these anxieties result in an anti-theatrical fear of excessive seeing.

After 2004, when the curated framing of information by state-sanctioned media becomes public knowledge, blindness is seen to offer deeper truths. It is once more realigned with its prophetic associations in ancient drama and becomes a means by which an alternative (and often more accurate) mode of sense perception is presented to the audience. When *Going Dark* in 2012 allows the spectators to experience blindness, this is more than an experiment in the company's growing interest in sound design. When the spectators lose their sight in these scenes, they are themselves inscribed within a tradition of anti-theatrical thought about seeing in the theatre.⁷⁶³ They lose their sight through excessive theatrical viewing, like Max and Galileo, completing a transformation with which the theatre has been threatening them at least since 1993, from bystander-spectator to victim.

⁷⁶³ For the long tradition of the anti-theatrical prejudice from antiquity to modernity, see Barish (1985).

That these plays return so closely to the specific spectatorial challenges of ancient blinding is apparent from their close but critical relationship with photography. Writing of the power of the photographic image in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes comments on the particular grammatical tense of the photograph, operating not in the past but in the future anterior: "it does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been".⁷⁶⁴ Barthes writes of a famous photograph of Lewis Payne (see figure 4) awaiting his death sentence, taken by Alexander Gardner in 1865, in these grammatical terms:

... he is going to die. I read at the same time 'this will be' and 'this has been'. I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me of death in the future tense.⁷⁶⁵

The tradition of theatrical blinding, like the camera according to Butler, is an instrument of the future anterior:

The date function on the camera may specify precisely when the event happened, but the indefinite circulability of the image allows the event to continue to happen, and, indeed, thanks to these images, the event has not stopped happening.⁷⁶⁶

Like a photograph, the blinding of Ian in Kane's *Blasted* is a critique of contemporary visual culture and total television, but also proves that the blindings of Oedipus, Gloucester and Hamm (as well as perhaps most importantly, Polymestor) were always blindings in the future tense.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁴ Barthes (1981), 85. It is perhaps this idea of the future pastness of the photograph that creates, for Sontag, a special link between photographs and death, see Sontag (1977) 70.

⁷⁶⁵ Barthes (1981) 96. Within ten years viewing rooms would become compulsory for death sentences.

⁷⁶⁶ Butler (2009), 86.

⁷⁶⁷ Cf. the conclusion of Biet and Triau (2006) on Lehmann's postdramatic movement, 928 that "le théâtre, en tout ou en partie, a été « postdramatique » avant même que le dramatique ait été théorisé".

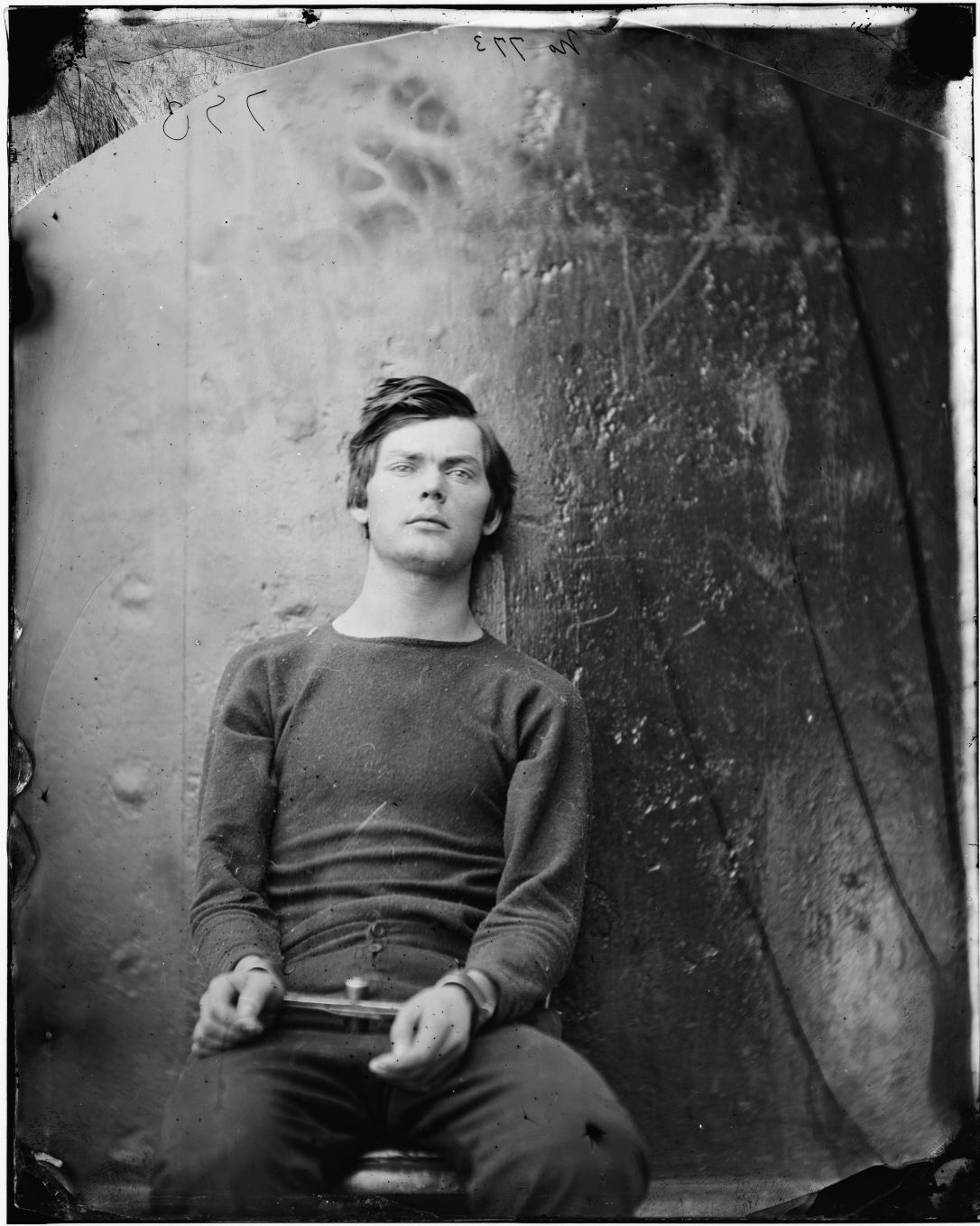


Figure 4.

Lewis Payne, handcuffed, stares apprehensively into the distance beyond the camera in a photograph by Alexander Gardner, 1865.

Conclusion

The scenes of blindness under discussion in this thesis are really blindness in the future tense. This is apparent from the most recent theatrical blindness on the London stage, in which it was possible to detect the grammar of theatrical blindness outlined in this thesis. *The Braille Legacy*, which opened at the Charing Cross theatre in April 2017, included, in addition to the young Louis Braille, a chorus of blind characters, Louis' young companions at the Royal Institute of Blind Youth in nineteenth-century Paris. Both Louis' blindness and that of his friends could be read according to this grammar.

The children's blindness was shown to cause their deaths: a persistent highlighting of the prevalence of disease in the institute as well as the revelation that the children kidnapped by the ophthalmologist did not return (Catherine, one such victim, was shown to be dead when she removed her blindfold, and left the stage to a musical reworking of the exile from sunlight metaphor: "for her the sun won't rise again").⁷⁶⁸ The stylised blindfolding and un-blindfolding of the chorus of blind children throughout the play marked their blindness as a performance, and the onstage geography was consistently contrasted with an imagined geography, that of dreams, which only the blind children could access. Like in the ancient plays examined in Chapter One, this concern with geography was expressed as a kind of exile: many of the children reported being exiled from their families ("they threw me out because I'm blind"). The link between blindness and knowledge opened the production, with Louis attempting to teach his schoolmaster how to read with his eyes closed, and continuing throughout

⁷⁶⁸ There is no published edition of this text. I cite here verbatim from a performance in June 2017.

the play to use his insight-in-blindness to supply information that the sighted characters no longer remember ("Is that Voltaire?" and Louis' reply "No, Shakespeare!" became a refrain).

However, it is because of its interaction with the sixth rule of theatrical blindness outlined in this thesis that *The Braille Legacy* is of interest to disability studies scholars. *The Braille Legacy* invited a shift to the more active and complicit spectatorship that we saw in Chapter Six: because of the presence of large mirrors on a revolving set, the spectators were forced periodically to look at a reflection of themselves on the stage. However, Louis and his friends did not only share with the spectators their position as spectated objects; their blindness was also refracted onto the audience as the house lights were masked with dark blue lighting gel, such that even in the interval sighted spectators had great difficulty navigating the space. But it was not this that critics remarked upon: instead, it was the complicity attendant on these moments of active spectatorship that prompted comment.

The Braille Legacy clearly obeys the grammar of theatrical blinding, and as such ought to be read as part of an assemblage that includes the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. This is nowhere more apparent than when Madame Mezier recalls Tiresias as she confronts the sighted staff member who is responsible for the deaths of the children: "you are the one that is blind... it is you who cannot see". However, this relationship with a tradition was problematic for disability theorist Michele Taylor, who criticised the "spectacular crippling up" and tired tropes of performing blindness in the production.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁹ Taylor's review on her personal blog has since been removed, but see Snow, 'The Braille Legacy criticised for spectacular crippling up', *The Stage*, 4 May 2017 for a

Taylor's concerns shift the ethical debate from the complicity of the spectator with the violence inflicted on performing subject (as with Abilqualit in *Revenge for Honour* and the responsibility implicit in Kane's "watch me vanish") to a complicity in the 'ableism' of a production that celebrates a pivotal moment in the history of adaptive technologies without a single visually impaired blind actor, and only two audio-described performances in a run of ninety shows.⁷⁷⁰ Blindness focuses attention on the ethically problematic complicity of the viewer precisely because when it appears onstage it relies on the viewer to actively construct it: just as Abilqualit's bleeding eyes only signify blindness until the audience are told to construct them as sighted, Louis' removal of his blindfold at the end of *The Braille Legacy* only signifies his death rather than his return to sightedness because the story of his childhood mortality is already familiar to the spectators.

Taylor's concerns have real life significance, but they are not simply a timely warning about ableism in the performing arts industry.⁷⁷¹ Her comments and their reminder that blindness relies on an active mode of spectatorship have serious implications for a tradition of blindness onstage that is read as an assemblage. The fact that Louis and his companions are played by sighted actors

summary of her reaction. For complaints about the performance of disability elsewhere see Ryan 'We wouldn't accept actors blacking up, so why applaud crippling up?', *Guardian*, 13 Jan 2015.

⁷⁷⁰ Ableism is the term given to any form of discrimination against people with disabilities. Millet-Gallant and Howie (2017) 2 offer a critique of ableism in the introduction to their book on disability in art history. They note that the term 'ableism' implicitly aligns the oppression of disabled people with the oppression of other marginalised groups, and therefore prompts the connections with gender studies suggested in the Introduction, above. Dolmage (2017) begins with an introduction to ableism, though he applies this not to arts but to academia.

⁷⁷¹ See, for example, the surprise registered by critics on discovering that the blind actor John Wilson Goddard was to play Oedipus, e.g. McKie, 'Blind Actor to Play Oedipus', *Independent*, 25 March 2017.

in *The Braille Legacy* is not simply an oversight on the part of the production team, but is required by the highly stylised semiotics of the blindfolds in the production: the children remove their blindfolds when they are vividly dreaming, for instance, or when they come to understand the full extent of the danger that they are in. By far the most pervasive trope of blindness both in literature and in real life is precisely the one that in *The Braille Legacy* is signalled by the removal of the children's blindfolds: that those who are visually impaired reach a kind of insight through amplification of another of their senses.

The blind character on stage encourages a different mode of spectating by modelling a non-visual process of viewing. By returning consistently to the trope of insight-in-blindness, these characters make spectators aware of the limits of sight. In promoting this situated viewing, blind characters also encourage a situated mode of reading. Blindness onstage is an assemblage, but it also models the role of the reader in an assemblage, by accepting that semiotic relationships are fluid and subject to focalisation. The blindness of Gloucester shows the spectators that they do not really 'see' a semiotic relationship between the cliff he describes and the flat stage they look at; and in so doing, he invites readers to situate their own vision just as his spectators must do. Gloucester's relationship with Oedipus, Oedipe, Polymestor, Hamm, Ian, or Molly, like the relationship between the cliff and the stage, is not fixed but relational - and as such it is his blindness that models its reading as an assemblage.

Elsewhere in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes called for a "history of looking", a comment that in 1981 came relatively early in a move towards historicising

understandings of the sensory world.⁷⁷² Emphasis on the performance of disability in real life, coming from disability studies, as well as the influential separation between disability and impairment have returned the emphasis, even in real life, to the complicity of the spectator. Interdisciplinarity between performance studies and disability studies remains in its infancy, but the tide is beginning to turn away from the historicising of disability towards its construction by both readers and spectators.⁷⁷³ In reception studies, too, the idea of a singular history is increasingly losing traction to rhizomic or assemblage-based models of understanding intertextuality that favour the reader's present over the uncovering of historical influence latent in the text. Much remains to be done in these areas, but blindness provides one possible way for the spectator / reader to engage with the shortsightedness of their own vision.

Richardson explains the situated position of the reader as an alternative mode of spectating in his chapter in *Deep Classics*:

In these collisions, we can trace the radical subjectivity of reception: had you seen what I had witnessed (a ghostly hand, a glimpse of Homer, goings-on behind the curtain), you would hold a different opinion.⁷⁷⁴

The situated spectating that Richardson attributes to the spectator here clearly parallels the blind characters' undermining of the spectator's vision. Indeed, such 'radical subjectivity' is already apparent to the chorus of the *Oedipus at*

⁷⁷² Barthes (1981). By 2014, for example, Howes and Classen could state as simple fact that "the way we use our senses, and the way we create and understand the sensory world are shaped by culture". On this impulse to write a history of vision, see also Ings (2007) and Spalding (2005). See Jütte (2005) for a long history of the senses more generally.

⁷⁷³ See Henderson and Ostrander (2010) for an early example, and more recently Koppers (2013), Johnston (2016) and Koppers (2017).

⁷⁷⁴ Richardson (2016), 235.

Colonus, who respond to the blind Oedipus with a comment on the subjectivity of history:

ὄρᾳ δ' ὄρᾳ πάντ' ἀεὶ
χρόνος, στρέφων μὲν ἕτερα,
τὰ δὲ παρ' ἡμαρ αὖθις αὖξων ἄνω.

Time sees all things, sees always,
overthrowing some things at some times,
and raising up other things on another day.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷⁵ S.O.C.1454-5.

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