Artigo Original

Estudos sobre Shakespeare

'Being strong on both sides': Shakespearean heroines' equivocations

'Sendo forte em ambos os lados': Equivocações por heroínas shakespeareanas

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Resumo: No século XVI, perseguições politico-religiosas levaram os católicos ingleses a desenvolver uma técnica para enfrentar inquéritos protestantes e ao mesmo tempo evitar o pecado do perjúrio. Teorizada por Henry Garnet em *Tratado da Equivocação*, a prática consistia na formulação de sentenças verdadeiras, mas que contém dois sentidos: um é de fácil compreensão, porém falso; o outro contém a verdade, porém de forma complexa e oculta. Este artigo investiga como algumas heroínas shakespeareanas utilizam essa técnica para responder perguntas em situações limítrofes. Como os perseguidos politico-religiosos faziam na realidade, essas heroínas angustiadas buscam proteger a si mesmas e/ou aqueles que amam.
Palavras-chave: Shakespeare; Equivocação; Verdade e mentira; Henry Garnet

Abstract: In the sixteenth century, politico-religious persecution led English Catholics to develop a technique for dealing with Protestant inquiries while avoiding the sin of perjury. Conceived by Henry Garnet in his *Treatise of Equivocation,* the practice consisted of formulating sentences that were always true but had two different meanings: one easy to understand but false; the other true but complex and hidden. This article investigates how some Shakespearean heroines explore this technique to answer questions in distressing situations. As the persecuted politico-religious minority did in history these misguided heroines seek to protect themselves or those whom they love in the plays.
Keywords: Shakespeare; Equivocation; Truth and lying; Henry Garnet

Introduction

Around the turn of the seventeenth century, English religious conflicts led to a discussion about the boundaries between truth and falsehood. The trial of the Jesuit Robert Southwell (1561-1595) revealed that the so-called "doctrine of equivocation" was in widespread use among the English Catholic community. Southwell wrote a treatise in which he legitimised the core idea of

the doctrine: the concealment of the truth when there was persecution of a religious nature was to be practised even when the individual was under an oath to speak truthfully. For this purpose, there were linguistic techniques to circumvent the legal processes through the formulation of either incomplete or ambiguous sentences. The information given in them would still ring true for the speaker, but would deliberately lead the listener to misapprehension. Southwell's treatise on that subject was lost, but another one, written around the same time, was publicly revealed in 1606, whose author, Jesuit priest Henry Garnet (1555-1606), was himself on trial, but this time for his alleged participation in the Gunpowder Plot (1605).

William Shakespeare's more explicit references to this doctrine are present in *Macbeth* (c. 1606) and to some degree in other plays, such as *Othello* (c. 1604).[2] Criticism devoted to the study of equivocation in the poet's work has focused on these two texts, paying close attention to the negative effects that doubtful statements have on the plots. There are rarer studies dedicated to Shakespearean characters' use of equivocation, in conformity with the rules and practices specified in Garnet's treatise, for the purpose of protecting themselves or others in the face of a threat or violence. This article investigates both the practice and the purpose of equivocation, as described by Garnet, by a specific type of character in the Shakespearean canon, the young heroine. Two such characters equivocate when they face questions in precarious–though not religious–situations, formulating answers with double meanings that nevertheless cannot be labelled as "lies". Under pressure, Desdemona in *Othello* and Isabella in *Measure for Measure* (1603-4) make statements that in their consciences they can recognize as true. These two texts are chosen based on their composition dates probably between 1603 and 1604, when there was an intense discussion in English society about the easing of the persecutory laws for non-conformists at the beginning of the reign of James I (1603-1625). It is possible that equivocation on stage performed by Catholic heroines in order to protect themselves or those they love would have a different sort of impact on the audience at that specific moment. In addition, we can infer that, even at other situations, instances of equivocation to protect oneself or others always had a dramatic potential, as these instances naturally would emerge from critical situations occurring in early modern drama.

Treatise of Equivocation

The first time that the doctrine of equivocation became a matter of public interest in England was during the trial of Robert Southwell in 1595. Among the reasons that he was condemned was the fact that he taught the woman who offered him a hiding place in England how to answer the authorities with only part of the truth, the balance kept in mental reservation. If asked, for instance, if there were priests hidden in her home, she should reply "No", completing the sentence in her thought: "No, you have no right to know" (Hadfield, 2017, p. 79-81). Southwell had acted in this way because there was a belief among the faithful that a lie, especially made under oath, was

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[2] For dating the plays I use those proposed in the catalogue organised by Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson (WIGGINS; RICHARDSON, 2012-actual).

a sin that would send the offender to hell. On the other hand, to reveal secrets that would harm the priests or those in charge was also seen as a sinful act. Southwell then wrote a treatise, now lost, in which he defended mental reservation and other techniques so that persecuted Catholics could formulate sentences with double meanings. These sentences would be true in the mind of the believer and in God's judgement, but they would be interpreted completely differently by the listener, leading to misprision. After his death, partly condemned for spreading this doctrine of equivocation, the superior of the Jesuit order in England, Henry Garnet, took an opportunity to write his own treatise on the subject. Garnet, seeking to legitimise the practices taught by Southwell, also intended to provide peace of mind to Catholics who needed to deceive their persecutors. By noting Garnet's mentions of Southwell's arrest and of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603), it is possible to establish the composition limits of the remaining *Treatise of Equivocation* to the years 1595-1603.[3]

Máté Vince reveals in a meticulous study the theoretical grounds upon which Garnet's text was founded, and why we can consider it the most mature work on the doctrine of equivocation before its intense problematization after the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 (Vince, 2013, 52-101). In 1598, three years after Southwell's death, Archbishop of Canterbury George Abbot (1562-1633) published his sermon "On Lying" (1598), providing a critical addition to what was known about the doctrine. Abbot reveals that he had access to a collection of documents discovered in the 1580s containing Catholic instructions for practices similar to those introduced into England by the Jesuits. The Archbishop took the opportunity to divulge his findings as a warning to the Protestant community.

Garnet may have used Southwell's earlier treatise and even Abbot's sermon as the basis for his composition. But what seems more feasible is that he based his *Treatise* on *Commentarius in cap. Humanae aures*, published in 1584 by Martín de Azpicuelta (1491–1586), also known as "Doctor Navarrus". Azpicuelta's text continues a discursive line traced by both Gregory the Great and Gratian to defend the idea that God judges the words as they are spoken according to the heart, and not by the way they sound outwardly (Vince, 2013, p. 56-70). Azpicuelta also defends the legitimacy of the construction of sentences with multiple meanings by those who are forced to speak in an inquiry considered unlawful, again reinforcing the interpretation that God judges words according to the speaker's heart, and that those words *can* be used to deceive the listener as a protective measure. Interestingly, Garnet reuses many of the same examples presented by Azpicuelta in the *Commentarius*, reinforcing the idea that Garnet used this text as a source.

Garnet's *Treatise of Equivocation* was circulating in manuscript when the English government discovered the plan to blow up the Parliament in 1605.[4] An annotated copy by the author was found in the cell of Thomas Tresham, the father of one of the main conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot. This aroused suspicion of Garnet's involvement in the conspiracy and his consequent arrest. After being discussed at Garnet's trial, the treatise was the focus of attention in the press, sparking a debate between Protestant and Catholic publications led by Robert Persons (1546-1610), Rector of

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[3] For Henry Garnet's *Treatise of Equivocation*, I use the edition by David Jardine based on the manuscript in the Bodleian Library with notes made by the Jesuit himself (GARNET, 1851). In Jardine's edition, Garnet's references to information from Southwell's lawsuit are found on pages 72-4 and 92-4; references to the authorities acting on behalf of Queen Elizabeth on pages 83-7. Andrew Hadfield estimates that Garnet's text was written in 1595 (HADFIELD, 2017, p. 80); Máté Vince believes that it was composed in 1598 (VINCE, 2013, p. 85-7).

[4] I suggest Antonia Fraser's detailed exposition on Garnet's involvement in the Gunpowder Plot and subsequent trial (FRASER, 1997). Although it contains some typical 19th-century value judgments, Samuel Gardiner's well-documented and thorough description is still quite useful (GARDINER, 1900, Vol I, p. 234-264).

the English College in Rome, and Thomas Morton (1564-1659), Dean of Gloucester (Vince, 2013, p. 118-156). Something that links all these texts, from Azpicuelta's commentary to Persons's and Morton's publications, is the attempt to establish a dividing line between truth and lying, locating equivocation in one field or another. Garnet's text can be considered in this context as an important document for recording a moment in the interpretation of the techniques and concepts developed previously, before the drastic developments at the outbreak of the Gunpowder Plot.[5] In other words, of the available documents, the *Treatise of Equivocation* best allows us to glimpse how this doctrine was practised, in what situations, and how it was identified by those familiar with it in England.

As in the other texts referenced above, Garnet seeks to teach members of his religious community to speak the truth, but to induce the listener to misprision through the formulation of ambiguous sentences. This could be done in two ways. The first involves the expression of part of the truth, while the other part is kept in a mental reservation. Here Garnet seems to improve upon the concept defended by Southwell, returning to Aristotle to affirm that the truth consists of a proposition in which there is fidelity to what is conceived in mind. The proposition could be mental, written, spoken, or combination of these. The latter occurs when a part of the truth is expressed orally and another part reserved in the mind. The truth would then consist of the sum of these two proposed parts, "whan both togeather do contayne a truthe" (Garnet, 1851, p. 10).

The second possible way, which Garnet calls an "extraordinary" equivocation, is the use of a sentence with a double meaning, one of which would be easily understood, but would lead the listener to misunderstanding, and the other of which would be hidden and difficult, but categorically factual. An important point would be the question of the circumstances of this kind of equivocation: "circumstance of tyme, place, matter, person, intention, and such like, may alike make a supply of some thinges to be understood" (Garnet, 1851, p. 32-3). The ignorance of a listener about the specific context leads to mistakes in the interpretation of the statement. Both types of equivocation would express the truth conceived in the speaker's thought, albeit in a partial or ambiguous way. In contrast, Garnet insists that "the lye doth consists of this, that a man do intend to deny wth wordes that very trewth wh^ch he conceiveth in his mynde" (Garnet, 1851, p. 16). To guarantee the faithful's well-being, the author states that God accesses the equivocator's thoughts, verifying whether what was said corresponds to what is thought. Thus, the sentences handed down could be recognized by God–and by the speaker's own self–as true (Garnet, 1851, p. 10-14).

Finally, Garnet seeks to eliminate the doubts of the faithful once and for all when he affirms that in unlawful inquiries, equivocation is not only allowed, but is necessary for the protection of oneself or of someone else—whom he calls a "neighbour" (Garnet, 1851, p. 46-7). In this case, an act of charity to protect someone at risk would be as important as truthfulness to God, and true justice could be transgressed if one were to reveal the secrets of "neighbours" or testifies against them uncharitably in a unlawful inquiry. These acts would be contrary to what reason requires in such "inconueniences" (Garnet, 1851, p. 47). On the other hand, Garnet prohibits the use of equivocation in three specific situations: when it is unnecessary, that is, on occasions that "health

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[5] In addition to the debate between Persons and Morton, the implication of the *Doctrine of Equivocation* in the Gunpowder Plot also led to the requirement of the Oath of Allegiance to Catholics recognized or suspected by the authorities, which generated another debate of publications in which this time James I participated with texts of his own hand. For this debate see W. B. Patterson (1997, p. 75-123).

of or bodye or sowle, pietye, charytye, iust profitt or necessitye, vrgeth vs not"; in the profession of the Catholic faith; and when it damages the honour of God or some "neighbour" (Garnet, 1851, p. 56-7, 59-60, 65-6).

Although Garnet's purposes are religious, he offers many worldly examples in his treatise, thus lending credence to observation of Edward Coke (1552-1634), the General Attorney in the Jesuit's judgement, in his notes on the apprehended manuscript: the practices described could also be employed in various situations in the civil sphere.[6] Vince shows that the use of ambiguity–whether by use of a certain word or by careful syntactical construction of a sentence in order to encompass more than one meaning in rhetoric and/or dialectics–had already been discussed in antiquity by Aristotle, Cicero, and the anonymous author of *Ad Herenium* (Vince, 2013, p. 11-51). The ideas of *aequivocatio*, initially used to designate a word with more than one meaning; *amphibolia*, a group of words joined in a sentence with more than one meaning; and *ambiguitas*, which encompasses both of the previous, were all used in Renaissance England to refer to ambivalent passages in rhetorical speeches.[7] Even in the rhetorical manuals used within English universities in the middle of the sixteenth century, there is condemnation of the use of semantic ambiguities in the student *disputatio*. This fact leads us to understand that the practice was far from rare, at least not to the point of being ignored. Therefore, ambiguities in sentences had a long tradition and did not begin with the doctrine of equivocation. On the other hand, religious conflicts in the sixteenth century raised important discussions about ambiguities. From the point of view of English Protestantism, the theme gained attention as it involved social disruption. From a Catholic perspective, however, the ambiguities served as instruments of protection and resistance. We cannot fail to consider that, as linguistic devices and situational experiences, these techniques could also offer playwrights a useful tool for generating dramatic effects.

Shakespeare's more explicit references to the doctrine of equivocation are usually analysed by literary critics in the famous porter's scene in *Macbeth* (c. 1606);[8] and in *Othello* (c. 1604), in which Brabantio, upon hearing the Duke's justification for the actions of the Moor, states "These sentences, to suck or to gall,/ Being strong on both sides, are equivocal" (1.3.215-6).[9] In both of these cases, however, as well as others in which there is the mention of "equivocation" or related words, the characters do not practise the doctrine; they only refer to it. These two texts have received attentive critical analysis for containing in their own structure the use of equivocation as a determining element, in which speeches with ambiguous meanings uttered by Iago in *Othello* and the witches in *Macbeth* lead other characters to extreme acts and to the establishment of a

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[6] The manuscript published by David Jardine in 1851 was that found in Thomas Tresham's cell during investigations of the Gunpowder Plot. Beside the copyist's handwriting, it also contains that of Edward Coke, dating from his examination of the *Treatise* during the prosecution, as well as that of Henry Garnet himself during the print review process. It was probably intended to be printed by a secret Catholic press. (GARNET, 1851, p. iii-xxix, 79-81).

[7] "In Aristotle, ὀμονυμία (translated to Latin as *aequivocatio*) is used for words with more than one referent, while ἀμφιβολία describes the phenomenon of ambiguity in general. Classical Latin sources use *amphibolia* and *ambiguitas* relatively interchangeably to refer to a multiplicity of meanings on any level of the language. Renaissance texts seem to distinguish between *aequivocatio* 'ambiguity of words' and *amphibol(og)ia* 'ambiguity of units larger than words', while referring to them as *ambiguitas* in general. Apart from lexical or syntactic ambiguity, however, the same terms can refer to a semantic problem of an utterance being obscure, doubtful, twofold, undecided or contradictory, ambivalent" (VINCE, 2013, p. 51).

[8] Garry Wills proposes that the Gunpowder Plot would have led Shakespeare, Thomas Dekker and Barnabe Barnes to refer to the doctrine of equivocation around 1606 in *Macbeth*, *The Whore of Babylon* and *The Devil's Charter* (WILLS, 1995, p. 152). Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason draw attention to the doubt that Macbeth expresses at the end of the play about the predictions of "the fiend/ That lies like truth" (5.5.42-3) and to the fact that "the theme of double-speak and linguistic ambiguity pervades the whole play" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p. 17-19). See also: WAKE, 2011; CURRAN JR, 2018.

[9] References to Shakespeare's plays are from *The Oxford Shakespeare* (SHAKESPEARE, 1988).

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distressing atmosphere (Hadfield, 2017, p. 286-310; VINCE, 2013, 236-292; Wills, 1995).

On the other hand, the equivocation in these plays is generally still investigated via the point of view from which Protestants saw the phenomenon, that is, the way it was understood by the authorities after Southwell's trial in 1595 and Garnet's in 1606: as a social disturbance. The way in which Catholics experienced the doctrine and the specific instructions and norms Garnet's outlines to use the practice as a means of protection have been relatively overlooked. As we have seen, an indispensable condition for using the techniques of equivocation is the protection of oneself or another member of the community who is under threat; it is prohibited when it could harm someone. From this Catholic/Jesuit perspective, the ambiguous speeches made by Iago or the witches can not be labelled *equivocation*, as they do not occur for protection. On the contrary, they are made with the intention of causing mistakes that culminate in the ruin of others. According to Garnet's statements, these characters' speeches should be considered as "lies": "the lye doth consists of this, that a man do intend to deny wth wordes that very trewth wh^{ch} he conceiveth in his mynde" (Garnet, 1851, p. 16). By this interpretation, Iago and similar characters do not equivocate, they lie.

In what follows, I examine the occurrence or appropriation of the techniques and rules of conduct described in the *Treatise of Equivocation* in two plays written just before the Gunpowder Plot: *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*. Bearing in mind that the instructions for the practice circulated in manuscript within the Catholic community and that the question had been part of public discourse since 1595, instances of equivocation on the stage in the context of the specifics described by Southwell, Abbot, and Garnet could at least have been noted by those who were interested in the matter.[10] I will concentrate on 1603-4 because during those years, for the first time since the Reformation, an English monarch had signalled some kind of religious tolerance. James I ascended the throne in 1603, and he soon took some measures in the direction of tolerance, such as the commutation of fines imposed on non-conformists (Fraser, 1997; Gardiner, 1900, vol I, p. 114-117, 141-142). Those actions generated conflicting collective feelings: hope by the Catholics and apprehension by Protestants. In February 1604, the King held an ecumenical conference at Hampton Court, at which a Catholic petition for relief of persecutory laws was delivered, and another was delivered by Protestants demanding greater rigidity of those same laws. In the opening speech of Parliament in 1604, the King acknowledged the Roman Church as "our Mother Church", in addition to asking for relief measures to its followers (Patterson, 1997, 31-75).[11] It was in this context that Shakespeare probably wrote *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, including equivocations by Catholic heroines that align with Garnet's *Treatise* in both plays.[12]

[10]   It is possible that Shakespeare was interested in the discussion because he had Catholics in his circle of friends and benefactors, such as Ben Jonson and the Earl of Southampton, or even because he belonged to a Catholic family. Stephen Greenblatt believes that the playwright, because he belonged to a family that adhered to the Roman creed and were thus accustomed to the necessity of dissimulation, would have developed an elusive writing style (GREENBLATT, 2004, p. 149-175). John Klause draws attention to Shakespeare's kinship by the Arden family with Robert Southwell himself, and the possibility that they would have influenced each other's poetic writing (KLAUSE, 2008). I believe that, regardless of Shakespeare's religious affiliation, the subject would have attracted his attention due to the dramatic potential it carried, both in the content and in the structural form of the so-called "equivocations".

[11]   On the other hand, later on that same year, the fines were resumed, Catholic priests were ordered to leave the country, and new persecutory laws were passed by Parliament. Historian Antonia Fraser argues that the disappointment caused by these setbacks regarding tolerance fuelled revolt among young Catholics, culminating in the Gunpowder Plot (FRASER, 1997).

[12]   At least in *Othello*, there are also equivocations in the way the doctrine was interpreted by Protestant authorities, a subject well explored by Andrew Hadfield (2017, p. 286-310). It is quite possible that Shakespeare approached the doctrine of equivocation in *Othello* both from a Protestant perspective, through Iago, as Hadfield shows, and also from a Catholic point of view, through Desdemona, as I intend to demonstrate. It seems to me that Shakespeare would have portrayed the subject *in utramque partem*, a rhetorical technique for approaching the same question from two or more different perspectives. In 2009, the first collection of articles written by different scholars of early modern political thought dedicated exclusively to Shakespeare's works was published. Some of the authors, such as Conal Condren and Cathy Curtis, investigated how the playwright would have treated some important topics related to civic humanism through this rhetorical technique. For a quick overview,

Equivocations on stage from a Catholic perspective

Before exploring these plays, let us consider a dramatic moment in which Shakespeare made use of equivocation with a special emphasis on the audience's emotions and response. The playwright had previously made use of Garnet's equivocation techniques and recommendations in situations of emotional duress that involve other protagonists, as in *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1595). The principal scene in which equivocation occurs in that play is after Tybalt's death and Romeo's departure for exile, when Juliet is asked by her mother about the reason for her incessant crying, something she considers "some want of wit" (3.5.73). Lady Capulet assumes that the reason is Tybalt's death by Romeo, the "traitor murderer" who still "lives" (3.5.84), to which the heroine replies with a series of equivocations:

> I pray you, tell my lord and father, madam
> I will not marry yet; and when I do, I swear
> It shall be Romeo–whom you know I hate–
> Rather than Paris. [13]

<div align="right">(Romeo and Juliet. Act III, scene v, lines 120-123)</div>

It must be said that Juliet is not lying when she suggests that she hates Romeo for her cousin's death, she had already demonstrated it in a conversation with the Nurse. She is attesting here the truth about these two contradictory feelings she experiences, love and hate. The equivocation would be in the ambiguous sense of the words in relation to Romeo, for whom she also expresses hidden affection, something impossible to be understood by her mother, who ignores the "circumstances of tyme, place, matter, person, intention, and such like" in Juliet's propositions. In these moments of the scene, the protagonist equivocates to protect herself from her mother, since Romeo is safe in Mantua, and to avoid the perjury of committing herself to a second marriage while her first husband still lives. Significantly, however, audience would substitute in the place that Garnet reserved for God, as the spectators are the ones who have been made aware of the heroine's thoughts, their convergence with what is said, and her effort to neither sin/lie nor to commit a perjury in a future marriage.

Shakespeare seems to have continued to use the equivocation techniques described by Garnet in other plays, such as the sophisticated question of the disguise of heroines in works such as *Twelfth Night* (c. 1601).[14] However, by 1603-4 the debate over religious tolerance of Catholics would perhaps have created another sort of referent for instances of equivocation on the stage, as a simmering legal issue. In *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, we find situations that could lead to a trial, similar to that of Southwell. In *Othello*, Desdemona is questioned by her husband in the final scene, and her answers lead him to believe that she is lying. The protagonist, seeing

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see the concluding chapter of the volume by Quentin Skinner (SKINNER, 2009, p. 271-281).

[13] These lines are present in the second *Quarto* (1599) and the *first Folio* (1623), but there are some textual variants in the first *Quarto* (1597): 'Madame I will not marrie yet./ And when I doo, It ſhalbe rather *Romeo* whom I hate,/ Than Countie *Paris* that I cannot loue'.

[14] Vince analyzes Viola's situation in *Twelfth Night*, where disguise would itself serve as an equivocation for self-protection. The character's presentation as Viola for the theatrical audience, and as Cesario for the other characters on the stage, makes most of the character's lines have two meanings (VINCE, 2013, p. 199-235).

himself both as a betrayed husband and as the secular authority in Cyprus, judges and condemns his wife to death by suffocation. When Emilia enters the room and asks the victim, still alive, "who hath done this deed", Desdemona replies: "nobody, I myself" (5.2. 132-3).[15] Here it is quite possible that Desdemona is equivocating. The scene suggests that she would be keeping in mind the complement of the statement, or its second meaning, perhaps that her own actions resulted in her death–whatever those are in her consideration. Although Othello may occasionally lie (Hadfield, 2013, p. 286-310), he uses this speech as a proof of his wife's impostures, foreshadowing another condemnation of her, this time to hell. What Othello ignores, or prefers to ignore, is that she would be equivocating only in order to protect him in relation to Venice's authorities for her murder. As Garnet shows, the protection of the "neighbour" is necessary, it is an important act of charity. In that sense, Desdemona would have been compassionate, and more charitable than Juliet. Since Romeo is safe in Mantua, Juliet equivocates only to protect herself from her mother, while the Venetian heroine does it to protect only her husband, even though he is her murderer. Desdemona would thus be more in conformity with the Catholic theological concept of love as it was defended by Saint Augustine, that in which *caritas* would be the true synonym of love.[16]

In *Measure for Measure*, a play written around the same time as *Othello*, Isabella is another heroine who equivocates in a precarious situation, but she does not lie. After she has decided to become a nun, Isabella's brother Claudio is sentenced to death by Angelo, ruler *pro tempore* of Vienna. He offers forgiveness to Claudio in exchange for a night of sex with the heroine. Isabella, still determined to remain chaste, causes Angelo to believe that she accepts his offer. However, assisted by the Duke, disguised as a friar, she lets Mariana take her place with Angelo in the dark. In the final scene, Isabella exposes her cause to be judged by the Duke, equivocating in the narration of events, believing that he does not know all their "circumstances":

> and after much debatement,
> My sisterly remorse confutes mine honour,
> And I did yield to him. But the next morn bedtimes,
> His purpose surfeiting, he sends a warrant
> For my poor brother's head.
>
> (*Measure for Measure*. Act 5, scene 1, lines 99-103)

Isabella unveils the facts as they really occurred–that she was pressured to give up her body in exchange for her brother's freedom–but she equivocates when saying: "My sisterly remorse confutes mine honour/ And I did yield to him". The equivocation is that only apparently, and in order to make the stratagem work, did her "sisterly remorse" cause her to "yield" to Angelo her "honour" by agreeing, but not her chastity by performing the sexual act itself. She simply jumps from this ambiguous confession to the death order given to her brother on the next day, without mentioning what *really* happened on the night that separated these two episodes. As stated by Garnet, hiding part of the truth is not the same as lying, even if what is said does not reflect things

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15   The words are the same in the first quarto of the play (1622) and in the Folio (1623).
16   On the correlation that Saint Augustine makes between charity and love, although this is more in the Christian sense, and not sexual or relational one, see Gillian Clark (2016, p. 209-225).

exactly as they are (Garnet, 1851, p. 75-8). In a similar way, when we see Juliet, the audience would be in the God's place and would recognize the faithfulness of what was said to what Isabella thinks, although it would lead other characters to wrong conclusions. We can say that Shakespeare, by creating a God-like omniscient audience, makes them not only judge of the case of Isabella, but also makes them her accomplice, which provokes the understanding of the protagonist's reasons for equivocating. The difference is that this time the audience is not the only one who knows the story: the Duke, whose role in the plot is compared to the "power divine" (5.1.416), also knows what is going on in the heroine's conscience at that moment, which reinforces the dramatic effect when he pretends not to believe her and orders her arrest.

Equivocations in 1603-4

The Historian Conal Condren believes that the plot of *Measure for Measure* would evoke the discussion on the tolerance of Catholics held at the Hampton Court conference and at Parliament in 1604 (Condren, 2009, p. 157-175). Condren envisions the possibility that Shakespeare presented the matters between Catholics and Protestants *in utramque partem*, a rhetorical technique that consists in approaching a question from two opposite sides.[17] For Condren, this treatment of the religious questions in the play presents a result in which the arguments cancel each other in their own contradiction, leaving the conclusion in suspension. However, it is necessary to say that the *in utramque partem* approach can also present a biassed result to one of the sides represented, as the interpretation can be determined by the context of the question itself. Although an analysis of the text of *Measure for Measure* may indicate that the arguments are distributed in a balanced way, we can also glimpse the hypothesis that the simple presentation of equivocation as a device for self-protection, made by a Catholic heroine who wishes to become nun, induced by a ruler disguised as a friar, could elicit some sympathy in the audience in 1603-4, both for Isabella and for those she calls to mind for Shakespeare's contemporary audience.

This hypothesis becomes more relevant if we think that *Romeo and Juliet* was probably revived by Shakespeare's company for the Christmas' Court season of 1603-4 before the new royal family.[18] *Measure for Measure* may also have been presented at the Court season at 1603-4, and it certainly was presented in the 1604-5 season, along with *Othello*.[19] Due to the proximity in time and in dramatic heroism, it is possible that the same apprentice actor played Juliet and Isabella in these performances, drawing a connection for audience members to a moment in which religious tolerance was being debated.

[17] Condren considers that mitigation is portrayed negatively in the play because its continued overuse by the Duke would have driven the city into chaos. On the other hand, mitigation is presented as the only way to avoid injustice and cruelty at the end of the text (CONDREN, 2009, p. 157-175).

[18] Richard Dutton uses the list of plays presented in the Court season in 1604-5 to speculate upon which ones may have been presented in the previous year of 1603-4, about which we have no information. Dutton believes that those written by Shakespeare and that had experienced relative success on stage, judging from previous impressions, were absent in the 1604-5 season because they had been presented at the end of the previous year by the King's Men. These plays would include *Romeo and Juliet, Richard III, The First Part of Henry IV, A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and *Hamlet* (DUTTON, 2016, p. 236-7).

[19] Martin Wiggins proposes that *Measure for Measure* may have been presented as part of the Court's Christmas season in 1603-4, the first that had James I in the audience, and that it was performed again at the following year at the request of the King himself. This could had been done due to issues in the text that interested him at the beginning of his reign (WIGGINS; RICHARDSON, 2012-actual, vol V, entry 1413).

In conclusion, we can consider that the scenes analysed correspond to the definition and limits of what would have been considered truth, lying, and equivocation in Henry Garnet's *Treatise*, addressed to Catholics who feared damnation for lying under oath and needed some peace of mind to safeguard themselves through the deception of their examiners. As in the case of real interrogations, these dramatic situations involve questions asked in precarious situations. In response, the characters equivocate by using statements faithful to what they conceive in their minds, although expressed in a partial or ambiguous way. At the turn of the seventeenth century, Shakespeare's Catholic heroines performed exactly as actual victims of religious persecution in England. The scenes on stage evoked the historical trials due to the use of equivocation, serving to heighten the debate about the boundaries between truth and lying, to call to mind the distinctions between what is thought, what is expressed, and what is understood, and to dramatise moments of unbearable tension in which many found it necessary to protect themselves or those that they loved through extraordinary methods.

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