EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

Inter-Confessional Negotiations in Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*: Truce as Disputation

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Introduction

'Oh come back ravishing Boy, bright Messenger'.[1] This quotation taken from *The Virgin Martyr*, a play written by Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger and first performed in 1620, exemplifies the importance of embassies when it comes to a religious feud and the link between the figure of the angel and the messenger.[2] The 'ravishing Boy' is no one else than an angel called Angelo whose role, at the beginning of this scene, was to mediate between the Christian protagonist of the play, Dorothea, who is now dead, and her pagan murderer, Theophilus, the one uttering these words.[3] In that scene, the playwrights make use of the traditional representation of *angelos* as *nuntius* or messengers that originated

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[1] Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger, *The Virgin Martyr* in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, vol. 3, ed. by Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 5.1.166. All subsequent references to *The Virgin Martyr* will be from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text. The spelling has been modernised throughout.

[2] For a comprehensive study on the link between the angel, the messenger and the ambassador, see Daniel Ménager, *L'Ange et l'ambassadeur: diplomatie et théologie à la Renaissance* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013).

[3] The term 'Christian' will be used throughout this article since my purpose is not to determine whether the play is a piece of Protestant, or even Puritan, propaganda or if it contains a specifically Catholic imagery. As Thomas Moretti argues, 'Dekker and Massinger work toward religious tolerance and mediation by blending various religious practices together under the general category "Christian", not by calling attention to any denominational preferences for particular practices'. See '*Via Media* Theatricality and Religious Fantasy in Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (1622)' *Renaissance Drama* 42.2 (2014), 243-70 (p. 245, note 5).

with the angel Gabriel. With Torquato Tasso's *The Messenger* (1582), the figure of the angel became further associated with the ambassador. According to Tasso, the angel was an intercessor between God and mankind while the ambassador acted as a peace-broker between princes. The angel was also a figure whose role was to unify Christendom and this explains the close ties that existed between theology and diplomacy. However, performed in an era of conflict and debate, the play also explores the possibility for a disputant involved in a religious disputation to become a would-be ambassador, thus blurring the boundary between religion and diplomacy and testifying to what Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox call 'the porous and fluid nature of diplomatic exchange' and 'the heterogeneous nature of individual embassies and ambassadors'.[4]

Indeed, *The Virgin Martyr* reflects the various debates linked to the field of diplomacy that took place during the Renaissance. The period has often been regarded as a time during which the status of diplomacy evolved and diplomatic figures, such as resident ambassadors, emerged. Concepts such as that of truce were theorized and redefined in the numerous treatises that were published during the period. In his 1625 treatise entitled *On the Law of War and Peace*, Hugo Grotius defines the truce as follows: 'an agreement by which warlike acts are for a time abstained from, though the state of war continues' before adding that 'a truce is a period of rest in war, not a peace'.[5] Therefore, I will regard the truce as an episode in which physical violence or the use of force stop and are replaced by an agonistic dialogue between the two parties. Timothy Hampton describes this shift: 'For it [the truce] brings with it the sudden, but temporary, cessation of violence for the purpose of dialogue'.[6] *The Virgin Martyr*, published a few years before Grotius's treatise and just after the end of the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621) between Spain and the United Provinces, is very much concerned with the methods used to reach an agreement, the temporality of the truce and its aim. It perfectly illustrates what Timothy Hampton notices: 'Literary texts provide a unique and privileged terrain for studying the languages of diplomacy. In turn diplomatic culture plays a dynamic role in literary history, in the invention of new literary forms, conventions and genres'.[7] And, in *The Virgin Martyr*, the scenes of truce, during which inter-confessional negotiations are conducted, impact the

[4] Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox, 'Introduction' in *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1-12 (pp. 5, 7).

[5] Hugo Grotius, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis Libri Tres / The Law of War and Peace*, trans. by Francis W. Kelsey, Book III, chapter XXI, sects. I and II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925) p. 832; p. 834.

[6] Timothy Hampton, 'The Slumber of War: Diplomacy, Tragedy, and the Aesthetics of the Truce in Early Modern Europe' in *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre and Soft Power: The Making of Peace*, ed. by Nathalie Rivère de Carles (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) pp. 27-45 (p. 28).

[7] Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009) p. 2.

pace of the dramatic action, thus exemplifying the link between diplomacy and the creation of new literary and dramatic codes.

The play is set in pagan Rome and recounts the story of Dorothea, a Christian convert and soon-to-be martyr, who is arrested for her beliefs. The play is built around a very particular structure that reveals a tension when it comes to the way inter-confessional relations are envisaged: encounters that we could describe as war scenes alternate with episodes of parley, which partake of truce scenes, wherein the characters try and negotiate the surrender of their religious opponent. These scenes are inevitably followed by further episodes of violence, enhancing the temporary nature of truce agreements. The play obeys what Timothy Hampton calls, when referring to the course of events punctuating the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'a jerky rhythm'.[8] At the beginning of the play, Theophilus, who is set on killing all the Christians of the Province of Cæsaria, decides not to execute Dorothea but rather to send his two daughters, who converted back to paganism, to try and convince her to abjure her Christian beliefs. The scene avoids any outbreak of violence. Conversely, this episode is framed by two violent events which show that, in the play, the majority of cross-confessional encounters leads to brutality and ultimately to the death of one of the protagonists. The beginning of the play stages the arrival of Dioclesian and Maximinus, the Emperors of Rome, in Cæsaria. They have made peace with their enemies abroad, and they are victorious, but there is still an ongoing state of war between the pagans and the Christians within the city walls. The first words of Sapritius, the governor of Cæsaria, indicates that war is still an issue and that the two sides should be kept apart at all costs: 'Keepe the ports close, and let the guards be doubl'd, / Disarme the Christians, call it death in any / To weare a sword, or in his house to have one' (1.1.75-77). And it is indeed on this very war that the play is going to focus. The episode before the encounter is no exception. The entire scene is replete with words relating to death and torture. In addition, before sending his two daughters to Dorothea, Theophilus describes the consequences which a refusal to convert back to paganism would entail:

> If she refuse it,
> The Stygian dampes breeding infectious ayres,
> The Mandrakes shreekes, or Basilisks killing eye,
> The dreadfull lightning that does crush the bones
> And never singe the skin, shall not appeare
> Lesse fatal to her, then my zeale made hot
> With love unto my gods (3.1.21-7)

[8] Hampton, 'The Slumber of War', p. 28.

These words will prove themselves true. The truce is only temporary and violence and an open state of war immediately follow the encounter between the three women. In a reversal that shall be analysed hereafter, Caliste and Christeta convert back to Christianity, their father kills them and condemns Dorothea to death. The same pattern recurs at the very end of the play when, immediately after Dorothea's beheading, Angelo pays a visit to Theophilus, alone in his study and surrounded by books, and offers him a basket of fruit and flowers as a token of truce and amity. This juxtaposition enhances the contrast between the violence of Dorothea's execution scene and this dialogue. At the end of the scene, after a brief verbal exchange, Theophilus converts to Christianity only to reignite the inter-confessional conflict. He is subsequently sentenced to death and dies on stage, as we shall see later.

Furthermore, in *The Virgin Martyr* the scene of truce puts the emphasis on the importance of language and discussion. Caliste and Christeta are thus sent as envoys to broker peace and negotiate Dorothea's surrender. Theophilus summarises their mission as follows:

> In hope to draw backe this Apostata,
> Which will be greater honour than her death,
> Unto her fathers faith, and to that end
> Have brought my daughters hither. (3.1.28-31)

He then enjoins his daughters: 'Spare no promises, / Persuasions, or threats' (3.1.38-9). The encounter that will ensue is thus a truce in the sense that the characters stop fighting but their encounter still results from a major disagreement. However, this fundamental disagreement will not be solved by the use of violence ('death') but by the use of words ('Promises, persuasions, or threats'). The truce scene is a scene in which the conflict that informs the whole play is both absent and present. Furthermore, the scene of parley is envisaged as a disputation. The two sisters are repeatedly described as seasoned disputants and this is how they also consider themselves: 'We dare dispute against this new sprung sect / In private or in publicke' (1.1.51-2). Since, in *The Virgin Martyr*, the scene of parley is influenced by the medieval tradition of the disputation, this article will explore the diplomatic function of this very particular form of encounter, which was also being redefined and theorised in the seventeenth century as we shall see.

Henceforth, the word disputation, rather than dispute, shall be used because of the emphasis on speech that can be found in the definition of that word. While a dispute might involve an actual fight, the disputation is always contained within the bounds of a

dialogue between two parties. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition reads as follows: 'The action of disputing or debating (questions, etc.); controversial argument; debate, discussion, controversy'. This definition can be compared to that of a parley to be found in the same dictionary. All the entries contain words such as 'debate', 'argument', 'discussion', 'disputation', 'meeting' or 'truce'.[9] In *The English Expositor* (1616), John Bullokar defines a parley as a 'talking together'. Therefore, I wish to argue that the various truces staged in *The Virgin Martyr* can be equated with scenes of disputation that participate in a general reflection on the methodology and the aim of the truce. These scenes were also adapted to the context in which the play was performed. I shall first reflect on the importance of the movements and gestures of the disputants as a way of marking the transition from war to parley and opening up a discussion. In *The Virgin Martyr*, gestures of friendship and body language are used to signal a pause in the religious strife and the play may be said to outline a methodology linking chirology, materiality and truce. Then, I shall turn to the characteristics of the language used in these scenes. I shall analyse the extent to which the use of rhetoric and logic steers the truce scene away from a scene designed to obtain a peace that would satisfy all parties and towards a scene whose aim will be to secure victory. The truce thus turns the war into a linguistic battle. Finally, I shall question the role of theatre as a medium for representing a viable truce or peace. Can drama, and the inevitable presence of an audience, be accounted responsible for the failure of a lasting religious truce? Indeed, playwrights had to strike a balance between staging a moment of appeasement and the audience's horizons of expectations. I wish to argue that this art could provide negotiators and diplomats with an experimental model that could be put into practice in order to appease the tensions but the issue of the audience needed to be addressed.

Body language as a language of appeasement

In *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage*, Farah Karim-Cooper shows that gestures, and more particularly hands, were prime agents when it came to conveying an idea of violence

[9] 'disputation', n. *OED Online*. (Oxford University Press) Def 1.a. Accessed 13 October 2017. https://www-oed-com.nomade.univ-tlse2.fr/view/Entry/55207?redirectedFrom=disputation#eid 'parley, n.1 (and int.)' *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) June 2017, Accessed 13 Oct. 2017. www.oed.com/view/Entry/137986.

or war on the early modern stage.[10] In the scene depicting the murder of Caliste and Christeta, the emphasis is put on the role of Theophilus's hands in the process. The murder is enacted on stage. At the end of Act 3, scene 2, Theophilus says:

> Come you accursd, thus by the haire I drag you
> Before this holy altar; thus looke on you
> Lesse pittifull then Tigres to their prey.
> And thus with mine owne hand I take that life
> Which I gave to you. (3.2.111-15)

Here, as in the whole play, the protagonists disagree over matters of faith but their disagreement is portrayed less as a battle scene in which two armies would meet and fight with weapons than as a kind of hand-to-hand combat. This close-up effect on the hands climaxes when the murderer remarks: 'And thus with mine owne hand I take that life / Which I gave to you' (3.2.114-15). Even though Theophilus might use a weapon to stab the young Christian women, nothing is mentioned as to the presence of a prop on stage and he might as well strangle his two daughters.[11] In Act 4, Sapritius also uses his hand to drag Dorothea and draws attention to it by explicitly referring to this body part: 'Follow me thou damn'd Sorceres, call up thy spirits, / And if they can let 'em from my hand / untwine these witching haires' (4.1.60-2). Similarly, Harpax has Hircius and Spungius, Dorothea's former servants whom she rescued from poverty, beat Dorothea before putting her to death. Once again, the emphasis is placed on their hands: 'They shall not want durt under my nailes, ile keepe 'em long of purpose, for now my fingers itch to bee at her' (4.2.50-1). Therefore, hands take centre stage when it comes to the religious conflict and they symbolise the violence that is unleashed against the Christians, and especially Dorothea. The repetition of the word 'hands' throughout the play serves as inner stage directions but also enhances their importance, both visually and aurally.

Nevertheless, the function of the hands is ambivalent since, culturally-speaking, hands and agreement were also linked, most notably because handshakes symbolised friendship,

[10] See Farah Karim-Cooper, *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage: Gesture, Touch and the Spectacle of Dismemberment* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), pp. 197-240.

[11] In any case, this constitutes a departure from the dramatists' sources in which Caliste and Christeta are invariably burnt at the stake. See Julia Gasper, 'The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*', *The Review of English Studies*. 42.165 (1991), 17-31 (pp. 19 and 27).

protection, reconciliation or the conclusion of an agreement. Hands were also used to deliver gifts (see Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3).[12]

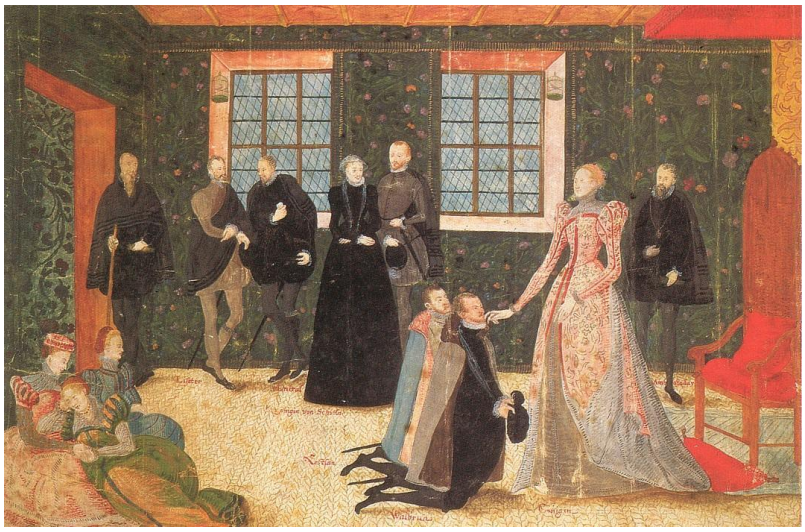

Figure 1 Artist Unknown, *Queen Elizabeth Receiving Dutch Ambassadors*, 1570-1575, Neue Galerie, Kassel, Germany.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elzbieta_przyjmuj_ca_ambasadoró.jpg

[12] In *Chirologia, or the Naturall Language of the Hand* and *Chironomia, or the Art of Manuall Rhetoric*, both published in 1644, John Bulwer recognizes the power of the hands as powerful tools of non-verbal communication. He also attests to the idea that the language of the hands can be ambivalent since they can be used to express triumph or hopelessness, scorn as well as praise, invite as well as dismiss or reject, express disapproval or support… (See Figure 4). Both these treatises were published over twenty years after *The Virgin Martyr* was first performed but they show how hands were perceived in the early modern period and the instability or ambiguity of the message that they may convey can be felt in the play.

Figure 2 Anonymous, *Peace of Cateau-Cambresis, signed April 3, 1559 at Cateau-Cambresis between Henry II of France and Philip II of Spain*, State Archives, Sienne Palazzo Publico, Siena.

ASSi, Tavoletta di Biccherna n. 63, anonimo, "La pace di Cateau Cambrésis e l'abbraccio di Enrico II di Francia e Filippo II di Spagna", 1559. **Divieto di ulteriore riproduzione.** [This image is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.]

Figure 3 Vittore Carpaccio, *Arrival of the English Ambassadors*, 1495-1500, tempera on canvas, 275 x 589 cm, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. © Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia/su concessione del Ministero della Cultura. [This image is not covered by the

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Figure 4 Illustration taken from John Bulwer, *Chirologia, or the Naturall Language of the Hand* (1644), p.151.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:John_Bulwer#/media/File:Jbulwer.jpg

This duality is reflected in *The Virgin Martyr* because their role is also brought to the fore when scenes of negotiations and truce are staged. In the play, gestures are meaningful and some of them participate in the performance of the truce. In one of the last scenes of the play, which echoes, as an inverted mirror, the episode in which Theophilus kills his two daughters, the role of the characters' hands is again emphasised but stands in stark contrast to the murder scene. This time they are not used to kill but to bear and offer a gift. Theophilus had Dorothea executed and he is alone in his study. Angelo, the allegorical character who was Dorothea's servant and friend and has now turned into a

symbolic emissary and diplomatic agent, appears to Theophilus to deliver a basket of fruit and flowers from his former mistress:[13]

> I had a mistresse late sent hence by you
> Upon a bloudy errand, you intreated
> That when she came into that blessed Garden
> Whither she knew she went, and where (now happy)
> Shee feedes upon all joy, she would send to you
> Some of that Garden fruit, and flowers, which heere
> To have her promise sav'd, are brought by me. (4.1.48-54)

Angelo really takes on the role of the celestial messenger whose diplomatic mission is to carry a present from one place to another as the opposition between the adverbs 'hence' (4.1.48) and 'heere' (4.1.53) seems to indicate. This mission, and the gesture to which it is associated, enables the playwright to give Angelo a diplomatic function. Indeed, diplomacy and gift-giving were already intertwined before the early modern period but they became increasingly so at the Tudor and early Stuart Courts. Tracy Sowerby and Jan Hennings assert: 'In early modern diplomacy not only humans carried agency… Although they were only exchanged intermittently, gifts were an essential feature of early modern diplomacy across the globe, creating bonds of obligation and constructing notions of reciprocity and friendship even between far distant princes'.[14] This gift-giving gesture is thus quite significant and symbolises an attempt to pacify the relations between the two enemies. As Isabelle Hentz-Dubail notices when analysing the strategies put in place to end the increasing violence to which disputants resorted in the sixteenth century: 'Thus

[13] While this may seem an ambiguous motif, especially because Theophilus will eat the fruit contained in the basket, offering food was also a symbol of concord: 'Almost anyone could, in the right circumstances, give food to anyone else. It could express the horizontal bonds of friendship and kin loyalty as effectively as the vertical deference of tenant or subject. Food is recognized in many cultures as a useful tool for the 'little present', tokens of esteem, deference, or affection, that are the small coin of social bonding'. See Felicity Heal, *The Power of Gifts: Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 36.

[14] Tracy A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings, 'Introduction: Practices of Diplomacy' in *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World: c. 1410-1800*, ed. by Tracy A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings (London: Routledge, 2017) pp. 1-21 (p. 15). Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen, and Giorgio Riello go as far as saying that 'ambassadors without appropriate gifts had little hope of being successful'. They add: 'Gifts were, along with the letters sent by foreign rulers at the heart of the ceremonies that accompanied the formal reception of ambassadors in Asia and in Europe'; see Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen, and Giorgio Riello, 'Introduction' in *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia*, ed. by Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen, and Giorgio Riello (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) pp. 1-33 (p. 2).

the language of gentleness too can be channelled through gestures, whose value precisely consists in replacing shouts, winning without any aggressive or humiliating speech'.[15] In *The Virgin Martyr*, that is precisely what the gift does. The basket can be equated with a flag of truce here which signals a transition from war to truce and enables the whole negotiation scene to unfold.[16]

This gift-giving gesture is only a first step in the encounter between the two characters. Indeed, two conflicting doctrinal perspectives continue to coexist in Theophilus's mouth. After Angelo's exit, he questions one of his servants:

> THEOPHILUS Saw you not–a boy.
> 2 Where?
> THEOPHILUS Heere hee entred, a young Lad;
> A thousand blessings danc'd upon his eyes,
> A smooth fac'd glorious Thing, that brought this Basket.
> 2 No sir?
> THEOPHILUS Away, but be in reach if my voice calls you,
> No! vanish'd! and not seene, be thou a spirit
> Sent from that Witch to mock me (5.1.70-8).

This dialogue and Theophilus's words testify to a change that is not quite complete yet. Indeed, Theophilus's speech is full of Christian undertones. The word 'blessings' and the phrase 'smooth fac'd glorious Thing' (which is in keeping with traditional representations of angels) show that Theophilus has made peace with the messenger.[17]

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[15] Isabelle Hentz-Dubail, 'De la Logique à la Civilité : disputes et conférences des guerres de religion, 1560-1610' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Grenoble, France, 1999), p. 256. 'Ainsi le langage de la douceur peut lui aussi passer à travers les gestes, dont la valeur consiste alors précisément à remplacer les cris, à remporter la victoire sans grands discours agressifs ou humiliants'. My translation.

[16] Even though the protagonists are not sincere, a metaphorical flag of truce is also present in William Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI*. In the scene in which opposes Gloucester and Winchester in Parliament, these two characters are ordered to reach an agreement and Winchester declares: 'Love for thy love, and hand for hand I give' (3.1.138). The stage direction indicates that he takes Gloucester's hand. Gloucester then replies: 'This token serveth for a flag of truce / Betwixt ourselves and all our followers' (3.1.141). Here, there is no gift but joined hands are used to visually signal a truce. William Shakespeare, *The First Part of Henry the Sixth*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), pp. 415-90.

[17] For traditional descriptions of angels stressing their youthful appearance and brightness, see Joad Raymond (ed.), *Conversations with Angels: Essays Towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100-1700* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 206-207, 208-209, 217, 219-220, 285, and 333. See also Figure 5 and Figure 6.

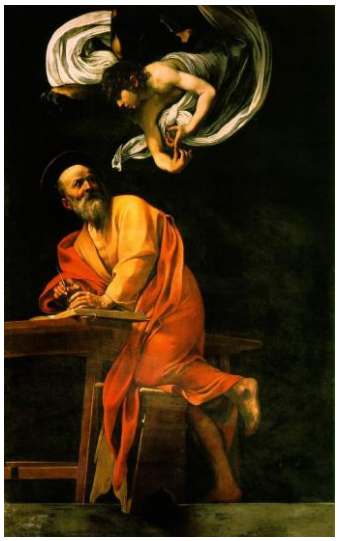

Figure 5 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*, 1602, oil on canvas, 292 x 186cm, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome, Italy.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Inspiration_of_Saint_Matthew_by_Caravaggio.jpg

Figure 6 Pietro da Cortona, *The Guardian Angel*, 1656, oil on canvas, 225 x 143 cm, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome, Italy.
Credits: Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, Roma (MIBACT) – Bibliotheca Hertziana, Istituto Max Planck per la storia dell'arte/Enrico Fontolan.

However, these words contrast sharply with his description of Dorothea as a 'Witch' (5.1.78). The relationship between Theophilus and Dorothea is still very much conflictual, as the insult seems to suggest. Benevolent gestures are not enough and the materiality of the gift needs to be emphasised several times throughout the scene. The physical presence of this prop on stage is underlined by the use of the deictic 'heere' (4.1.53) which draws the audience's attention to its materiality. This is the reason why, after Angelo's exit, the basket is then given a role of its own in the scene and it becomes an autonomous agent of truce. It is used as a tool leading to a religious epiphany that will permanently end the strife between Theophilus and the Christian community.

Indeed, this particular object also triggers a sensory and intellectual revelation since the basket gives Angelo the opportunity the reaffirm the existence of the Garden of Eden and the eternal bliss after death. Its content will bring about Theophilus's unexpected conversion to Christianity. In that case, truce and truth, or at least the search for truth, seem to work simultaneously and this search for truth had been at the centre of any disputation since the Middle Ages.[18] Indeed, if the basket is the element that visually symbolises the truce established between the two parties, it also foregrounds a link between truce and truth thanks to the use of the hands. The transfer of the object from Angelo to Theophilus symbolises a transmission of religious beliefs and learning. The hand is the organ which establishes a point of contact between the human body and the Scriptures and, thus, it was related to sacred knowledge in the Renaissance. Farah Karim-Cooper affirms: 'The hand was not just a symbol of God's "sacred mystery", but it also emblematized the tactile pursuit of knowledge and was the part of the body inherently linked to the mind' before concluding, 'hands were significant agents of learning'.[19] The moment of truce is a privileged moment when the truth can be revealed. And indeed, Theophilus explicitly links the figure of the celestial ambassador to the notion of accuracy. Asked to provide the particulars surrounding Dorothea's death, he enjoins his audience:

> O marke it therefore, and with that attention,
> As you would here an Embassie from heaven
> By a wing'd Legate, for the truth delivered
> Both how and what this blessed virgin sufferd…
> You will rise up with reverence (5.3.103-8).

[18] In his book, Alex Novikoff notes: 'Disputation involves the pursuit of truth'; see *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 136.

[19] Karim-Cooper, pp. 34 and 36.

The basket, which is the main symbol of the truce here, and the gesture that must signal its transfer from one character to the other on stage, is a powerful tool used to acquire knowledge. Theophilus gradually reaches the truth and makes peace with his former enemies because he is the recipient of an object that appeals to his senses. And, as Natalie Eschenbaum reminds us, the senses and knowledge were intertwined in the Renaissance: 'In early modern England most writers agreed with Aristotle's general assertion that knowledge happens via the senses'.[20] In turn, the use of the senses fully participates in this peace-brokering process. Theophilus's language first changes because he is enthralled by Angelo's beauty and attracted to the scent of the fruit: ''Tis a tempting fruit, / And the most bright cheek'd child I ever view'd / Sweete smelling goodly fruit, what flowers are these?' (5.1.56-58).[21] Theophilus clearly relies on his senses and this is a successful method insofar as it leads him to start rejecting his former beliefs and to embrace Christianity. He then uses his senses of sight and hearing:

> What was this apparition? Sure it had
> A shape Angelicall, mine eyes (though dazzled
> And danted at first sight) tell me, it wore
> A paire of glorious wings, yea they were wings,
> And hence he flew; tis vanished, *Jupiter*
> For all my sacrifices done to him
> Never one gave me smile: how can stone smile,
> *Musicke*.
> Or wooden Image laugh? Ha! I remember
> Such Musicke gave a welcome to my eare,
> When the faire youth came to me: tis in the Ayre,
> Or from some better place, a power divine,
> Through my darke ignorance on my soule does shine,
> And makes me see a conscience all stai'nd ore,
> Nay drown'd and damn'd for ever in Christian gore. (5.1.84-118)

Moreover, what really triggers Theophilus's sudden epiphany is his decision to taste the fruit contained in the basket. He clearly draws attention to his actions on stage when he

[20] Natalie K. Eschenbaum, 'Robert Herrick and the five (or six) senses' in *The Senses in Early Modern England: 1558-1660*, ed. by Simon Smith, Jackie Watson, and Amy Kenny (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 113-129 (p. 114).

[21] Sight was considered the most important of the five senses. See Farah Karim-Cooper, 'Afterword' in *The Senses in Early Modern England: 1558-1660*, ed. by Simon Smith, Jackie Watson, and Amy Kenny (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 217-219 (p. 217).

says: ‘I am sure / This is essentiall, and how ere it grows, / Will taste it’. (5.1.79-81). His actions are also put into words when he decides to eat another serving of fruit: ‘So good, ile have some more sure’ (5.1.83). A few lines later, his language has dramatically altered: ‘all this ground me thinke is bloudy, / And pav’d with thousands of those Christian eyes / Whom I have tortur’d, and they stare upon me’ (5.1.102-4). The reference to the Christian community implies that Theophilus is now reconciled with Angelo but also with all the Christians who live in the Province of Cæsaria. The use of plural forms in his speech illustrates the idea that this gustatory revelation put an end to a large-scale conflict. Finally, Theophilus decides to eat several extra pieces of fruit:

> Agen, what dainty relish on my tongue
> This fruit hath left, some Angell hath me fed,
> If so toothful, I will be banqueted.
> *Eates another*. (5.1.120-2)

Visually, on stage, Theophilus is bound to put his hand to his mouth. This gesture, and the sensory revelation that comes with it, leads to a symbolic peace agreement with Dorothea. He starts blaming Harpax for his past actions: ‘By thy damn’d Rhetoricke did I hunt the life / Of *Dorothea*, the holy Virgin Martyr’ (5.1.145-146). The idea of a revelation is furthered through an opposition between past and present. At the end of the scene, Theophilus mentions the music that he heard after Dorothea’s execution:

> THEOPHILUS Legions of ministering Angels to beare up
> Her spotlesses soule to heaven; who entertaind it
> With choyce celestiall musicke, equall to
> To the motion of the spheres, she uncompeld
> Chang’s this life for a better. My Lord *Sapritius*
> You were present at her death, did you ere here
> Such ravishing sounds?
> SAPRITIUS Yet you said then it was witchcraft,
> And divellish illusions
> THEOPHILUS I then hard it
> With sinful eares, and belch’d out blasphemous words
> Against his dietie, which then I knew not,
> Nor did believe in him. (5.2.131-41)

The repetition of the adverb ‘then’ enhances the change that occurred in Theophilus’s perception of the whole scene. The lexical field of belief is split into two opposites and words such as ‘witchcraft’, ‘divellish’ and ‘illusions’ contrast sharply with ‘celestiall’,

‘ravishing’ and ‘deity’. This spiritual revelation is linked to the act of eating the fruit contained in the basket and is thus the result of a very sensory revelation. By giving the basket to Theophilus, Angelo proves to be the main agent revealing a religious truth and participating in the resolution of the conflict that has been so central up to that point in the play. In that final act, the basket speaks louder than words and turns out to be more powerful than rhetoric.

Moreover, in addition to the hands, the whole body is involved in that search for truth during scenes of truce in Dekker and Massinger’s play. Indeed, *The Virgin Martyr* also stages the moments before the disputation. In the play, the characters insist on the importance of being seated to take part in the conference. The following quotation marks the beginning of the disputation between Caliste, Christeta and Dorothea:

> DOROTHEA prethee *Angelo*
> Reach us some chaires, please you sit?
> CALISTE We thanke you,
> Our visite is for love, love to your safety. (3.1.46-8)

This initial gesture places the whole scene under the aegis of politeness and mutual respect as the fact that the lines are shared here shows. The chiasmus of the word ‘love’ and the use of words such as ‘prethee’, ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ amply demonstrates it. Moreover, the position of the participants in the disputation also symbolises their willingness to pause and take time to reflect on the religious issues that brought them together. The moment of truce is thus seen as a time when, all other actions being suspended, the characters can think and try to reach the truth. The same is true of the scene involving Theophilus and Angelo. The fact that the whole scene is set in Theophilus’s study is also symbolic since the study represents a place of learning but also a very private place, which will prevent any outburst of violence.

Body language is thus crucial in these negotiation scenes because the disputants use their bodies to coerce their enemy or, on the contrary, to quell this violence. However, this is only a first step and, more often than not, words contradict gestures and make the conflict resurface. While Theophilus discovers the truth and makes peace with his enemies through a very sensory revelation, Dorothea uses rhetoric and language to conduct her negotiations and persuade her enemies. We shall therefore now turn to the role that verbal interactions play in the negotiations that are described or shown in *The Virgin Martyr* and determine the extent to which language helps reinforce the link between religious disputation and peace brokering.

Truce and rhetoric

In early modern texts, when inter-confessional meetings take the form of a disputation, the protagonists' language changes and adapts to the new relationship between the participants. Indeed, their emotions and passions tend to be stifled and the readers or the audience get a sense of their intellectual agility.[22] Two types of disputation are represented or referred to in Massinger and Dekker's play: corrupt disputations during which language is mishandled and violence plays a central role and more traditional forms of disputation making a fruitful use of argumentative techniques and rhetoric. In both cases, the importance of language transforms the initial aim of the truce, which is to find common ground to coexist with the enemy and to put aside differences. These moments become strategically used by one of the parties to prevail over the other and the characters sent to dispute move away from being simple messengers to become real ambassadors displaying oratory skills in order to win the enemy over to their side.[23]

The Virgin Martyr is a play that is characterised by a large number of conversions. The moments preceding each of these conversions can be equated with a truce because the

[22] See, for instance, two texts in which the use of reason is valued: Francis Savage, *A conference betvvixt a mother a devout recusant, and her sonne a zealous protestant: seeking by humble and dutifull satisfaction to winne her vnto the trueth, and publike worship of god established nowe in England. Gathered by him whose hearts desire is, that all may come to the knowledge of God, and be saued* (Cambridge, 1600) or Nathaniel Woodes, 'The Conflict of Conscience' in *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, ed. by Robert Dodsley, vol. 6, 4th edition (New York: B. Blom, 1964), pp. 29-142.

[23] This corresponds to Tasso's vision of the role of the ambassador. In *Fictions of Embassy*, Timothy Hampton summarises Tasso's vision of this figure as follows: 'Tasso presses the spirit to explain to him what is to be done when one of the princes in the affair seems to have intentions that do not include peace, friendship, or "onestà". In that case, says the spirit, the legate should use his rhetoric to persuade the evil prince to turn to the good… This turn to rhetoric introduces a certain circularity into the discussion. The role of the ambassador is to negotiate with the rival prince and make peace with him. This is a process that involves persuasion and the exercise of power. Yet when Tasso asks whether there is not a contradiction between being a mediator and being an agent, he is told that if the enemy prince really wants to act like an enemy and not make peace the perfect ambassador must use his training in rhetoric to persuade the rival prince to come over to the side of peace – that is, of the side for which the ambassador is an agent. In other words, if you need to persuade a prince in negotiation and he resists the impetus to peace you should simply persuade him – which is what you were doing to begin with… For eloquence now emerges as the key element, the supplement that turns agency into mediation. If you speak well you can make princes seek peace and friendship, your agency is a mediation' (pp. 56-7).

characters conclude a temporary peace agreement with their former religious enemies. The disagreement still exists but the fighting stops and the characters start a discussion. Caliste and Christeta, Theophilus's daughters, exemplify this characteristic feature because they convert no fewer than three times before being murdered by their father in Act 3. Each of these conversions is either mentioned or represented in the tragedy. At the beginning of the play, they are said to have just converted back to paganism before embracing Christianity again. Harpax, the demon of the play, sends Theophilus on a mission to his daughters and reminds him how he managed to convince them to convert back to paganism:

> [I] taught you to use
> With gentle words and milde persuasions,
> The power, and the authority of a father
> Set of with cruell threats and so reclaimd em (1.1.32-5).

Theophilus himself relates the conversion process in greater detail:

> I usde judges power, entreaties failing
> (They being seduc'd) to win them to adore
> The holy powers we worship, I put on
> The scarlet robe of bold authority,
> And as they had bin strangers to my blood,
> Presented them in the most horrid forme
> All kind of tortures, part of which they sufferd
> With Roman constancy…
> I kneeld, and wept, and begd them though they would
> Be cruell to themselves, they would take pittie
> On my gray haires. Now note a sodaine change,
> Which I with joy remember, those whom torture
> Nor feare of death could terrify, were orecome
> By seeing of my suffrings, and so wonne,
> Returning to the faith that they were borne in (1.1.170-93).

In these two accounts, the characters emphasise the power of words and language to continue the fight despite the truce and declare a winner as the words 'reclaimd', 'win', 'orecome' or 'wonne' suggest. Torture and visual displays of authority are presented as totally ineffective. On the contrary, words seem to enable one belligerent to win. Through the use of language, the purpose of the truce becomes less to make peace than to defeat

the enemy and this is also reminiscent of the objective of public religious disputation organised in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[24]

However, Caliste and Christeta's religious commitment will not last long and Dorothea will manage to convert them back to Christianity in the following act. One of the reasons for this lack of constancy may be found in Theophilus's account of their return to paganism. Indeed, if Theophilus used words to try and convince them to abjure their Christian beliefs, his argumentation seems fallacious. He did not pit argument against argument or build an argumentative demonstration based on logic but he begged them, hence appealing to their emotions and not their reason. In so doing, he rejected the possibility of a rational discourse to use his daughters' passions and emotions to convince them instead. He played on the idea of pity and this is not seen as a valuable tool to maintain a long-lasting peace in the play. Finally, he also resorted to very ineffective gestures that introduced chaos to the scene. He tells the audience that he kneeled in front of his daughters, which suggests an unnatural inversion of the patriarchal order, and used his tears, associated with femininity, so that Caliste and Christeta would take pity on him. The use of *pathos* is thus seen as something dangerous and ineffective when it comes to negotiating viable peace agreements during a truce. The peace thus concluded will soon give way to further conflict because Theophilus was unable to use language properly and his embassy on behalf of Harpax, the devil, failed.

Accordingly, the power of language and logic is repeatedly emphasised in *The Virgin Martyr*. In Act 3, the two sisters are sent off to try and persuade Dorothea to convert to paganism. This scene, which relies on the power of language to persuade the religious Other, constantly opposes different argumentative techniques. Caliste starts the conversation but her arguments seem flawed and ineffective:

> if you remember
> How nere in love our parents were, that we
> Ev'n from the cradle were brought up together.
> Our amity increasing with our yeeres, (3.1.69-72)

[24] Isabelle Hentz-Dubail remarks: 'Winning the enemy over, preparing him to accept another truth, remains the crucial step in every controversy' (p. 492) ['Gagner d'abord l'opinion de l'autre, le préparer à accepter une autre vérité, reste l'étape majeure de toute controverse'; my translation]. See also Joshua Rodda who mentions this question several times in his book: 'In short a disputation had to be performed correctly to reach or present the truth'; *Public Religious Disputation in England, 1558-1626* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), p. 200.

From the beginning of the disputation, Caliste does not try to prove anything. She resorts to argumentative techniques based on *pathos* through a recourse to nostalgia. She tries to arouse Dorothea's emotions: she makes use of the preterit to anchor her speech in their common past, the lexical field of love and friendship appears in her lines and she repeats the pronouns 'we' and 'our' to create a sense of community and togetherness which, she seems to think, will help her convince Dorothea.[25] This technique is doomed to failure and Dorothea's answer is very short: 'To the purpose' (3.1.73). However, Caliste goes on playing on Dorothea's passions:

> By our example
> Bequeathing misery to such as love it,
> Learne to be happy, the Christian yokes too heavy
> For such dainty necke, it was fram'd rather
> To be the shrine of Venus…
> …our Religion Lady
> Is but a varied pleasure, yours a toile
> Slaves would shrinke under (3.1.92-100).

Caliste focuses on the opposition between pleasure and pain here. She tries to strike fear into Dorothea's heart to convince her or, more precisely, to intimidate her. She only describes the pleasures of life that Dorothea would enjoy if she decided to abjure her faith. Furthermore, she tries to use her own example to persuade Dorothea to change her religious allegiance. The persuasive power of this technique is very limited since it cannot be generic and universal, as the faithful paradoxically tried to present their beliefs. She adopts a rhetoric characterised by emptiness and devoid of any argumentative skills and tools. Such misuse of language appears dangerous. Indeed, Dorothea's reaction is very significant since it is the moment when the conflict openly resurfaces. Her reaction is sudden and unexpected: 'Have you not cloven feete? are you not divels? / Dare any say so much or dare I heare it / Without a vertuous and religious anger?' (3.1.101-3). When Dorothea starts uttering these words, this is the only instance in the whole scene where she does not share her line with one of the two sisters. The rapid succession of questions and the presence of the word 'anger' suggest that the *disputatio* is turning into a violent confrontation or a quarrel. Rhetoric is thus used to convert the two sisters but also to

[25] Although using memory or the rhetoric of feelings were attested strategies, the play seems to oppose *pathos* and *ratio* as argumentative techniques in a scholarly debate through the opposition between Caliste, Christeta and Dorothea and asserts the superiority of *ratio* (Dorothea) over *pathos* (Caliste and Christeta) to determine who the winner is. Erasing passions was one of the major objectives of the theorists who tried to revive the medieval tradition of the *disputatio* and to adapt it to the new religious controversies.

pacify the relations between the characters, acting as a safeguard to prevent the whole scene from falling into chaos and physical violence. Contrary to the two sisters, Dorothea displays a skilful use of language. She reacts to Caliste's last statement and counteracts it when she underlines the fact that these are earthly pleasures. She also denounces the crimes committed by the gods they adore. She begins by asking the sisters a series of rhetorical questions. They have no other choice but to abdicate (3.1.123-38). Then, Dorothea mentions a series of examples:

> Yet Venus whom you worship was a whore,
> Flora the Foundresse of the publike Stewes,
> And has for that her sacrifice: your great god,
> Your Jupiter, a loose adulterer,
> Incestuous with his sister (3.1.139-43).

The word 'yet' is of prime importance here. It places Dorothea's lines within the scholastic tradition because it belongs to a discourse based on rational argumentation. Moreover, the adverb marks a point of no return in the play since, from that moment on, the number of lines spoken by the characters becomes completely unbalanced. Dorothea utters seventy-two lines while the two sisters together utter thirteen lines. Dorothea makes good use of a last rhetorical question to end her negotiation:

> And thousands more, on whom abused error
> Bestowes a diety, will you then deere Sisters,
> For I would have you such, pay your Devotions
> To things of lesse power then your selves? (3.1.158-61)

Nonetheless, Caliste manages to prolong this debate when she argues that they only honour the good deeds of their gods through their images. Dorothea's answer displays great mastery of the rhetorical art. It is worth dwelling on it since it is a quintessential example of the link between truce, peace negotiations and logic. She first uses a hypophora. In other words, she both asks a question and answers it. She asks about the images: 'By whom fashion'd / By sinfull men?' (3.1.162-3). The two sisters cannot but remain completely silent. Then, she goes on with an *exemplum*, or edifying tale, which enables her to prove that anyone requiring material objects to worship a god is in fact paying homage to a false deity. She begins: 'Ile tell you a short tale / Nor can you but confesse it was a true one'. (3.1.163-4). It is also worth noting that this moment of disputation and truce enables the characters to openly mention theological issues such as the role of images or the use of incense without any blood being spilt. The iconoclastic gesture, which will be performed on stage in the following act when the truce is broken,

is here replaced by a debate. This is rare enough to be worthy of note and shows that these cross-confessional encounters can be valuable as long as they remain within the bounds of a disputation and tied to strict and formal rules. Thanks to her fruitful use of argumentation techniques and persuasive skills, Dorothea manages to convert Caliste and Christeta and to negotiate their surrender. Indeed, the conclusion of the scene can be read in terms of capitulation and victory as shown by the presence of words such as 'conquest' (3.1.200), 'Captives' (3.1.201), 'triumph' (3.1.201), 'victory' (3.2.202) and the repetition of 'loss' (3.2.202 and 203). The play thus vindicates the powers of rhetoric, logic and rational argumentation in order to be able to dictate the terms of peace without resorting to physical violence.

In addition, this play was meant to be performed in front of an audience. As such, it could be used to experiment new methods and to draw up new rules. As Nathalie Rivère de Carles remarks: 'drama [was not] just […] a mere reflector but […] a true instrument testing, challenging, informing and implementing a diplomacy of peace'.[26] When enquiring into the reasons for the popularity of the play, Jane Hwang Degenhardt mentions what she calls 'temporal slippage[s]' and 'Protestant "coherences"'.[27] Indeed, she argues that the play echoed the growing anxiety of contemporaries about conversions to Islam in the Ottoman Empire and some of the Catholic-Protestant debates of the period. While I do not wish to discard these aspects, I want to argue that this success might also be due to the very form that the play takes. *The Virgin Martyr* was reportedly performed at the Red Bull Theatre and was part of a series of very successful plays that 'fuse[d] comic and tragic elements'.[28] As Nova Myhill has shown, the play contains presentational and representational elements precisely because it was written for the Red Bull Theatre, a theatre 'enjoying (perhaps unjustly) a reputation as a site of "violence and vulgarity" both on and off the stage, popular with apprentices who preferred spectacle to poetry'.[29] That is the reason why we shall now see that these sequences represent something more than truce scenes wherein people sit down and display their logical skills. I shall now determine the extent to which these moments were meant to offer new models of encounter but were also transformed and adapted to meet the audience's horizon of

[26] Nathalie Rivère de Carles, 'The Poetics of Diplomatic Appeasement in the Early Modern Era' in *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre and Soft Power*, pp. 1-23 (p. 4).

[27] Jane Hwang Degenhardt, 'Catholic Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger's "the Virgin Martir" and the Early Modern Threat of "Turning Turk"', *ELH*. 73.1 (2006), 83-117 (pp. 91 and 94)

[28] Lucy Munro, 'Dublin Tragicomedy and London Stages', in *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. by Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne, Studies in Renaissance Literature, 1465-6310, v. 22 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 175-92 (p. 184).

[29] Nova Myhill, 'Making Death a Miracle: Audience and the Genres of Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*', *Early Theatre* 7.2 (2004), 9–31 (p.24).

expectations in a public theatre such as the Red Bull, a theatre known for staging popular drama in front of rowdy audiences.

Truce and drama: The question of the audience

For all the violence that it displays, the play can also be said to offer a reflection on the possibility of debating, hearing what the enemy has to say and brokering peace without explosive outbursts of violence. As Isabelle Hentz-Dubail notices: 'Concord starts with the very possibility of gathering to dispute, with the idea of meeting face to face, and of convening several divergent minds in the same place without any blood being spilt'.[30] These moments represent an opportunity to provide a model when it comes to cross-confessional diplomatic missions. The first rule concerns the diplomatic space. The play advocates the idea of a meeting that would be held without an audience. At the end of Act 3, Caliste and Christeta tell their father that they have converted back to Christianity. Theophilus is not the one who reacts first after this announcement. Harpax, who has witnessed the whole scene, asks Theophilus:

> Profane
> And impious, stand you now like a Statue?
> Are you the Champion of the Gods? where is
> Your holy zeale, your anger? (3.2.53-6).

At that moment, Harpax represents a prototypical example of an unruly audience that does not respect the rules. He encourages Theophilus to act and to reject diplomacy in order to turn to violence to solve the conflict:

> HARPAX Your Honour is ingag'd,
> The credit of our cause depends upon it,
> Something you must doe suddenly,
> THEOPHILUS And I will.
> HARPAX They merit death, but falling by your hand,
> It will be recorded for a just revenge
> And holy fury in you. (3.3.96-101)

[30] Hentz-Dubail, p. 5: 'La concorde commence dans l'éventualité même de s'assembler pour disputer, dans l'idée de se rencontrer physiquement, de réunir plusieurs esprits divergents dans un même lieu sans effusion de sang' (my translation).

Here, Harpax may be said to represent the audience gathered in the playhouse. He is the one who excites the passion in this scene and makes it impossible to hold a parley or to negotiate a compromise between the two parties. Interestingly enough, Theophilus orders him: 'Doe not blow, / The furnace of a wrath thrice hot already' (3.2.101-2). The word 'wrath' is used here to signal that reaching an agreement or even maintaining the truce will prove impossible. Harpax has sealed the fate of the young women and, spurred to action by an outside force, Theophilus is about to kill his own daughters. The play imitates here the old form of psychomachia making visible the workings of decision-making and the passions that may resurface during the truce scene.

In order to establish the conditions that would enable the characters to find common ground and to broker peace, the play thus establishes again a methodology for the truce and suggests that the negotiations should be carried out without the presence of an audience. In so doing, it echoes numerous texts on disputation written during the period.[31] The preparations for the disputation between Dorothea and the two sisters are described at length. The private nature of the encounter seems to be of prime importance. The pagan priest announces Dorothea's arrival and all the other characters leave almost instantly. Theophilus states: 'We leave you, / Be constant and be carefull [*Exeunt* Theophilus, *Priests*]' (3.1.41-2). Consequently, the sisters start using the word 'conference' rather than 'disputation': 'Our conference must be private, pray you therfore / Command your boy to leave us' (3.1.49-50). This obsession with confidentiality in order to carry out successful peace negotiations recurs at the end of the play. If Theophilus does not unleash any violence against Angelo and if he seems ready to negotiate his own surrender, it is because Harpax is absent from the beginning of the scene and Theophilus's isolation from the rest of the world is highlighted several times. The first stage direction of the scene reads as follows: 'Enter Theophilus in his study, books about him' (5.1.SD). In this scene, Harpax has been replaced by books, symbolising reason and knowledge. The sense of isolation is strengthened when, after his departure, Theophilus wonders how Angelo managed to enter his study. He questions two of his guards:

Enter two servants.

BOTH	My Lord.
THEOPHILUS	Are my gates shut?
1	And guarded.
THEOPHILUS	Saw you not–a boy.
2	Where?

[31] The idea was advocated by Erasmus, Jean Bodin or Agrippa d'Aubigné among others.

THEOPHILUS Heere hee entred, a young Lad;
A thousand blessings danc'd upon his eyes,
A smooth fac'd glorious Thing, that brought this Basket.
2 No sir?
THEOPHILUS Away, but be in reach if my voice calls you. *Exeunt.*
(5.1.67-76)

This dialogue insists on the idea that Theophilus's office is impenetrable. Not only are the gates strongly fastened but they are also guarded, ensuring that no one can gain entrance into the house. Theophilus is thus separated from the world that surrounds him and will not look for vain glory when conferring with Angelo. This enclosed space enables the angel to turn from a 'Ravishing Boy' (5.1.166) to a 'bright Messenger' (5.1.166).

And yet, if the play seems to uphold the idea of very intimate meetings taking place in enclosed spaces, these scenes feature a kind of physical stasis and long debates based on logic that might not be very entertaining for an audience expecting action. This is the reason why they are not completely isolated from the main action of the play and they are also designed to take part in its appeal. Indeed, moments of truce or disputation also serve to advance the plot and move the action forward. These moments of debate lead inescapably to a change of allegiance that will impact the whole play. In *The Virgin Martyr*, the disputation between Dorothea, Caliste and Christeta is the first *peripeteia* that will lead to the murder of the two sisters and, ultimately, to the rape attempt and the execution of Dorothea. These three events are quite spectacular and serve to recapture the audience's attention because violence and war reappear very quickly. In that case, the truce as a scholastic disputation is fruitful since it leads to peace between the three characters but it is also useful to the plot as a whole because the agreement reignites tensions that will resurface in sensational episodes.

The aforementioned basket full of fruit and flowers exemplifies perfectly the dual nature of the truce scene.[32] On the one hand, it is a purveyor of appeasement and the focus is put on language. Once Theophilus gets hold of it, his language changes and is even infused with Christian undertones. This is also reinforced by the presence of music throughout

[32] It might be worth noting that Cyrus Hoy notes the 'dual nature' of the play as a whole due to the fact that it is the result of a collaboration between Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger. According to him, Act 5, scene 1 is one of the four scenes of the play that were mainly, but not entirely, written by Dekker. See Cyrus Hoy, *Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to Texts* in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) p. 193.

the whole scene. But on the other hand, his speech is constantly interrupted and disrupted by the sound of conflict. Harpax, the allegorical and devilish counterpart to Angelo, is lurking backstage, again playing the role of an onstage spectator, and laughs his devilish laugh:

HARPAX	Ha, ha, ha, ha. [*Within*]
THEOPHILUS	What insolent slave is this dares laugh at me? […]
HARPAX	Ha, ha, ha, ha. [*Louder*]
THEOPHLUS	What's thy name slave?
HARPAX	Goe looke. [*At one end*]
SERVANT 1	Tis Harpax voice…
HARPAX	Foole, thou liest. [*At tother end*]
SERVANT 1	Hee's yonder now my Lord.
THEOPHILUS	Watch thou that end
	Whilst I make good this.
HARPAX	Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. [*At the middle*]…
	Ha, ha, ha. [*Within*] (5.1.86-119).

The whole scene juxtaposes two very different soundscapes: Theophilus's words of appeasement and the music that accompanies them and a sense of urgency conveyed by the shared lines and the spatially overwhelming presence of Harpax's voice and laughter. These jarring sounds may have resulted in an engrossing cacophony. Moreover, when Harpax finally physically entered the stage, his entrance must have been quite spectacular. The stage direction reads: '*Enter* Harpax *in a fearful shape, fire flashing out of the study*' (5.1.SD).[33]

Finally, the basket also contains a cross made of flowers. Again, this particular object is at the same time a symbol of appeasement and a weapon that will be used to continue the fight. Theophilus uses it twice against Harpax:

THEOPHILUS	At the botome,
	One thing I found not yet, see.
	[*A crosse of Flowers*]

[33] The juxtaposition of appeasement and conflict in these truce scenes may also reflect the historical context in which the play was written and performed. Indeed, Dekker and Massinger wrote the play when the end of the Twelve Years' Truce reignited inter-confessional tensions between Spain and the Netherlands but also at the height of James's policy of toleration during the negotiations for a Spanish match for Prince Charles.

HARPAX Oh, I'me tortur'd…
THEOPHILUS This small weapon
Me thinks is Armour hard enough.
HARPAX Keepe from me.
Sinkes a little
THEOPHILUS Art poasting to thy center? Down hel-hound, down,
Me hast thou lost; that arme which hurles thee hence
Save me, and set me up the strong defence
In the faire Christians quarrel. (5.1.151-156)

In this passage, the flowers, previously associated with a peace offering and a truce flag, are turned into a religious object inflicting bodily harm used against a fencing opponent. Theatre has the power to move very rapidly from a gift-giving scene to a quarrel and to adapt material objects and truce scenes to its purpose to meet the audience's horizon of expectations and display a dual nature which makes truce and dispute collide into one single moment.

Conclusion

Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* invites us to explore the link between truce and disputation. The characteristic features of religious disputations impact the way truce scenes are represented and performed in the play. Dekker and Massinger present a new methodology for conducting negotiations during a truce. This methodology enhances the importance of gestures, objects and the senses. Body language and the presence of certain objects are regarded as appeasing the tensions. However, words and language should not be overlooked when trying to negotiate peace. The truce or disputation is also, paradoxically, the moment when the outcome of the war must be decided and language is used to determine who the winner is. This conception of the truce as a paradoxical tool to make a winner emerge and to annihilate the enemy through language comes from the fact that a play always has an audience. Dekker and Massinger tackle this question and make clear that true coexistence cannot be the outcome of a truce scene as long as an audience is present. They entertain the idea that the interference of public opinion in talks requiring expert discussion is dangerous. However, they could not but take their own audience into account and present them with a play in which appeasement and conflict occurred simultaneously on stage. What we can draw from this analysis is that *The Virgin Martyr* is a play in which opposites fruitfully unite. Truce is also a dual concept. It can be a scene featuring a kind of physical stasis and long logical discourses which serve to broker peace but also a tool to advance the plot and capture the

audience's attention. It is a concept which is not rigid nor easily defined. The basket, and its reversibility is a prime example of this process. It is part of a dual nature which defies paradoxes and ambiguities and upholds the theatre's right to do so. *The Virgin Martyr* is a play which successfully reunites two apparently antithetical concepts: disputation and truce. It is a play which constantly questions the coexistence of opposites as Theophilus's words make clear. At one point he asks: 'How can stone smile / Or wooden image laugh?' (5.1.111-12). In order to find an answer to these questions, we may have to turn to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, another play in which opposites collide: 'It is required you do awake your faith'.[34]

[34] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 5.3.94-5.