"To Write and Read be Henceforth Treacherous":
The Transgression of Marking in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*

Elizabeth Smith

English 7160: Early Modern Studies

December 14, 2017

During his soliloquy in Act III of *Cymbeline*, the servant Pisanio receives letters from his master demanding that he kill the princess Innogen for her adultery. In addition to lamenting his master's "too ready hearing," Pisanio addresses the letters themselves: "O damned paper, black as the ink that's on thee..."[1] In this scene, Posthumus's letters are subjected to the same rage and disbelief as is directed toward their sender, binding together thematically the written word, its medium, content, and writer. The letter itself is homologized as "the feodary for this act" in a gesture which serves to underscore the substitutive role of the letter for the deed and intent.[2] Before this event, a series of messages both written and spoken created a web of misinformation that culminates in Posthumus's demand that the servant kill the princess Innogen. It is worth pausing for a moment to wonder: what causes are at the root of this soon-to-be tragic event? How do simple messages and hearsay form the foundation for the action in *Cymbeline?* The role of messages is more complicated than one might initially think; it is inextricably bound up with both its material existences as well as the act of hearing and seeing these words. Inks and dyes, tools among many for communication across the vast geographical distances traversed in the play, figure not only in their representative function; they also carry material connotations that were pregnant with meaning for early modern audiences. Inks and dyes are repeatedly mentioned in the play in ways that associate the written word with the “stain” of transgression and mendacity. This connection has its roots in early modern ink-making practices as well as the circumstances surrounding their modes of representation and transmission within the play.

Authors of the early modern period do seem to have associated the substance of ink with the process of staining as well as associating the notion of stain with both bodily fluids and

---

[1] William Shakespeare, William George Clark, and William Aldis Wright, *Cymbeline* in *Unabridged William Shakespeare*, Courage Unabridged Classics Series ([N.p.]: Running Press, 1997) http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=33030&site=ehost-live, 1190.
[2] Ibid., 1190.

bodily marks such as moles. Shakespeare himself drew this connection of stains, blood, and bodily marks in several of his works including *King John* ("Patch'd with foul moles and eye-offending marks") and *Cymbeline* ("some marks of secret on her person").[3] In *Cymbeline* specifically, the actions of inking, marking, and staining provide a central theme for the play, blurring the distinctions between bodily marks such as moles and meaning-making marks such as writing and embroidery. The text also plays with the multiple meanings of the word "mark," used to indicate etching or staining as well as listening and attending to the visual representations as well as the spoken word.

Materially, the physical and semiotic action of marking is caught up with the substances *of* marking (inks, stains, and dyes) as well as the substances which are marked *upon* (paper, skin, and fabric).[4] Early modern uses of the word "mark" blur the distinction between the physical and semiotic mark (such as an image or text) and the action of attending to or listening, as in John Lydgate's 1440 urging of the reader to "Merk this in your mynde," or Glendower's comment in Henry IV that "These signs have markt me extraordinary."[5] The blending of these two ideas has its deepest roots in the communicative gestures of primitive man and the semiotic function of writing and marking. The physical action of marking implies the complementary process of ocular and mental engagement with the text just as the physical action of speech implies the

---

[3] William Shakespeare, William George Clark, and William Aldis Wright, *The Life and Death of King John* in *Unabridged William Shakespeare*, 417; Shakespeare, Clark, and Wright, *Cymbeline* in *Unabridged William Shakespeare*, 1213.

[4] For a comprehensive overview of the connection between the act of marking and the material practices of marking, see Bennet, J. 2013. Epilogue. In: Piquette, K. E. and Whitehouse, R. D. (eds.) *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, surface and medium*. Pp. 335-342. London: Ubiquity Press. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/bai.q J. Bennett writes in his epilogue that "writing…implies a complementary, but distinct and sequential process of engagement with the product, a process that is visual and/or tactile and embodied and requires the presence of a material residue of writing."

[5] "Mark, v.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/114171?isAdvanced=false&result=5&rskey=74UTSZ& (accessed December 12, 2017). See the Oxford English Dictionary for a comprehensive list of noun and verb usages of the word "mark" as well as early modern texts in which the word is used; Shakespeare, Clark, and Wright, *The First Part of King Henry IV* in *Unabridged William Shakespeare*, 486.

complementary process of an aural and mental engagement with the spoken word.[6] Thus, the action of marking in ink or thread (to name only a few examples) is inextricably tied up with the receptive action of marking that is both physiological and mental. Acts of writing are directly informed by material properties and cultural knowledge, and these, in turn, carry implications for the meaning-making of viewers and readers.[7]

Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is replete with both visual and verbal markings, and the material connotations of the visual arts inscribed meanings upon these marks that were unique to Early Modern theatre-goers. The plot of *Cymbeline* revolves around various actions of marking that foreground the negative connotation of "stain" that marking entails. In this play, the semiotic function of the mark is revealed to be both transgressive as well as unstable due to the material and penetrative act of writing as well as the inherent possibility of misreading and misrepresenting by the play's characters. The inability of the symbol to effectively convey total and truthful meaning is systematically revealed by the playwright through the deployment of markings that are physically and geographically removed from their speakers and writers. However, the process of writing is always separated to a greater or lesser extent from the act of reading, especially in cases of letter correspondence. In his epilogue to *Writing as Material Practice,* author John Bennet argues that the processes of reading and writing, though complementary, are usually embodied separately:

> Although it occupies a period of time, we can think of the 'moment of writing'…in contrast to the potentially *multiple* 'moments of reading' that might take place many

[6] Bennet, J. 2013. Epilogue. In: Piquette, K. E. and Whitehouse, R. D. (eds.) *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, surface and medium.* Pp. 335-342. London: Ubiquity Press. DOI: http:// dx.doi.org/10.5334/bai.q 336

[7] Piquette, K. E. and Whitehouse, R. D. 2013. Introduction: Developing an approach to writing as material practice. In: Piquette, K. E. and Whitehouse, R. D. (eds.) *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, surface and medium.* Pp. 1-13. London: Ubiquity Press. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/bai.a

> times, minutes, days, even centuries or millennia afterwards…. Depending on the portability of the material written upon, 'reading' may take place in the same location or at a distance; it may be achieved by the same actor, or a different one, or even be only an 'implied' reading aimed at supernatural beings.[8]

That letters are written and verbal messages are spoken in physical separation from their recipients is certainly intuitive. However, the inherent displacement of a composed text from its reader lends an unstable quality to the content of the text. It must often be recoded by the reader in a process uninformed—or misinformed—by the circumstances of its composition. The physical distance that must be traversed in *Cymbeline* requires that many of the significant interactions between characters must be transacted by letters and go-betweens, so the potential for misinterpretations and misrepresentations is heightened. The reduced semiotic efficacy of the removed speaker is underscored in *Cymbeline* through the deployment of the material connotations of ink and dyes and their constitutive substances. That these physical and verbal markings have the potential to be both harmful and transgressive is emphasized by Shakespeare's allusions to the materiality of inks and dyes as stains. Just as inks and dyes may be considered transgressive in their penetrative actions upon media such as paper and fabric, so too do verbal and visual verbal marks work to penetrate a character's psyche and produce imaginative stains. Thus, as a character aurally or visually "marks" a speech or textual act, he or she is marked by attending to the act. The capacity for marks in *Cymbeline* to be transgressive or mendacious translates to a psychic or imaginative stain upon the characters who attend to them.

This quality of writing as unstable, mendacious, and potentially transgressive is present from the play's beginning, as Posthumus consoles Innogen that the geographic distance placed

[8] Piquette and Whitehouse, *Writing as Material Practice*, 336.

between them will be spanned by letters. However, this promise is initiated with the mention that Philario is one who is known to Posthumus "but by letter."[9] In this scene, a dynamic is established in which the written word serves as a stand-in for the physical body. Posthumus's promise to "drink the words you send, / Though ink be made of gall," underscores this substitutive relationship, while also foreshadowing the potential problems stemming from this arrangement:[10] the gustatory act of tasting is paired with the sensory image of bitterness suggested by his use of the word "gall." This statement by Posthumus creates another effect; by likening her ink to gall, Posthumus introduces into the action of the play a material item constituent and metonymic in the ink-making process. A primary ingredient in Early Modern ink, gall, becomes a complex metaphorical and metonymic signifier, one which all at once may represent ink (as ingredient), bitterness (as homonym), and Innogen (as message). This substitutive and problematic relationship of writing for physical intimacy is explored throughout the action of the play, reaching a climax as Iachimo intrudes into Innogen's chamber and commits his observations to writing. The blurred distinction between the physical and material act of marking heightens the drama of the play for several significant reasons. Ink carried multiple material and bodily connotations, and thus was positioned at a meeting point of writing and the body.[11] It was a substance that was common, yet the substance and its constitutive

[9] Shakespeare, Clark, and Wright, *Cymbeline* in *Unabridged William Shakespeare*, 1175

[10] Ibid., 1175

[11] Andrea Feeser, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds., *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments, 1400-1800*, The Histories of Material Culture and Collecting, 1700-1950 (Farnham, Surrey, England : Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 71. In his essay "The Expense of Ink and the Wastes of Shame," Harris argues that ink was considered a curative for various ailments: "In early modern England…ink was not merely confined to the page. It found its way onto and into the body. Equally intriguing, however, is the converse prospect: how the body found its way into early modern ink."

elements were perceived to have had metaphorical and curative qualities that rendered it a semi-medicinal, semi-magical substance.[12]

It is likely that Shakespeare and other early modern writers had at least a passing understanding of the principle steps required for ink making, and it is further likely that these authors were aware of the ways in which the physical bodies of both humans and animals were incorporated into author's tools for marking (in the form of powdered bone, blood, urine, and lampblack). In his essay "The Expense of Ink and Wastes of Shame," Mitchell M. Harris argues that the ingredients and processes of ink-making were fairly common knowledge for writers during the early modern era: "…passages reveal that Shakespeare possessed at least a basic knowledge of ink-making, but that he sees ink as a noxious substance…perhaps hints at more secretive knowledge of its various uses in "science" manuals."[13] Harris postulates that Shakespeare's mention of black ink in the sonnets may reveal both his understanding of the ink-making process as well as of the body's ability to express its fluids in the act of writing:

> Is it too much to believe, then, that Shakespeare's "black ink" of the sonnets is his own wasteful stain (dye, infection, *inficere*), perhaps his own urine, his own blood, or, in following the Galenic model that saw semen as the concocted and cooled form of blood, his own seed—his own "waste of shame"? After all, Shakespeare seems to understand the body's potent ability to express (and waste) its concocted fluids, when he has Lady Macbeth proclaim rather outrageously, "Come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall."[14]

---

[12] Ursula Klein and E. C. Spary, eds., *Materials and Expertise in Early Modern Europe: Between Market and Laboratory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 10-11. In their introduction, Klein and Spary argue that early modern craftsmen-scientists "manipulate materials in a world replete with astrological agencies, invisible spirits, occult forces, and hidden chemical principles." In addition to being a product-in-commerce, ink functioned as both a curative as well as a semi-magical substance.

[13] Feeser, Goggin, and Tobin, *The Materiality of Color,* 70.

[14] Ibid., 76.

In *Cymbeline,* as with Shakespeare's sonnets, the transgressive act of writing carries material and bodily connotations that serve to highlight the transgressive and factually visceral act of writing upon clean (pure) paper. In marking paper with ink comprised of bodily fluids, the author creates a "mark" which is infused with the physical body of a living individual, establishing a link between the physicality of the author and the text itself. This physical connection is extended even further by the act of reading, during which the reader, in turn, engages in an embodied process of marking the message's contents within his or her mind/ brain. In this way, reading of a text may serve as a type of physical congress in which the bodies of the reader and the writer meet momentarily in the physically separate acts of writing and reading.

The activity of writing and the material culture which surrounded it were pervasive elements of early modern domestic, mercantile, and political settings. James I and Charles I made improvements to England's postal system in the 16th and 17th centuries, which improved the security and dependability of postal deliveries.[15] Literacy rates for both men and women saw an increase between 1600 and 1700, and the advent and spread of the printing press helped immensely to further the trend of literacy and to spread a culture of writing and correspondence throughout England.[16] Regional economies in England were consolidated on a national level as England benefitted from domestic and international trade, and by the mid-17th century, household accounts indicate a fruitful market in materials and implements associated with writing. Retailer inventories in Kent and Cornwall demonstrate that paper was an extremely

[15] James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512-1635*, Early Modern Literature in History (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 119. Daybell writes that in "1608, James I 'revived, renewed, and published' earlier postal directives by printing *Orders for the Postes,* which was reprinted in 1621…Efforts were also made to maintain good postal conditions between England and Scotland…"

[16] Ibid., 20. Daybell writes that "As levels of literacy rose towards the end of the sixteenth century, letters became increasingly private spaces…"

popular commodity and was commonly held in commercial shops in the early 1600s.[17] Writing took place in spheres both public and private, in houses both domestic and mercantile, and among social classes and genders.

Somewhat harder to trace artefactually is the production and circulation of ink, likely due to a logistical issue. In terms of the marketplace, the ingredients for ink have other practical applications in the domestic sphere. Copperas, oak galls, and gum Arabic were ingredients in a wide variety of homemade products, including medicine, cosmetics, and food items.[18] Copperas, crystals of hydrated ferrous sulfate, had practical applications to combat ague and inflammation as well as to tint cosmetics, inks, and dyes.[19] Iron-laden oak galls were used to treat stomach ruptures and soothe toothaches, and gum Arabic had various applications as a thickener and binder.[20] Although pre-mixed ink was probably readily available in the stalls and shops of commerce centers, the raw ingredients were more widely available, more easily transported, and had a broader range of practical applications. Furthermore, recipes for making ink were widely available, and it was fairly easy to produce it in a variety of colors and consistencies according to the needs and occasion of the writer.[21]

As an item of material culture, ink possesses the unique quality of being both ubiquitous and elusive. As a commodity, ink and its constitutive ingredients must have circulated

---

[17] Ibid., 31-32. "A study of retailers' inventories in Kent and Cornwall for the period 1600 to 1649 reveals that 11 per cent of Kentish and 44 per cent of Cornish shops carried paper as a commodity."

[18] Klein and Spary, *Materials and Expertise in Early Modern Europe*, 105-106. In his essay "Ink," Adrian Johns notes that there "were no ink manufactories to speak of until the mid-seventeenth century and no sustained industry of ink making until quite late in the eighteenth"; *The Family Magazine: In Two Parts. Part I. Containing Useful Directions in All the Branches of House-Keeping and Cookery.*, n.d.

[19] *The Family Magazine: In Two Parts. Part I. Containing Useful Directions in All the Branches of House-Keeping and Cookery.*, n.d., 13, 114. The recipe book describes copperas as an ingredient in cosmetics (p. 114), as a "physic" (p. 13), and as an ointment (p. 114).

[20] *The Family Magazine* also describes galls as an effective treatment for "stomach ruptures" (p. 223) and toothaches (p. 257-258). It also mentions imbibing ink directly as "the vulgar remedy" for ringworm (p. 82).

[21] Klein and Spary, *Materials and Expertise in Early Modern Europe*, 106. Johns includes an early modern ink recipe, and argues that recipes "are enough to convey that making ink was not a straightforward business and that its associations were not those we might now assume."

throughout the early modern economy as something to be bought, sold, pilfered, gifted, and produced. Yet ink constitutes somewhat of an absent presence in the shipping manifests, probate inventories, and bills of sale of the early modern era. Ingredients for ink were widely available at market in early modern English towns and villages and had been since at least the Middle Ages.[22] The everyday requirements of commerce, communication, and memory required ink and paper to be readily available. Early modern England was very much a writing culture, and the early modern era witnessed a boom in writing manuals, writing tablets, manuscript books, and other paper wares.[23]

Harris argues that the material commodities of ink, pen, and paper are engaged by Shakespeare in a sort of "metaphoric transference," in which the physical tools of the writer operated in ways similar to the bodily members they may be said to represent.[24] Harris is interested in investigating the materiality of ink in Shakespeare's time in order to allow a broader reading of the sonnets that demonstrates a close relationship between material processes and implicit homologies that the poet constructs. He argues that the materiality of writing and its content are not always divisible. What results from this homology is that the tools of linguistic and artistic representation are subjected to the same anxieties as their representative body parts.[25] Thus, the transgressive action of marking with pen upon clean, white paper is treated with anxiety similar to the marking of the eyes and ears upon the body, word, or speech of another.

---

[22] Ibid., 104. Johns notes that ink seems to have existed "in all distinct cultures we tend to think about in comparative terms…[and] seems to have been to all intents and purposes the *same* thing for long periods of time and across large distances.

[23] Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England*, 20. Daybell notes that the early modern period "as a whole witnessed a complex development in letter-writing theory and instruction over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" that included "letter-writing manuals," and "printed works which offered instructions on how to write letters…" He argues later that writing tablets were "commonly produced, incorporated into almanac form from the sixteenth century…"

[24] Feeser, Goggin, and Tobin, *The Materiality of Color*, 67. The argument of this essay proceeds, in part, from Mitchell M. Harris' analysis of ink.

[25] Ibid., 67.

The act of writing may even have been subject to anxieties of transgression surrounding acts such as copulation and rape.

Materials such as ink and dye dwelled in an economy of science and trade that had its roots in artisanal practices. Yet, as Klein and Spary argue in *Materials and Expertise in Early Modern England,* these scientific inquires/ products-in-commerce were "manipulated in a world replete with astrological agencies, invisible spirits, occult forces, and hidden chemical principles."[26] Pigments, metals, and chemicals held symbolic and mythical value as well, and ink bore many associations with magic.[27] Material objects and scientific epistemology continually transited across the spheres of the domestic, the marketplace, the laboratory, and scenes of artistic practice.[28] Consumer substances like ink, ceramics, gunpowder, and metals provided the semi-raw materials for this burgeoning scientific investigation. Yet these products were inextricably bound in with artisanal practices and market culture—inks, poisons, and medicines were workaday in every sense of the word, yet the early modern marketplace was rife with demand for new substances to fulfill everyday needs.[29]

Despite the sometimes noxious elements that were constitutive in the ink-making process, ink itself was associated with medicine and found its way both onto and into the body.[30] Conversely, the body also found its way into ink and the writing process. Blood was sometimes substituted for vermilion in red ink, and authors often equated red ink with blood in a gesture

[26] Klein and Spary, *Materials and Expertise in Early Modern Europe*, 10-11. Klein and Spary argue that ink was often regarded to have sympathetic qualities derived from the semi-magical properties of its constitutive elements.

[27] Ibid, 11.

[28] Ibid., 18.

[29] Ibid., 9.

[30] Feeser, Goggin, and Tobin, *The Materiality of Color*, 71. This information is corroborated in J. Osborne's *The Family Magazine: In Two Parts.* As previously cited, ink itself is described as "a vulgar remedy."

which underscored the physical connection between the author and his or her text.[31] Ink imbibed elements of the body, imitated desires and processes of the body, and possessed both magical and perceivable qualities that permitted the deployment and invocation of significations, affiliations, and the bodily humors.

In the play *Cymbeline,* letters are marked, inks and stains are used and discussed, and media is blotted with stain or ink. The plot revolves around this action of marking, used in *Cymbeline* to indicate both transgression and restoration. These instances serve as the main driving actions for the plot, and they also serve as focal points (whether visual or imaginative) for both the audience and the characters. These instances of marking help to create a theme of unstable and problematic communication, which is underscored by both their position as focal points to the audience as well as the ways in which their effects reverberate through the text. The literal and symbolic act of marking within the play is caught up with the material connotations of ink's constitutive substances, as well as being caught up with the material connotations surrounding the act of writing and mentally "marking" or attending to signs and symbols.

Shakespeare draws on the medicinal qualities of ink in characterizing the correspondence between Innogen and Posthumus after his exile to Rome. In Act 2, scene 4, Iachimo gives Posthumus letters from Innogen. However, the text does not indicate that Posthumus ever reads this letter. The reader/ viewer never has the opportunity to glean what is in these letters (although there is the possibility that Posthumus reads these off-stage). Posthumus does not fulfill his promise to drink the words she sends; in ignoring her letters, he refuses to "mark" her words and severs the tenuous link that is supposed to span their geographic distance. In this case, the instability of textual correspondence is the direct result of Posthumus's mistaken belief of

[31] Ibid., 71-72. This further demonstrates the connection between the physical and ocular mark in the use of red ink in ecclesiastical calendars ("red letter days").

Iachimo's testimony. Innogen seems to be aware of the spiritually-curative properties of material communication as well as the potential for text to act as semi-substitute for physical presence. She describes his letters as containing the "relish of love, / Of my lord's health, of his content."[32] Here, the medical and medicinal terminology that Innogen uses suggests the potential for the written word to cure the psychological pains of displaced love: "yet not / That we two are asunder, let that grieve him; / Some griefs are med'cinable, that is one of them, / For it doth physic love."[33] Textual correspondence thus has the potential to "physic love" just as it has the potential, if misapplied, to engender spiritual disease. In fact, the act of reading letters may have been considered to be the momentary meeting of two bodies in acts of reading and writing that involved marking *on* or *in* the body *from* the body of the other. In these two scenes, a direct link is established between the physical ailments of the body and the medicinal or curative functions of ink and letter writing. Just as Posthumus consoles Innogen by suggesting that "drinking the words she sends" should provide a palliative for their displaced love, Innogen recognizes this in her verbal reception of his letter.

However, that which is medicine also has the potential to be poisonous. Echoing the Galenic belief that the distinction between poison and medicine dwells in the dosage, Posthumus's refusal to read the letters signals an intensification in his disease of the heart.[34] In his writing of the duplicitous letter to Innogen, Posthumus effectively misapplies the physic.

---

[32]Shakespeare, Clark, and Wright, *Cymbeline* in *Unabridged William Shakespeare*, 1190.

[33] Ibid., 1190

[34] John Henry Adams, "Agentive Objects and Protestant Idolatry in Arden of Faversham," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 57, no. 2 (2017): 231–51, https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2017.0010; Galen and P. N. Singer, *Galen : Selected Works*, The World's Classics (Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press, 1997), http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=12310&site=ehost-live, 275. Adams notes that "continuing into the Renaissance, the distinction between poisons and drugs was blurry as writers continued to think in terms of *pharmaka*, or the notion that if a given substance proved toxic, it was likely to be a sign of improper dosage rather than inherent danger." This idea is corroborated by Galen, who states that "….many drugs which are taken internally do good only at a certain time, in a certain quantity, and in a certain mixture, and are actually harmful if taken at the wrong time, in excess, and unmixed. This, after all, is true of food too."

That textual correspondence has this potential to engender spiritual disease is illustrated by Posthumus's letter to Innogen via Iachimo. However, in this case, it is the letter-writer himself who misrepresents the truth about Iachimo, effectively allowing Innogen to mismark Iachimo as trustworthy. The letter commending Iachimo to Innogen may have rightfully engendered in the reader or viewer feelings of unease or anxiety; after all, what reason has Posthumus to commend Iachimo so heartily and graciously?

Our first meeting of Iachimo in Rome does little to commend the reader/viewer to him. Besides his loose acquaintance with Philario, Iachimo likely does not strike the reader particularly favorably. He is skeptical of Posthumus's honor, and contests the idea that Posthumus's marriage to Innogen spoke to Posthumus's honor, "wherein he must be weighed rather by her value than his own, words him…a great deal from this matter."[35] Here, it is significant that Iachimo says "words him," which here means "labels him" or "marks him." From Iachimo's skeptical perspective, it is Innogen whose honor marks or stains Posthumus, and not the other way around. There is an intentionality on the part of Iachimo here: by staining Innogen or marking her as stained, Iachimo seeks to "stain" Posthumus in reputation. Nevertheless, Posthumus commends Iachimo to Innogen, and her trust in her husband persuades her, despite Iachimo's tasteless flirtation, to take the chest of jewels into her bedchamber. This initial, written "marking" of Iachimo as an individual of the "noblest note" must provide a stand-in for an experienced-based appraisal of Iachimo, though the exchange that follows undermines this initial commendation.[36] In accepting Posthumus's words about Iachimo, his letters provide the metonymic stand-in for his physical body.

[35] Shakespeare, Clark, and Wright, *Cymbeline* in *Unabridged William Shakespeare*, 1178.
[36] Ibid., 1181.

Innogen's first meeting with Iachimo is not auspicious, and it is only through the substitutive quality of Posthumus's letter-presence that Innogen is compelled to endure Iachimo. He interrupts her personal reveries in a gesture that serves to mirror his later interruption of her private bedchamber. In an aside, he comments that, externally, she is beautiful: "all of her that is out of door, most rich."[37] This verbal invocation of 'out of door" is suggestive of that which is not external, two invisible identities of Innogen that include her inner, moral self and her sexual self. He makes the note that, if the external matches the internal, he will give up his plan. Here, Iachimo signals that the direct confrontation of the external appearance with an internal truth would cause his entire plan to fall to pieces. That is, if his external, ocular "marking" of Innogen should match Posthumus's verbal "marking" of her, the game is up and Iachimo will forfeit.

Iachimo's invasion of Innogen's bedchamber later that night provides the plot climax and the visual/ imaginative focal point of the first half of the play. Here, Iachimo's intent is to fabricate a lie, rather than relate a true story. His intention to mislead Posthumus is facilitated by Iachimo's reliance on the written word to recount his conquest of Innogen. He begins to make notes about the chamber, but he indicates to himself that "some natural notes about her body" would serve him "ten thousand" times better than descriptions of furniture.[38] His emergence from the trunk, along with his self-identification as "Tarquin," serve to underscore the simulated rape that characterizes this scene. The act of trespass from the trunk simulates the penetrative act of rape, and Iachimo's comparison of himself with Tarquin underscore his malicious intentions. Iachimo's description of the chamber is cursory here, serving to shift the focus towards Iachimo's ocular marking of Innogen's body and her bodily mark which will serve as Iachimo's most damning item of evidence. While he glosses over the material elements of her bedroom,

[37] Ibid., 1181.
[38] Ibid., 1184.

many of which tell rich narrative stories in themselves, he mentions only one another narrative by name: a book that Innogen has been reading. This book is the "Tale of Tereus," which she instructs her maid to fold down a leaf from. This physical act of marking draws the reader/ viewer's attention to the story, and it creates a suggestive link between the two narratives. In this story, Philomel is raped by her brother-in-law and, after having her tongue cut out, weaves the tale into a tapestry that identifies her aggressor.[39] The act of verbal "marking," or indicating in such a way that the reader/ viewer must attend to something, causes an overlap of narrative in which the themes of the alluded-to narrative irrupt into the primary narrative. In much the same way as Iachimo trespasses into Innogen's chamber and commits his violation to text, another textual account of female violation and subsequent revenge trespasses into *Iachimo's* scene, passively and silently providing feminine witness.

While the physical talisman from Innogen, the bracelet, will serve to provide "witness…/ To th'maddening" of Posthumus, it is the "mole, cinque-spotted" that provides "a voucher/ stronger than ever law could make."[40] The mole, with its "crimson drops" signal the portentous possibility of the blood which might be shed due to this transgression. In Iachimo's retelling of this scene, he will later refer to this mark as a "stain" in Act IV, which retroactively creates a material connection between the mole (as stain on flesh), Iachimo's account (as stain on paper), and his conquest (as stain on reputation).

This mole is the "other," internal Innogen that complements Iachimo's earlier statement about her "out of doors." Normally hidden from view, the mole will provide the proof that

---

[39] Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: Translated by Eminent Persons. Published by Sir Samuel Garth. In Four Volumes. ...*, vol. 1 (London: printed [by Rickaby] for Martin and Bain, Fleet-Street, 1794), http://find.galegroup.com.spot.lib.auburn.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&docLevel=FASCIMILE&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=aubu72210&tabID=T001&docId=CW3316140320&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0.

[40] Shakespeare, Clark, and Wright, *Cymbeline* in *Unabridged William Shakespeare*, 1184.

Iachimo needs to convince Posthumus that he has been intimate with Innogen: It is "a voucher / stronger than ever law could make."[41] It is of significance here that Iachimo uses the words "voucher" and "law." The word voucher plays on multiple meanings, existent in Shakespeare's time, of voucher as written document, verbal summons, and physical piece of evidence. Thus, Innogen's whole sexual body becomes metonymized as her single mole, which is dealt with as if it were a mark on paper. As Iachimo has manipulated the truth by committing its falsification to paper, he has manipulated Innogen's physical virtue. By metonymizing Innogen as her mole, and transforming this mole into a "stain," Iachimo renders Innogen as unstable and manipulable as the written word.

In effect, this scene of transgression is played out twice in the text of *Cymbeline.* The first time, the audience *sees* the trespass and acknowledges the dramatic irony that will make the retelling of it all the more infuriating. The scene is played out a second time verbally, as Iachimo relates his conquest back to Posthumus and forces him to mentally mark the falsified scene. In this retelling, however, other instances of markings in Innogen's chamber rise to the surface of the dialogue and operate subversively in the background of Iachimo's story with the same undermining function that "The Tale of Tereus" performed in the previous scene. These instances of marking in Innogen's chamber comprise a semi-textual backdrop that serves to underscore the transgressive nature of Iachimo's invasion, while suggesting or foreshadowing themes of female power and revenge.

At first, as Iachimo relates his conquest, he hedges a bit, seemingly reluctant to state outright that he has been intimate with Innogen. Perhaps he hopes that his descriptions of the tapestries and the chimney-piece will provide enough proof to convince Posthumus of Innogen's

[41] Ibid., 1184.

inconstancy. By withholding his most damning item of false evidence, he hopes that Posthumus will jump to the conclusion himself; Iachimo intends that Posthumus "mark" himself as a cuckold based on circumstantial evidence, inscribing on himself the "stain" of fallen grace and lost reputation.

Iachimo first invokes the image of the silk and silver tapestry that hangs in Innogen's bedchamber. The tapestry constitutes an additional element in the theme of marking: as a decoration of the domestic sphere, the tapestry is suggestive of the female private life and of female craftsmanship.[42] Here, the female craftsmanship of the tapestry lends a female voice to a story of female power. The tapestry thus becomes a talisman of female agentive power. Though incapable of speech, like the sleeping Innogen and the mute Philomel, the tapestry of Cleopatra portrays an image of a female seductive authority that nevertheless holds the promise of menace for the male transgressor. In addition to providing an opportunity for Shakespeare to reference one of his own plays, the tapestry of Cleopatra is a quietly menacing image that reinforces the theme of silent communication taking a substitutive place for physical intimacy. *Antony and Cleopatra* contains dramatic themes of mismarking heralded by textual correspondence which are reminiscent of those in *Cymbeline:* Antony accused Cleopatra of betraying him. Cleopatra, in an attempt to win him back, sends messengers to Antony claiming that she has died. He dies in her arms, and she is to be taken back to the seat of Rome's authoritative (masculine) power. Rather than relinquish her physical agency, Cleopatra hides asps in her basket, and she and her

[42] Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse, eds., *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, Empire in Renaissance England*, New Cultural Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 240-241. In her essay "Staging Women's Relations to Textiles in Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Cymbeline*," Susan Frye notes that "women did connect through textiles…[they] bear witness to women's lives and affiliations. Women's textiles, especially those featuring designs, attest to different ways in which women's activity was interpreted in the early modern period…"

maids die rather than submit. This allusion is important to the text of *Cymbeline* for several reasons. The lack of physical proximity which is spanned by letters reinforces the theme of tragic miscommunication. Additionally, this story, like "The Tale of Tereus," demonstrates menacing images of women who were wronged but who nevertheless retain their agency from men. Philomel, refusing to stay quiet about her rape, weaves the event into a damning tapestry. Cleopatra, refusing to surrender her body and agency to Rome, takes her own life.

A somewhat more menacing example of female agency is present on Innogen's chimney-piece: an image of the goddess Diana at the moment when, bathing, she is espied by Actaeon. Like the textual/ material image of Philomel and the visual/ verbal image of Cleopatra, the additional visual/ verbal marking of Diana from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* presents an image of feminine agentive power and masculine transgression.[43] It positions Innogen as a tempting yet dangerous object of male sexual desire. According to Ovid, as the unsuspecting Actaeon wanders through the forest, he strays toward a cave mouth. This image, along with the image of the tumescent river Cydnus, imbues the room with sexual energy of distinctly female craftsmanship and anatomy. Diana, enraged at his trespass, turns Actaeon into a snag as she snarls "Tell, if thou canst, the wond'rous sight disclosed, a goddess naked to thy view expos'd."[44] This last image places Iachimo unwittingly in the position of Actaeon, and many reader/ viewers may have shared a quiet hope that Iachimo, like the witless hunter, would be subject to vengeful violence. As Iachimo makes his report to Posthumus, his evidence compels Posthumus and the reader/ viewer to "attend" or to "mark" his testimony and, subsequently to "mark" the stories of Philomel, Cleopatra, and Diana. By invoking these stories, Iachimo unwittingly invokes the

[43] Erickson and Hulse, *Early Modern Visual Culture*, 239

[44] Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: Translated by Eminent Persons. Published by Sir Samuel Garth. In Four Volumes. ...,* 158.

power of female agency and revenge, which now provide a subtly menacing backdrop for his mendacious tale.[45] These textual narratives overlap or irrupt into the primary narrative, giving the lie to Iachimo's story, silently rebuking his trespass, and situating Innogen among the ranks the powerful and the wronged. Iachimo's exclamatory statement, "Never saw I figures / So likely to report themselves" provides a pun on this narrative mechanism: this statement could be read/ heard to suggest that Cleopatra and Diana, if they could, would report themselves violently upon Iachimo.[46] Additionally, this statement serves to foreshadow that Iachimo's transgression, like those of Tereus, Actaeon, and the Romans, will be vengefully answered. Although the representations of these stories are material, they possess a physical presence within Innogen's bedchamber. Unlike the letters of Posthumus, they report themselves accurately to Iachimo, and they were not written with the specific intent of deceit. Instead, they serve as silent warnings to male transgressors for whom deceit is the goal. Additionally, these stories invoke strongly transgressive sexual images which may be suggestive of the stain of copulative fluids that Iachimo wishes to connote to his story and stain upon the mind of Posthumus.

It is not only the physical distance between letter-writer and recipient that provides the instability for the meaning of the letters; it is the letter-writers themselves who intentionally exploit the physical distance and who seek actively to deceive. While Iachimo and Posthumus actively attempt to exploit distance, other characters work to close this gap through further instances of marking. Thus, in Cymbeline, the act of marking is a tool both for transgression and restoration. Not all marks are in ink, yet the physical act of marking serves a signifying purpose

[45] Erickson and Hulse, *Early Modern Visual Culture*, 239-241. Frye's essay comprises an elegant elaboration on this theme of transgression and embroidered "marking."

[46] Shakespeare, Clark, and Wright, *Cymbeline* in *Unabridged William Shakespeare*, 1184.

within the play, denoting an attempt by the characters to bring unstable or uncontrollable characters within the realm of control.

In both scenes recounting Iachimo's invasion of Innogen's bedchamber, the book and tapestries constitute physical and visual marks, materially inscribed with inks and dyes and imaginatively inscribed with copulatory fluids that tell various stories which share a common theme. By invoking these stories and allowing their texts to irrupt into the primary storyline, Shakespeare systematically creates a connection that links physical transgression (the rape of Philomel), the transmission of false letters (Cleopatra's to Antony), and visual marking (Actaeon's trespass against Diana). These visual marks assert their narrative presence within the scene in a gesture that mirrors the assertion of physical presence enacted by the writing and sending of letters. That Iachimo visually marks the stories and re-marks them upon Posthumus serves to underscore this connection and demonstrate the extent to which false communication coupled with evil intent can blot or stain the receiver of the mark.

Pisanio succinctly illustrates this connection between the material substances of writing, the physical mark as substitute for physical proximity, and the theme of literary misinterpretation in the soliloquy delivered in Act 3, scene 2. Posthumus's reliance on hearsay is likened to a "strange infection" that has fallen into his ear.[47] Like Innogen before, Pisanio deploys medical terminology which likens the act of hearing falsities to imbibing poison. In marking the false statements of Iachimo, Posthumus has not only allowed himself to be marked as cuckold, but he has also fallen prey to a disease of the mind which manifests itself as unreason and aggression. Essentially, Iachimo's poisonous words have penetrated Posthumus and left their infectious mark upon him, bringing his mind "as low as thy fortunes."[48] That Posthumus's letter is substitutive to

[47] Ibid., 1190.
[48] Ibid., 1190.

the act of murder is also indicated here: "O damn'd paper! Black as the ink that's on thee!"[49] Here, Pisanio's characterization of the letter as blackened by ink performs a gesture of metaphoric transference in which the blackness of ink marring the purity of paper echoes the staining of Posthumus's mental state by the mendacities of Iachimo and the imagined staining of Innogen's chastity by Iachimo's invasion of her chambers. Pisanio, acting as go-between for Posthumus and Innogen, refuses the command to have his lady killed. He dwells on Posthumus's physical distance, which prevents him from knowing the truth about his faithful wife. In this scene, the letter that Pisanio holds becomes a representation for the evil that has occurred due to the tragic miscommunication. The ink which blackens the paper here only sends the message, yet it and the message are metonymized to underscore the evil intent that sprang from the initial miscommunication. The connection between ink and act is underscored in Pisanio's description of Posthumus's letter as "feodary for this act." The term feodary hints at the substitutive nature of the letter for the act of the murder.

Yet just as the written word marked falsely has the potential for harm, so too does the written mark of truth carry the potential for restoration. The final scene witnesses the reunion of the removed characters after battle with the Romans, and Cymbeline stands reunited with his daughter and long-lost sons. He recalls a mark upon Guidarius, "a sanguine star."[50] Here, the mark upon Guidarius serves as a representation of the truth of his lineage, effectively marking him as royalty and establishing the genealogical link between himself, Innogen, and Cymbeline. Belarius's previous lie about the death of Cymbeline's sons is reversed by their physical presence and the "natural stamp" that provides the evidence for truth. The physical presence of Iachimo also causes the truth of his deceit to come to light, no longer facilitated by physical

[49] Ibid., 1190.
[50] Ibid., 1215.

distance. In a final gesture of restoration, the soothsayer interprets the tablet which the god Jupiter laid upon Posthumus's breast, and "bloody hands are washed," signaling an end to reliance on ink, letters, and hearsay, and restoration of the monarchy upon the truth of physical proximity.[51]

[51] Ibid., 1216.

Bibliography

"Mark, v.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/114171?rskey=Tpm5jZ&result=5&isAdvanced=false (accessed December 14, 2017).

Daybell, James. 2012. *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512-1635*. Early Modern Literature in History. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Erickson, Peter, and Clark Hulse, eds. 2000. *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, Empire in Renaissance England*. New Cultural Studies. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Feeser, Andrea, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds. 2012. *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments, 1400-1800*. The Histories of Material Culture and Collecting, 1700-1950. Farnham, Surrey, England : Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Galen, and P. N. Singer. 1997. *Galen : Selected Works*. The World's Classics. Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=12310&site=ehost-live.

John Henry Adams. "Agentive Objects and Protestant Idolatry in *Arden of Faversham*." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 57, no. 2 (2017): 231-251. https://muse.jhu.edu/ (accessed December 14, 2017).

Klein, Ursula, and E. C. Spary, eds. 2010. *Materials and Expertise in Early Modern Europe: Between Market and Laboratory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ovid, and Allen Mandelbaum. 1995. *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace.

Piquette, Kathryn E., and Ruth Whitehouse, eds. 2013. *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, Surface and Medium*. Print on demand. London: Ubiquity Press.

Shakespeare, William, William George Clark, and William Aldis Wright. 1997. *Unabridged William Shakespeare*. Courage Unabridged Classics Series. [N.p.]: Running Press. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=33030&site=ehost-live.

The Family Magazine: In Two Parts. Part I. Containing Useful Directions in All the Branches of House-Keeping and Cookery. n.d.