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RHETORICAL TOPICS AND ALTERNATIVE FACTS: THE LANGUAGES OF TRUMP AND SHAKESPEARE¹

Keywords: *commodification; provisionality; rhetorical redescription.*

Abstract: *I analyse the language of Donald Trump in the context of classical rhetoric and contemporary linguistic and cultural studies. His vocabulary is limited, and his capacity for sustained thought is concealed – his utterances are ‘invented’ from a very restricted set of sources, and he pays scant attention to ‘disposition’. His style and vocabulary are relentlessly populist and demotic. Two speeches by Shakespeare, that of the Bastard in King John on ‘Commodity’ and that of Troilus on ‘Instance’ in Troilus and Cressida, serve as touchstones. Today’s materialist culture has generated a near universal reification of language (a phenomenon investigated by Nietzsche), which has itself infected the way many people regard facts and ‘truth’. Trump has abandoned axioms for mantras, has created in his language a reductively simplified allegorical world, and instinctively resorts to the figure of paradiastole, rhetorical redefinition – for the use of which Machiavelli was, in his time, widely censured. He is guilty of countless fallacies generated by his use of unevidenced induction – based on a small number of instances. He is, however, of his time, and I have a concern that too many humanities curricula in higher education have overstressed ideology at the expense of ideas, and not done enough to foster an awareness of the nature of language as well as an epistemological vigilance among students.*

Recently an annoying clip was shown on BBC Television. It trailed a programme that claimed to help children distinguish the ‘fake’ from the ‘real’. It purported to focus on statements – truth-claims and news – but its key words derive from the marketplace: as in ‘this is a *fake* Rolex, while this is a *real* one’. It’s a symptom of today’s wholesale commodification of culture. This was anatomised early – by Shakespeare, in fact, who wrote a brilliant diatribe for the Bastard in *King John* that includes the following:

That daily break-vow, he that wins of all,
Of kings, or beggars, old men, young men, maids –
Who, having no external thing to lose
But the word ‘maid’, cheats the poor maid of that –
That smooth-faced gentleman, tickling Commodity,
Commodity, the bias of the world,
The world who of itself is peisèd [weighted] well,
Made to run even upon even ground,
Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,

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This sway of motion, this Commodity,
Makes it take head from all indifferency,
From all direction, purpose, course, intent ... (*King John* 2.1.567-80)

We admire Shakespeare's wonderful image of a perfectly balanced lawn-bowl, and also his diagnosis of the way that commodification – then and now driven by self-interest – leads to the destruction of morality by materialism. 'America first' is scarcely a moral crusade. Because of the way we live now, the rule-following diplomat has been replaced by the grasping fixer, and the Trumpian 'deal' has become the normative transaction in both public and private life. There is a craving for celebrity, something that can be *quantified* in fees earned or by Facebook hits. People become market-made, identity politics submerge individuality. Commodification, as Shakespeare shows, also leads to the reification of language: in the Bastard's speech the word 'maid' becomes a thing. We may think the way Trump's pursuit of paramours is followed by attempts to take their good names – he brands them as liars. I need to return to reification later.

In fact, ours has become an age of brands and branding. For many people the brand of an object is an index of its value ('This is a Rolex'). Trump is the master-branding. Of places: 'shit-hole countries', and of people: 'crooked Hillary'. His own name is branded on the hotels, casinos, and golf-courses that he owns. Another bastard, Edmund in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, reminds us of the etymology of the word: 'Why *brand* they us with base?' The origin of the word reminds us of the pain of the red-hot branding iron, and its use is to destroy one's sense of self.

To return to the BBC clip. Any notion of '*truth*' differs from the notion of the '*real*': I share the belief that a truth-claim brings with it a degree of provisionality. I imagine Trump may not have read J.L. Austin's famous 1950 essay 'On Truth'. This is how it starts:

“‘WHAT is truth?’” said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer’ [the opening sentence of Francis Bacon's essay 'Of Truth']. Pilate was in advance of his time. For 'truth' itself is an abstract noun, a camel, that is, of a logical construction, which cannot get past the eye even of a grammarian. We approach it cap and categories in hand: we ask ourselves whether Truth is a substance (the Truth, the Body of Knowledge), or a quality (something like the colour red, inhering in truths), or a relation ('correspondence'). But philosophers should take something more nearly their own size to strain at. What needs discussing rather is the use, or certain uses, of the word 'true.' *In vino*, possibly, '*veritas*', but in a sober symposium '*verum*.'²

However, populists ignore this distinction between *veritas* and *verum*, speaking of 'facts' or of 'alternative facts'. Leaders deliberately reify these, and their followers are seldom aware that neither a 'truth' nor a 'fact' is a 'thing'. These are, rather, non-material constructs, the products of – or, we might say, the 'phases within' – some particular mental *process*, logical or empirical.

² The quotation is taken from <https://www.aristoteliansociety.org.uk/pdf/austin.pdf>.

Later I shall analyse a classic piece of disguised lying from Donald Trump. Maybe I am taking a sledge-hammer to crack a nut – the *capo di tutti capi* and his gang of money-grubbers and money-launderers are simply out-and-out liars or simulators. Lying by anyone is bad enough, but lies from a politician violate our human rights: there is a daily erosion of integrity. I do not know which is worse, an immoral liar or an amoral bullshitter.³ Some fifty years ago, A.J. Ayer wrote about ‘knowing as *having the right to be sure*’: (Ayer 31) this is what these mobsters are taking from us.

When did it all start? I am going to attempt to link some of Trump’s discourse to rhetorical traditions in the early modern period. I allude first to the influence of Pierre de la Ramée, or Ramus. Ramus developed the commonplace tradition, a move from formal logic or dialectics towards a reasoning that could be applied to specific situations (Hadfield 159-169).⁴ Debates raged, and it is no surprise that that Cambridge man, Christopher Marlowe, in *Doctor Faustus*, takes a swipe at Ramus. For some, like Marlowe, Ramus was the master of short-cuts that lead to error. For others, he helped liberate humanism from the clutches of dialectic. But let’s invoke him when considering that monstrous megalomaniac, and proto-Donald Trump, Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*.

Faustus devotes himself to commodity, the pursuit of magnificence, and the ransacking of the world – particularly the Orient world. (Trump too knows the rich pickings to be garnered from the former Soviet empire in the East.) Faustus’ quest culminates in his possession of the ultimate trophy or celebrity, Helen of Troy (no Stormy Daniels, she). But first, in that long soliloquy, he justifies himself with a list of discontents. He finds no profit in logic, and cursorily dismisses what he asserts to be its aim. Picking up a book he reads, ‘*Bene disserere est finis logices ...to dispute well is logic’s chiefest end*’ (A text, 1.1.7-8) (*Dr Faustus*). This reductive formula seems call into question the authority of Aristotle, whom he names, but in fact the ‘end’ or aim he cites comes from Ramus. (Aristotle had said that logic was the faculty of *demonstration*.⁵) In this tradition, logic can become unhitched from truth, but tethered to rhetoric, and Trump, no demonstrator, he, wields his mantras as crude weapons of mass deception. His commonplace or lead topic, ‘Drain the swamp’, will do as an example.

Rhetoricians instructed speakers to take account of their audience: Trump, like most demagogues, always starts by telling his audience what they want to hear. He exploits their grievances, often using simple and familiar words as well as obscenities and non-standard forms of speech, to ‘assert his identity as a “common man.”’⁶ Contrariwise, on 20 May 2018 his tweeted formulae mimic those of an

³ See Frankfurt: *On Bullshit*.

⁴ Compare Rosemond Tuve who argues that Ramism ‘makes no distinction between a logical base distinguishable in an image and a dialectical function for that image’ (*Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (1947): 334.

⁵ Hattaway, Michael. "The Theology of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*." *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 3 (1970): 51-78, at 55n.

⁶ Hunston, Susan. "Donald Trump and the Language of Populism." *Perspectives*. 2017. Web 2018. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/perspective/donald-trump-language-of-populism.aspx>

absolute ruler, liberated from the American Constitution: ‘*I hereby demand*, and will do so officially tomorrow, that the Department of Justice look into whether or not the FBI/DOJ infiltrated or surveilled the Trump Campaign for Political Purposes’.⁷ He works by ‘persuasive insistence’ rather than ‘legislative coercion’. According to The Washington Post, in his first 497 days, President Trump made 3,251 false or misleading claims.⁸ However, lying seems to work, and Trump’s brand of rhetoric, has created constituencies, if not communities.

Trump’s assertions are speech acts appropriate to the rally – the opposite of that paradigm of American democracy – or at least the New England version of it – debates at the ‘town [hall] meeting’. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in 1831 that ‘municipal institutions constitute the strength of free nations. Town meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science.’ (*Democracy in America* 56) Language study played its part in preparing students for debates, whether in these deliberative occasions or in law-courts. In preparation, students of language moved to where logic and rhetoric were conjoined, and had been taught to argue *in utramque partem*, to be aware of, and weigh up, contrary positions and examples. (Altman *The Tudor Play of Mind*) This helped dramatists structure the debates enacted in the plays of the time, and was also a necessity for democracy itself.

Marilynne Robinson reflects ruefully on the dangers Trumpism poses to the very essence of our systems of government:

America at present is not a democracy. It does not use its politics to think through the questions that arise for it, or even to acknowledge them and articulate them thoughtfully. It has instead fractured along partisan lines, departing so far from any thought of negotiation that the parties need hardly make any account of themselves, except perhaps to major donors.⁹

This is the prelude to a withering attack by Robinson on current educational curricula – I shall return to that in a moment.

But back to Trump: he did, of course, take part in the TV debates. However, it is significant that, at all three debates, the moderators failed to put any question about, for example, climate change. One debate was wholly dominated by issues raised by the video of Trump making lewd comments about women. But did he join issue? Rather, he seldom deliberated, more often simply delivered the sort of pitch that he used at his rallies. At the debates he would leave his lectern and stalk Clinton, standing aggressively behind her.

What is important in a rally is *presence*: Trump’s physicality was most unseemly the context of a debate. In early modern Europe proximity to the monarch offered access to the levers of power: think of Charles I at Whitehall and Louis XIV at Versailles. Trump, of course, has created a *virtual* place where citizens can feel

⁷<https://www.vox.com/2018/5/20/17374098/trump-fbi-campaign-spy-twitter-justice-department>.

⁸https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ec8e0a5da02e consulted Web. 2018.

⁹ Robinson, Marilynne. "Year One: Rhetoric and Responsibility." *New York Review of Books*. 14 November 2017.

themselves to be in the presence of his greatness – let’s call it his Twitterdom. He bypasses normal channels, what he calls ‘failing’ media, as he did when he announced the date and the place of his meeting with Kim Jong-un on Twitter.

To turn from words to iconography. Theatricality was inscribed in European fascism of the 1930’s. Let us recognise a similar Trumpian theatricality. Again, this was prevalent in Renaissance England: ‘The progresses that took [Elizabeth I] and her successor James I around the kingdom were dazzling representations of power that were performed in allegorised spaces, brought into being by devices such as triumphal arches or symbolic castles.’ (Hattaway: *Renaissance and Reformations* 126) The settings on which Trump stages himself to men’s eyes are fake places, fixed-camera set-pieces, brought into being by carefully placed symbols. During the election campaign he appeared before his own Boeing 757, a pastiche of Air Force One, which was branded with one word, ‘Trump’. ‘His’ people stood literally and figuratively behind him. Now, in the White House, entrances are filmed from the end of a long corridor, with doors opening as he moves forward – Putin uses the same technique. Trump uses the White House as a set for his performances as much as for a place of work. We hear he wants to instigate an annual military parade, which is what populist leaders do when establishing a personal cult. These are so obviously scenes for theatres of power that we may be tempted to describe Trump’s America as a ‘theatocracy’, the designation Plato disparagingly applied to the Athens of his time, (*Laws*, 701).

It is not enough, however, to brand Trump as uncouth. In what he called a ‘baroque eclogue’, *The Age of Anxiety*, written in exile in New York and published in 1947, W.H. Auden had one of his personae, Malin, categorise such a man, at home back with the NRA:

But the new barbarian is no uncouth
Desert-dweller; he does not emerge
From fir forests; factories bred him;
Corporate companies, college towns
Mothered his mind, and many journals
Backed his beliefs. He was born here. The
Bravura of revolvers in vogue now
And the cult of death are quite at home
Inside the city. (Auden 268)

Auden anticipates Marilynne Robinson: she invites us, educators, to be aware of our complicity. We need to look to our curricula:

This so-called learning, most recently ‘theory’, seems harmless in so far as it has no meaning outside the classroom, or beyond the journals and conferences that sustain it and establish the hierarchy of its practitioners. But it is deeply harmful in that it wastes time and teaches students to think and write badly, to master as they can the terms and assumptions of twaddle. It lifts words from other disciplines and languages, which for its purposes suggests a sort of sophistication that floats above particulars, above the interesting books and cultures that are its putative subject we have allowed our thinking to be conformed to the model of ideology, which is the

old enemy of ideas, as it is of plain realism. The language of ideology has all its conclusions baked into it. (*ibid.*)

Trump does not seem to have read anything, neither classic novels nor important political texts – his vocabulary is restricted, and he is not equipped with Erasmian copiousness. His unstocked mind seems to contain no stories, not even memories of movie sequences with which he might think. His artful anarchy is untethered from, yes, ‘culture’, or any kind of sustained decorous speech.

In fact, however, there *is* an art to be discerned. As in the utterances of Boris Johnson, there is method in his madness. Trump relies not upon *logical analysis* but what rhetoricians used to call ‘*discovery*’, retrieval, and constructs his speeches largely out of *topics (loci)* or commonplaces. Discovery has become the privileged rhetorical faculty for the electronic age. Trump, it seems, ‘discovers’ from Fox News. Commonplaces need not, of course, be true in all cases. Those of Trump harden into adages or *mantras*, easily remembered and regurgitated. He makes little use of *axioms*, or self-evident propositions derived from reflection, reasoning, and abstract thought. In doing this he is turning his back on the style and substance of the axioms enshrined in the Declaration of Independence of 1776: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident.’

In this latter-day age of anxiety, to quote Auden once more, ‘we are mocked by unmeaning.’ (Auden 283) Unmeaning has recently been called ‘truthiness’, ‘the truth that comes from the gut, not books’. The taproots, material and religious, of this kind of mentality are set out in Kurt Andersen’s *Fantasyland*, a brilliant survey of irrationality and anti-rationalism in American culture. (Andersen 4-5) Trump is as much a product as an architect of this ‘post-truth’ age.

But let us test this by reverting to ‘commodity’. Recently items of ‘fake news’ began, for the sake of the advertising revenue they might accrue, to be shot into FaceBook like tear-gas cannisters. It seems they first came out of Veles in Macedonia. The perpetrators used headlines such as "Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President". Trump picked up these weapons and hurled them at the traditional media. (Wending) Even his own lawyer, Rudi Giuliani, has recently admitted that the story of the FBI planting a spy in the Trump campaign was all smoke and mirrors, fake news generated not by the ‘failing media’ but by the White House – to minimise and cloud the truths that may yet emerge from the Mueller inquiry.

It has been written that Machiavelli would have expected his readers to recognize that chapters sixteen to eighteen of *The Prince* are ‘a virtuoso exercise in *paradiastole*, the redescription of behaviour in order to transform its moral significance’. (xxxiv) According to Quintilian, *paradiastole (distinctio)* in Latin, was a figure ‘by which things that have some similitude are distinguished’. (Hattaway: *Superfluous Falstaff* 71-83) It could be a tool for untruth: George Puttenham wrote in 1589, ‘*Paradiastole* ... we call the Curry-favel [one who seeks unworthy compliance with the opinions of another], as when we make the best of a bad thing, or turn a signification to the more plausible [pleasing] sense’. (*The Arte of English Poesie* 154)‘ Quintilian’s analysis of the figure – used by a speaker who, under the guise of substituting one word (*verbum*) for another, substitutes one thing (*res*) for

another – has been brilliantly analysed by Quentin Skinner. (*Reason and Rhetoric* 144-51)

Like Machiavelli, Trump has a penchant for refutation by means of rhetorical redescription. He defended the white nationalists who protested in Charlottesville in August 2017, saying they included “some very fine people”. He customarily refers to political opponents as, simply, ‘enemies’. He repeatedly calls Mueller’s Special Counsel Investigation ‘a witch hunt’. This is all part of a sustained operation to politicise the rule of law. We might invoke Innocent Gentillet, who, of Machiavelli, wrote: ‘Is not this to call things with contrary names, that is, to call injustice by the name of justice; cruelty by the name of clemency; night by the name of light; evil by the name of good, and the devil by the name of an angel?’ (Gentillet 15)¹⁰ Will – can – this president keep faith – ‘*mantenere la fede*’, to summon Machiavelli’s phrase from Chapter 18 of *The Prince* – or is he doing all he can deliberately to create a moral world based on arbitrariness? As Will Hutton wrote, ‘Trump’s fights and deals may reward the rich, but many of the disenfranchised rally to the philosophy of self-assertion.’¹¹ We hope we might hope that post-enlightenment truth, as we all recognise it, will survive Trump’s pernicious rebranding, but, because of alternative epistemologies, ‘alternative facts’ will also live on.

Many great writers have structured great works upon commonplaces – Montaigne is an obvious example. Yet, as Andrew Hadfield points out, ‘such knowledge is only ever a starting point and, if taken at face value, what is useful becomes misleading, false, and even a lie.’ (Hadfield 187) ‘In Scott Adams’ book *Win Bigly* [the author] says President Trump’s public repetitions work as a form of mass hypnotism. So, does that explain the ‘No collusion’ mantra?¹² Trump used that mantra ‘no collusion’ seven times in a single Russia answer.¹³ Does he – or his baleful chief strategist Steve Bannon – intend to generate, in this way, cognitive dissonance – as when people who have passionately believed in something continue to believe even after it has been disproved?¹⁴

So here, finally, is the example. You may remember that on 4 May 2018 Trump referred to London in his National Rifle Association speech. His audience expected it, and his commonplace or theme was the Second Amendment, to which many Americans accord the authority of a scriptural text. The amendment is built upon the proposition – or ‘rule topic’ or commonplace – ‘individual American citizens have an inalienable constitutional right to bear arms’ with its corollary that ‘all gun controls are bad’. Trump then proceeded to an *exemplum* or ‘instance’ of this – ‘instance’ will be a key word in the last part of my lecture. He ‘invented’ an anecdote.

¹⁰ See Skinner 172.

¹¹ Hutton, Will. "How Does the World Deal with Trump’s Erratic and Capricious Ways" *Observer* 27 May 2018.

¹² <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/tv/2018/01/13/is-trump-no-collusion-mantra-hypnotism.cnn>.

¹³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/10/politics/trump-no-collusion/index.html>.

¹⁴ Cf. Burnett, Dean. “The neuroscience of no regrets: why people still support Brexit and Trump.” *Guardian* (9 November, 2007).

To quote: ‘we recently read a story that in London, which has unbelievably tough gun laws, a once very prestigious hospital—right in the middle—is like a warzone for horrible stabbing wounds. Yes, that’s right, they don’t have guns—they have knives. And instead there’s blood all over the floors of this hospital. They say it’s as bad as a military war zone hospital.’ He then added: “Knives, knives, knives,” punctuating each word by miming a stabbing. ‘London hasn’t been used to that, they’re getting used to it. It’s pretty tough,’ he said.

As he expanded on his example he supercharged it rhetorically by false outrage and the hyperbole of blood on the floor in a ‘war-zone hospital’, suiting the word to melodramatic action. The exemplum is untrue or tendentious,¹⁵ yet from it Trump purports not simply to exemplify but to validate his commonplace or ‘rule topic’ by *induction*. However, his inductive method, like his ‘example’, is false, because the USA and the UK are not possessed of uniform laws or cultures – it was Hume who pointed out that inductions are true only if uniformity obtains.

Another way of describing this is to say Trump has composed a kind of allegory. George Puttenham has an interestingly ambivalent attitude towards the figure:

The use of this figure is so large and his virtue of so great efficacy as it is supposed no man can pleasantly utter and persuade without it, but in effect is sure never (or very seldom) to thrive and prosper in the world, that cannot skilfully put it in ure [use], insomuch as not only every common courtier, but also the gravest councillor, yea and the most noble and wisest prince of them all are many times enforced to use it, by example (say they) of the great emperor who had it usually in his mouth to say, ‘*Qui nescit dissimulare nescit regnare*’ [he who knows not how to feign knows not how to reign].

Puttenham calls allegory both ‘the figure of false semblant’ and ‘the courtier’ (Puttenham 155): ‘the courtly figure *Allegoria* is ... when we speak one thing and think another, and that our words and our meanings meet not’. (Mucci 214-24) This leads to dissimulation (not seeming to be what you are). (Dzelzainis 463-74) Nietzsche says dissimulation is means by which weaker ... individuals preserve themselves. (Nietzsche 114-23) Trump tries to refashion himself as a modern hero in an old tale. His Washington ‘swamp’ is the equivalent of Dante’s *selva oscura*, the stock epithets he attaches to his enemies, ‘crooked Hillary’, ‘slippery James Comey’, ‘animal Assad’, could crop up in a Hollywood cartoon or a child’s rather nasty story-book.

Another habit of a mind like that of Trump is reification – we encountered it in the Bastard’s commodity speech and I need to revert to this for a moment. He and people like him regard or categorise words – as well as what we would recognise as dogmatic statements – as things. Some British examples: during the Brexit referendum, Nigel Farage repeatedly claimed, ‘I want my country back’, as if a ‘country’ belonged to the same category as a ball that a child has inadvertently kicked over the fence. So too ‘sovereignty’, another key word for our Brexiteers, is not a substance but a process.

¹⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-44007312>

If facts are categorised as ‘things’, they can constitute a kind of currency that can be traded or converted from one context to another – hence the notorious reference of Kellyanne Conway on 22 January 2017 to ‘alternative facts’.¹⁶ I do not know whether I can discern a model rather than a muddle. But perhaps it was held that behind a reified ‘fact’ was a reified ‘meaning’ or referent. To repeat: a word or a fact is not a *thing*. Shakespeare once again, this time Falstaff: ‘What is honour? A word. What is in that word “honour”?’ What is that “honour”?’ Air. A trim reckoning...’ (*IH4*, 5.1.133-5) Air is no ‘thing’: rather, a word is a sign.

So Shakespeare got there before Nietzsche and J.L. Austin. You will be familiar with Nietzsche’s famous essay ‘On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense.’ His argument is that people do not understand the elusiveness of words:

Every word immediately becomes a concept, inasmuch as it is not intended to serve as a reminder of the unique and wholly individualized original experience to which it owes its birth, but must at the same time fit innumerable, more or less similar cases – which means, strictly speaking, never equal – in other words, a lot of unequal cases. Every concept originates through our equating what is unequal. Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. (Nietzsche 117)

The confidence of being ‘possessed of’ truth, perceived as a material object, is found in the discourse of the Christian fundamentalists and Islamic jihadis alike. Tendentious readings of John’s utterance ‘Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’ (John, viii, 32) do not help. ‘Persuasive insistence’ instils belief. Such possession bestows authority and the desire to fight off challengers – again a Trumpian paradigm. The mentality of the Christian right feeds all too easily into conviction politics: ‘I believe, therefore I am right’. (Andersen 15)

Trump is also a contrarian, or, in some people’s eyes, a crusader against the shadowy elites of what we know to be a fantastical ‘deep state’,¹⁷ conjured up by Breitbart News. In Trump’s *Land of Faerie*, riddled with allegorical binaries, truth for the President is the opposite of what his adversaries declare or believe. In this political imaginary, his detestation of Obama, his erstwhile master, emerges in what Nietzsche described as a ‘slave mentality’, manifesting itself in a ‘priestly revenge’. (Nietzsche 398) Yet Donald Trump is confident he can carelessly rule the world, even though he is shackled by the constraints of language I have been trying to describe. The problem is, ‘who notices?’

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_facts#Legal_usage

¹⁷ There is a good Wikipedia article:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_state_in_the_United_States.

What all this demonstrates is that, in both church congregations and political constituencies – and this is my take-home message – *epistemology is as important as conviction* – it is, in fact, a *moral issue*: ‘the weak, who cannot tolerate uncertainty and shades of grey’, writes Paul Glenn, ‘seek to impose an epistemology of clarity and certainty.’ (Glenn 576) Trump’s epistemology is also the epistemology of the underdog. If Trump is not speaking for those who feel oppressed by the system (‘the Government’) he projects the world using the vocabulary of the nursery: there are goodies and baddies – of Mexicans he said in February 2017, ‘we are getting the bad dudes out’. Everything is drenched in childlike hyperbole: he is going to build a ‘beautiful wall’, ‘the Iran nuclear deal was the worst deal ever’.

A sophisticated epistemology, therefore is a weapon of liberation: and, on this battle-field, Shakespeare, by his strenuous insistence on the ways in which we think with words, raises our level of what has been called ‘epistemic vigilance’¹⁸ – and may even help to make us free. Remember Marilynne Robinson on ‘thinking with politics’.

Finally, two passages from *Troilus and Cressida*: the first is from 1.3, the Greek Council scene – it is the beginning of the ‘degree’ speech.

ULYSSES

Troy, yet upon his basis, had been down
 And the great Hector's sword had lacked a master,
 But for these instances:
 The specialty of rule hath been neglected,
 And look how many Grecian tents do stand
 Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions.
 When that the general is not like the hive
 To whom the foragers shall all repair,
 What honey is expected? Degree being vizarded,
 The unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.
 The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre
 Observe degree, priority, and place ... (*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.75-86)

Neither ‘instance’ nor ‘speciality’ is glossed in the New Cambridge Edition. ‘Instances’ here means illustrative examples (*OED*, ‘instance’, 6). ‘Speciality’ I take to mean ‘particular quality’, in this case due regard for the details of order and for hierarchy.

The second is from the fifth act, and is spoken as Ulysses offers Troilus what seems to be ‘ocular proof’ of Cressida’s connection with ‘perfidious’ Diomedes. In fact, the passage reminds us that we do not just *see* realities, we *read* them:

TROILUS

This she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida.
 If beauty have a soul, this is not she,
 If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,

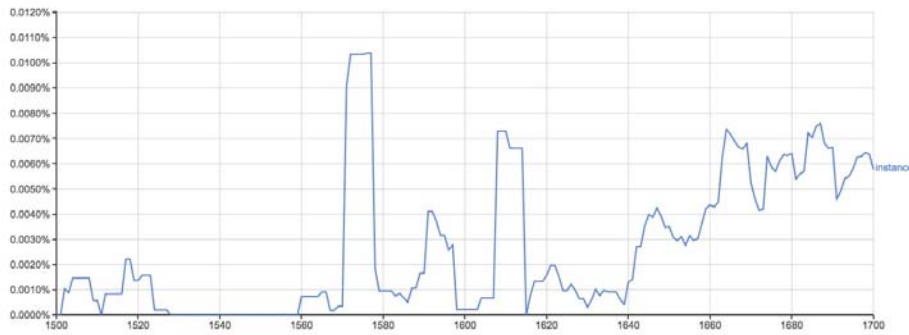
¹⁸ For the phrase and a reading list, see <https://sites.google.com/site/hugomercier/theargumentativetheoryofreasoning>

Truth(s) and Alternative Facts

If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
 If there be rule in unity itself,
 This is not she. O madness of discourse
 That cause sets up with and against itself –
 Bifold authority, where reason can revolt
 Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
 Without revolt! This is and is not Cressid.
 Within my soul there doth conduce a fight
 Of this strange nature: that a thing inseparate
 Divides more wider than the sky and earth,
 And yet the spacious breadth of this division
 Admits no orifex for a point as subtle
 As Ariachne's broken woof to enter.
 Instance, O instance, strong as Pluto's gates,
 Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven;
 Instance, O instance, strong as heaven itself,
 The bonds of heaven are slipped, dissolved, and loosed,
 And with another knot, five-finger-tied,
 The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,
 The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics
 Of her o'er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed. (5.2.136-59)

When Shakespeare repeats a word, as he does here, (using the figure of *ploce*) it is the opposite of Trump's 'persuasive insistence'. He is not trying to instil what he thinks *about* the word's referent but, rather, he seems to be thinking *with* the word. A couple of obvious examples: in the parliament scene of *Richard II* Bullingbrook rebukes the King: 'The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed / The shadow of your face' (4.1.291-2). In *King Lear* Edmund catechizes the audience: 'Why brand they us / With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?' (1.2).

What is the function of Troilus' repetition? I think that Shakespeare is not only exploring Troilus' love-torn mind, but exploring the way that, at this time, the word 'instance' could mean two contradictory things. The first example is an example of a *deduction*, something deriving from and supporting a generality – the word came to mean this in the 1590's (*OED*, 'instance' 6). The second example deploys the older meaning, first used in this sense, according to the *OED*, in 1573: 'A case adduced in objection to or disproof of a universal assertion' (*OED* 'instance' 5), and forms part of an *induction*: 'The process of inferring a general law or principle from the observation of particular instances' (*OED*). It seems to have been a matter for discussion: if you put the word into Ngram, here is what you get:



Notice the fascinating spikes around 1570 and 1605.

So, yes, there can be 'alternative facts', but Shakespeare is at pains to enlighten his audience: unless citizens have some awareness not only of historic truth but also of topics and tropes, the processes of deliberation and persuasion, their independence is in peril. We need a Thomas Wilson to stand up to Donald Trump. In 1553, in *The Art of Rhetoric*, Wilson warned: 'We might heap many men together, and prove by large rehearsal [frequent repetition], anything that we would, the which of the logicians is called induction.' (208)

Many wouldn't understand – or want to understand – a word of this. So what is to be done? As educators we ought to look to our curricula again. Perhaps it is time to concentrate less on 'theory' and spend more time on close reading, 'practical criticism', *explication de texte*. In my recent experience as a university teacher, language is too often overlooked. There are no obvious barricades to handle, and it is too easy simply to inveigh against Trump (and I may be guilty of this myself) rather than, on the basis of particular slogans and utterances, critique the culture and helped bring them into being. Better than taking to the streets carrying placards reading 'Down with Paradiastole'?

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