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CYMBELINE'S MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, NOTING, (K)NOT KNOWING, AND NOTHUS¹

Patricia PARKER

This essay focuses on language networks important to Much Ado About Nothing and Cymbeline —starting from the long-acknowledged homophone of “nothing” and “noting” in Much Ado. Drawing on translingual dictionaries and related language networks in Shakespeare, it includes nothing, noting, knots, musical notes, and the bawdy language of nought/naught/not(e). But it also traces the multilingual impact of Latin “nota” (including the ars notaria or writing; branding, blot, or stain; the stigma of slander; and the “notus/ignotus” of knowing/not knowing); commercial notes as “IOU”; conflation of the female “O” with the “cipher” of arithmetical notation; and the “bastard” or “counterfeit” Nothus (homophone of Notus), a crucial early modern context not only for Don John the Bastard in Much Ado but also for “Italian” Iachimo, who manipulates Cymbeline’s anachronistic wager plot by counterfeiting “simular proof enough” (v.iv.200). Though concentrating principally on Cymbeline, the essay argues that this nexus is central not just to the wordplay but also to the larger issues raised by both plays, including the power of narrative telling, or counterfeit “accounts,” to fashion how one looks, projecting bastard or counterfeit “coin” onto the female “coint” or “count,” while forging the illusion of evidence or “simular proof.”

Cette étude s'intéresse particulièrement aux réseaux de langue, que l'on trouve abondamment dans *Much Ado About Nothing* et *Cymbeline* – en prenant pour point de départ l'homophonie célèbre entre « nothing » et « noting » dans *Much Ado*. Se fondant sur des dictionnaires de langues et les réseaux langagiers présents dans les pièces de Shakespeare, elle se penchera sur les similitudes existant entre *nothing*, *noting*, *knots*, *musical notes* et les sous-entendus grivois de *nought/naught/not(e)*. Mais elle retracera également l'influence multilingue du latin « nota » (notamment *ars notaria* ou écriture; marquage, tache; stigmates de la diffamation; et « notus/ignotus » signifiant savoir/ignorance), les contrats commerciaux comme reconnaissance de dettes, l'assimilation du « O » féminin et du zéro des notations arithmétiques, et le bâtard ou la contrefaçon Nothus (homophone de Notus), que l'on retrouve dans les personnages de John le bâtard de *Much Ado* et l'« Italien » Iachimo, qui contrefait les preuves pour gagner son pari dans *Cymbeline*, fournissant « assez de preuves simulées » (v.iv.200). Cette étude se concentrera principalement sur *Cymbeline* et tentera de démontrer que ce réseau langagier n'est pas uniquement une source de jeux de mots, mais qu'il s'inscrit dans les thématiques propres à ces deux pièces : le pouvoir de la narration, les comptes-rendus erronés sur l'apparence, l'assimilation de pièces contrefaites (counterfeit « coin ») et de l'organe féminin (« coint » ou « count »), tout en créant une illusion de preuve (« simular proof. »).

M*uch Ado About Nothing* is famous for its homophonic title — where “nothing” reverberates with “noting.” But *Cymbeline* employs the language of “noting,” “notes,” and “noted” even more frequently than *Much Ado*. And the pervasive fears of female infidelity and cuckolding exploited by Don John the Bastard (precursor of Iachimo as well as Iago) become in *Cymbeline* a foregrounding of the power of narrative *telling*, and counterfeit “accounts,” to shape or fashion how one *looks*, projecting bastard or counterfeit “coin” onto the

¹ Nothus. . . . Base borne, a bastard, not lawful, counterfeit (Thomas Thomas, *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae*, London, 1587); Nothe: com. Bastard, adulterous; counterfeit (Randall Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*, London, 1611).

female “coint” or “count,” while forging the *illusion* of evidence or “*simular* proof.”²

Like *Much Ado About Not(h)ing*, *Cymbeline* not only exploits the homophones of nothing, noting, knots, and nought/naught/not, but reflects the broader early modern network of Latin *nota*, including slander and accusation; branding, blot, or stain; the *ars notaria* or writing; the *notus* and *ignotus* of knowing or (not) knowing; the female “nothing,” “nought” or “O,” and fears of female infidelity conflated with the “O” or “cipher” of arithmetical notation; revenge as payback and commercial notes as “IOU”; and the “bastard” or “counterfeit” *Nothus*, homophone of *Notus* – the unhealthy south wind identified with the “spongy south” and infecting “Italian” Iachimo of *Cymbeline*, who wins this “Roman” play’s anachronistic bourgeois wager by counterfeiting “simular proof enough” (III.ii.4; IV.ii.348; V.iv.200).

Much Ado exploits overlapping parts of this associational nexus – from Claudio’s “Didst thou *note* the daughter of Signior Leonato?” (I.i.162-3) and Benedick’s “I *noted* her *not*, but I *looked* on her” (I.i.164); to the exchange on musical “notes” in Act II, before the eavesdropping that brings Benedick and Beatrice together through others’ noting; the conclusion that Benedick is in love (“The greatest *note* of it is his melancholy,” III.ii.54); Dogberry’s “take no *note* of him” (III.iii.28); the slandered Hero, another sense of “noted”; the Friar’s certainty that he *knows* through “*noting* of the lady” (IV.i.158); and the reiterated “note” of Act V, as a sign that might make it possible to *detect* a “villain” (V.i.259-261), or *know* false from “true.”

In Borachio’s “Thou *knowest* that the *fashion* of a doublet, or a hat, or a cloak, is *nothing* to a man” (III.iii.117-119), “nothing” resonates with *noting* and *knowing* through “notes” of “apparel,” the outward “signs” that in Phillip Stubbes’s *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) are crucial to distinguishing social status and gender.³ In *Cymbeline*, Posthumus’ change of “fashion” from “Italian gentry” to “Briton peasant” (V.ii.18-24) alters how he is *seen* and therefore *regarded* by others; but the strategic

² *Cymbeline*, V.iv.200, quoted from William Shakespeare, Martin Butler, ed., Cambridge, CUP, 2005 – used for all references to this play. Butler retains the Folio’s Iachimo but changes Imogen to Innogen, citing *inter alia* Holinshed, Spenser, the “ghost-character” Innogen as Leonato’s non-speaking wife in *Much Ado*, and Simon Forman’s 1611 account (p. 79). *The Riverside Shakespeare*, G. Blakemore Evans et al., eds., Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1974/1997 is used for other Shakespeare works.

³ For Stubbes, see Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge, CUP, 2001, p. 4-8, 68, 279.

reading of outward “notes” or “signs” is already at work from the opening scene, where British courtiers align their “faces” (if not their “hearts”) with the “looks” of the “King” (I.i.13-14), a word, like *regard*, that is both subjective and objective. “Fashion” (from *facere*, make or forge), a keyword in *Much Ado*, becomes in *Cymbeline* the shaping or forging of “looks” through rhetorical *evidentia* (the *simulating* of ocular proof), and through clothing, including in the pivotal scene where Innogen grieves over the headless body she thinks is Posthumus, when it is Cloten in his garments (IV.ii). But dissembling outward notes (parodied in Dogberry’s “Is our whole dissembly appear’d?” *Much Ado* IV.ii.1) extend to Innogen herself, crossdressed as “Fidele” (faithful or true). And the play foregrounds *theatrical* simulation or counterfeiting, including the transvestite boy actor who “play(s)” this “woman’s part” (V.iv.228; II.v.22), while kaleidoscopically exploiting the language and logic of paradox, being false to be true.

“Note” came with a sense of profit, use, or yield (*OED note*, noun 1). But in an English still emerging from Latin, it also resonated with the darker senses of *nota*: not only “a mark, sign, or (outward) note,” a “mark or character in writing” and a written document or legal examination, but “a mark of ignominy or infamy, a reproach, disgrace”; a brand on the body of a criminal (“stigma” or “stigmata”);⁴ and “the mark or note which the censors affixed” to the “name of any one whom they censured” (*OED note* noun 2), invoked in *Julius Caesar*’s “condemn’d and noted” (IV.iii.2). *Notare* meant not only to notice or to put down in writing but to “mark with disgrace, to censure, stigmatize,” reflected in the disciplines of literacy, written examination, and stigmatizing “noting” in *Much Ado*. In *Cymbeline*, the *ars notaria* includes long-distance letter-writing and the law of Roman “emperor’s writ” (III.vii.1), but also the new “arithmetic” of the “pen” and the “book” of “debtor and creditor” accounting, invoked by the Jailer (V.iii.228-29), in lines that call into question the truth of *all* accounts or reckonings, other than the hangman’s rope (“no *true* debtor and creditor but it”).

⁴ “Stigma” (like the “stigmata” recalled by *Cymbeline*’s “bloody cloth” in V.i.1) was a “note” or sign written in the skin by a needle or sharp instrument. Importantly for *Cymbeline*, the Latin of Ovid’s Philomel story (the “book” Innogen has been reading in II.ii), uses “*purpureas notas*” (purple or bloody “notes”) for the tongueless Philomel’s writing the story of her rape. See Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, Cambridge, CUP, 2000, p. 4-5; Charlotte Scott, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Book*, Oxford, OUP, 2007, p. 47-50.

Even *Cymbeline*'s focus on "name" and "fame" is part of this contemporary nexus, since *notus* (or *nota*) meant both "known" and "notorious." The apparently innocent exchange between Claudio and Benedick on whether Hero has been "noted" (I.i.164) foreshadows the later scenes where she is more ominously "noted" (III.ii; IV.i). "To note" as "accuse of a fault, defect, or wrongdoing" was used for a woman "noted of inconstancie" in Lyly's *Euphues* (*Oxford English Dictionary*: *note* verb 2 3a). "Noted" appeared as "condemned" or "stigmatized" ("note her as an adulteress") in Nicholas Udall's 1548 translation of Erasmus' *Paraphrases on the New Testament* (Matthew 5:43); as "in suspicion, and noted with infamy" in Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus* (1565); and as "spotted" and "tainted" in other texts. In *Cymbeline* (II.ii.28-38), in Iachimo's description of "natural notes" on Innogen's "body," the "cinque-spotted" mole is figurally *refashioned* into the maculate or spotted opposed to *immaculate*; and the sound of "sank" anticipates the rapid bodily descent of this "mole" into the "stain" of the "woman's part," O, or "not(h)ing" itself in II.iv.⁵ "Note" for a sexual stigma, blot, or stain had already appeared in "my posterity, shamed with the note" in *The Rape of Lucrece* (208), the story invoked in Iachimo's reference to "Tarquin" in II.ii, where he falsely reports the turned-down "leaf" of Ovid's Philomel story where "Philomel gave up," when the subtext is not the book Innogen has been reading but Ovid's *Amores* (III.xiii) instead, where a "two-leaved book" figures "a woman opening to receive a man" or the "phallic pen."⁶

Sir Thomas Elyot's *Dictionarie* (1538) includes virtually all of this network in a single sequence:

Notae, notes, cyfers, markes, made for remembraunce of some thyng.
Notarius, a clerke, whiche wryteth instrumentes or plees.
Notesco, notui, scere, to be knowen or made knowen.
Nothus, a bastarde.
Nothia, that whiche by some lawes is appoynted to a mans bastarde.
Notifico, are, to make knowen.
Notio, knowlege. *Notitia, idem*.

⁵ That *seeing* is fashioned or shaped by Iachimo's figural *telling* becomes clear when the same bodily "mark" or "stamp" – Guiderius' "mole" – is noted through a very different cultural lens in V.iv.363-8.

⁶ See Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, 3 vols, Atlantic Highlands, The Athlone Press, 1994, vol. 1, p. 131-132; with Werner Von Koppenfels, "Dis-covering the Female Body: Erotic Exploration in Elizabethan Poetry," *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 47, 1994, p. 127-137, p. 134 on Christopher Marlowe's translation of these lines.

Noto, are, to note or marke, to make a mark or token, to write after an example.
Notus, ta, tum, knowen: also a frende, or of acqueyntaunce.

His *Bibliotheca Eliotae* or *Eliots librarie* (1542) added the perceiving and “evidently” crucial to *Cymbeline* as to *Much Ado*:

Notae, notes, cyphers, markes, sygnes.
Notae eximere, to acquite or dyscharge of reproche or dishonour
Nota, defamation
Notabiliter, notably, evidently
Notare, to note or marke, to reproue, somtyme to accuse, also to perceyue

In ways important for *Cymbeline*, Thomas Thomas’s *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicane* (1587) foregrounded the *ars notaria* (including letters and “cipher” as cryptic writing to be deciphered); “fashion” or behavior; “knowledge” and discernment; and the ambiguity of being “noted” or “known.” It defined “Nota” as “A note, a marke, a signe, a token, a spotte: a defamation, infamie, rebuke, a slaundersous name or report; a reprehension or correction of any writing; a cipher, note, or abbreviation of that is read or written; also a print, letter, behauiour, sort, or facion”; “Notabilis” as “to be reprehended” as well as “Notable, knowne, to be noted or marked as a great matter, soone & easily discerned”; “Notio” (from “Nosco” or “To know, to be skilful in, to discern, to perceiue”) as “Knowledge, understanding, acquaintance” but also “the examination or understanding of a cause in judgement”; “Notus” as “*Knownen, notorious, notable, famous*, acquainted: also *he that knoweth*”; “Noto” as “To note, to marke, to reprove, reprehend, twitte, or rebuke: to accuse, to perceiue, or understand, to call or term: to discern, to defame or put to rebuke; also to put in writing”; and “Notoria” as “Tokens, witnesses, or *testimonies* in appeaching or accusing of one.” John Florio’s Italian-English *World of Wordes* (1598) included: “*Nota*, a note, a marke, a signe, a blot, a blemish, a token, a touch of infamie, a notice, an obseruation, a warning, a forewarning, a *note of musicke*”; “*Notabile*, notable, or worthy to be marked and noted”; “*Notare*, to note, to marke, to obserue, to discern, to aduertise, to blemish, to touch, to reprooue, to twit, to rebuke, to accuse, to call, to terme, to defame” (p. 241).

The combination in *noting* of writing’s *ars notaria* with accusation, blot, or stain yielded the contemporary sexual image of

virgin white paper stained by a phallic “pen,” reflected in the “ink”-stained Hero of *Much Ado* (IV.i.140) and Othello’s “Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, / Made to write ‘whore’ upon?” (IV.ii.71-2). In *Cymbeline*, when Pisanio receives Posthumus’ letter ordering him to murder Innogen for “adultery” (III.ii.1), he rejects the noting of his own outward “look” that led to his being “counted” (or accounted) “serviceable” (15) to such an order; and reverses the conventional attribution by condemning the letter itself as a “damned paper, / Black as the ink that’s on thee!”, though “virgin-like without” (III.ii.19-22).

“Note” in the period simultaneously exploited the homophonic “knot” reflected in the marital “knot” and “not” of *All’s Well That Ends Well* — a play linked with *Much Ado* and *Cymbeline* through apparent returns from “death” and the issue of whether Bertram, Claudio, or Posthumus are worthy husbands. Bertram’s “I have wedded her, not bedded her, and sworn to make the ‘not’ eternal” (III.ii.21-2) depends on the sounding of “not” as “knot” as he denies the *marriage* “knot”: but virginity itself was paradoxically “not” and “knot” — a “knot” to be untied on the wedding night (like Miranda’s “virgin-knot” in *The Tempest* IV.i.15) and a “nothing” or “not something.”⁷ The not/knot of *Much Ado* includes a marriage knot that is supposed to be tied in the wedding scene (IV.i) but is “tragically untied”⁸ by the “noting” or defamatory accusation that Hero’s virgin knot has already been undone. At the same time, the not/knot as part of the network of *nothing*, *nought*, and *naught* figures “the mystery of virginity itself that attracts, confuses, and bedevils many of the male characters in Shakespeare’s plays, the fetishized commodity that is and is not.”⁹ “Is and is not” is suggestive in another sense as well, for the Friar’s “tomb-trick” where the slandered virginal Hero (like Bertram’s wife Helena in the paradoxes of *All’s Well*) both “is and is not” dead. And for *Cymbeline*, where the funeral dirge for the “boy” Fidele is for a woman who is and is not dead (IV.ii.257-80),¹⁰ in a play where the

⁷ See William C. Carroll, “The Virgin Not: Language and Sexuality in Shakespeare,” *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 46, 1993, p. 107-229 (p. 117, 111).

⁸ Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard, “‘Knotting’ or ‘Je-ne-sais-quoi’: two readings of ‘Nothing’ in *Much Ado About Nothing*,” in Jean Perrin, ed., *Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing*, Actes de Colloque Université Stendhal, Grenoble, November 1991, Grenoble, ELLUG, 1992, p. 131.

⁹ Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁰ Euripides’ tragicomic *Alcestis*, already established as known through George Buchanan’s and other Latin translations and as an influence on returns from “death” in *Much Ado* and

not/knot is evoked in Iachimo's "Gordian knot" (II.ii.34) and Cloten's claim that Innogen's marital "contract" is only a "self-figured knot" (II.iii.109, 113), foiling or soiling the "precious *note*" of the crown with a "base slave" (II.iii.115-116).¹¹

Florio and other early modern texts included in *nota* not only the *ars notaria* of the "pen" but also musical notes. This is reflected in the most concentrated punning on "notes" in *Much Ado About Not(h)ing*:

DON PEDRO. Nay, pray thee come,
Or if thou wilt hold longer argument,
Do it in notes.
BALTHASAR. Note this before my notes:
There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting.
DON PEDRO. Why these are very crotchets that he speaks –
Note notes, forsooth, and nothing. (II.iii.52-57)¹²

Dictionaries of early modern bawdy point to the sexual overtones of musical "notes" and "noting" in Shakespeare and others. Gordon Williams on "music" and "music lesson" cites the overtones of "crotchet" and "prick-song" as well as "note" and "burden" (exploited as "song" and bearing the weight of a man in *Much Ado* III.iv.26). These include "crotchet" as legs or "crotch," from texts where lengthening or shortening a note (as with crotchet or quarter-note) depends on the phallic resonance of "note" and "prick" as note, noting, or notation.¹³ "Nota virilis" was a Latin term for the male member,¹⁴ the sense activated in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Titania asks Bottom to "sing again. / Mine ear is much enamored of thy note" (III.i.137-8). *Troilus and Cressida*, where it is said of Cressida "she's noted" and "Any man may sing her, if he can take her cliff" (V.ii.10-11), combines "noted" as "set to music" with "notorious for sexual availability" and "musical

The Winter's Tale, is also important for *Cymbeline*'s tragicomic plot and Innogen's "keep it till you woo another wife, / When Innogen is dead" (I.i.113-4).

¹¹ Critics and editors cite different textual signs as evidence of whether or not Innogen's marriage is consummated, i.e. whether her virgin knot is "undone" by Posthumus —a question that has also divided critics of *Othello*, in the absence of certain knowledge.

¹² Wordplay on not[h]ing and musical notes occurs in other plays, including *The Winter's Tale* ("my sir's song, and admiring the nothing of it," IV.iv.613); *The Tempest* ("music for nothing," III.ii.140); *Romeo and Juliet*'s exchanges on "note" as "observe, or pay attention to," musical note, notation, or written score, and "crotchets" as quarter-notes and quirks or strange ideas.

¹³ See *music* and *music lesson* in Williams, *Dictionary*, vol. 2.

¹⁴ J.N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, p. 70.

notation made with the phallic pen,"¹⁵ just as "cliff" (or clef) plays on musical "key" and sexual "cleft," another term for the female nothing or "O."

Given Mercutio's erotically double-meaning "occupy the argument no longer" in *Romeo and Juliet* (II.iv.100), sexually lengthening or prolonging a "note" may figure in Don Pedro's "if thou wilt hold longer argument, / Do it in notes," even as "notes" simultaneously evoke *written* accounts. In an exchange that may *seem* to be "much ado" about "nothing," reference to "slander" keeps alive the sense of "note" as accusation or defaming, anticipating not only the "honest slanders" (III.i.84) of the eavesdropping scenes (II.iii and III.i) but also the staining with sexual slander that follows from what Claudio, Don Pedro, and Leonato conclude (after John the Bastard's account) is certain knowledge.

In *Cymbeline*, the phallic resonance of musical notes is much cruder, when Cloten says at Innogen's window: "I am advised to give her music o'mornings; they say it will penetrate," instructing the musicians "If you can penetrate her with your fingering, so; we'll try with tongue too" (II.iii.10-13); and dismissing them after the song with "If this penetrate, I will consider your music the better; if it do not, it is a *vice* in her ears which horsehairs and calves' guts, nor the *voice* of unpaved *eunuch* to boot, can never amend" (II.iii.24-7). But the song itself—even while reflecting his crudeness in *doubles entendres* on "gate," "springs," "winking Mary-buds," "ope," and "Arise, arise!"—also floats free of Cloten himself, anticipating the other song where musical "notes" are mentioned, the dirge for "Fidele" in Act IV.

In ways typical of scenes in *Cymbeline* where divergent senses of "notes" converge, this passage starts with another kind of note, the "due debt" to the "grave" (IV.ii.232), recalled with a difference in Cloten "paid" back by death (IV.ii.245). "Note" as musical note then follows in Arviragus' "let us [...] *sing* him to th'ground / As once our mother; use like *note* and words, / Save that 'Europhile' must be 'Fidele'" (IV.ii.234-7). But the dirge itself ends up spoken rather than sung, after Guiderius responds "I cannot *sing*. I'll weep, and *word* it with thee; / For *notes* of sorrow *out of tune* are worse / Than priests and *fanés* that *lie*" (IV.ii.239-241)—lines that combine *musical* "notes" with false *outward* "notes,"

¹⁵ Gordon Williams, *A Glossary of Shakespeare's Sexual Language*, Atlantic Highlands, The Athlone Press, 1997, p. 70.

while ironically (in the “feigns” of “fanes that lie”) calling attention to what he *knows not* (though the audience does), that “Fidele” outwardly *appears* to be but is *not* dead and like “Europhile” is a counterfeit name.

The suspect fidelity of the female “note,” “nothing” or “O” was associated with the so-called “infidel symbol” zero, designated by *nota* and written like the letter O.¹⁶ This “nought” is able to “Attest in little place a million” in *Henry V*, where actors on the “wooden O” become “ciphers” to a “great accompt” (Prologue 13-17) and the “count” of Katherine’s female body becomes part of an inventory-language lesson (III.iv.51-9). In *Much Ado*, the “not(h)ing” of female “country matters” is tellingly sounded in Claudio’s title of “county” or “Count”; however, it is not the *female* “count” but *Count* Claudio’s *noting* that is *untrue*. In *Cymbeline*, when Posthumus credits Iachimo’s counterfeit account that Innogen has turned “whore,” his “Spare your *arithmetic*, never *count* the turns. / Once, and a million!” (II.iv.142-3) echoes the female “count” of *Henry V* and the sexual “turns” of *Othello* (IV.i.252-4). It also anticipates *The Winter’s Tale*, where the “cipher” or “O” able to “multiply” one into “many thousands” more figures not only a “debt” but the “rich place” and increase of Hermione’s body (I.ii.6-8), a “nothing” soon refigured by Leontes’ jealously proliferating “not(h)ings” (I.ii.284-96).

The fact that the female “nothing” is an unseen or “invisible baldrick” (*Much Ado* I.i.242) adds to the *evidentiary* problem of (*not*) *knowing* for certain, evoked in Leonato’s “Her mother hath many times told me so” when asked if Hero is his daughter (I.i.105), and in *Cymbeline*’s interconnected preoccupations with *knowing* (epistemological, cognitive, and sexual). “Arithmetic” (as the algebraic *Regola della cosa*) brought the unknown “thing” to light, a *cosa* or “thing” suggestive of the female *res* or thing,¹⁷ while the female “count” was part of bawdy on commercial “(ac)counts,” and subject/object of *conter* as both “count” and “narrate.” In *Cymbeline*, when Iachimo’s account of his night in Innogen’s “chamber” (II.iv.81) convinces Posthumus he has carnal “knowledge” of her (II.iv.51), his anguished response invokes the “count” and multiplying O’s of *sexual*

¹⁶ See Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1987, p. 8; Patricia Parker, “Cassio, Cash, and the ‘Infidel O’: Arithmetic, Double-entry Bookkeeping, and Othello’s Unfaithful Accounts,” in Jyotsna Singh, ed., *A Companion to the Global Renaissance*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 225-8.

¹⁷ See Parker, “Cassio,” p. 228, on “arithmetician” (*Othello*, I.i.19).

“arithmetic.”¹⁸ In *Henry V*, the zero’s “crooked figure” O, in “ciphers to this great account” (1. Prol.15-17), suggests *crooked* as dishonest in relation to this “count,” recalled in the Language Lesson scene; but the accounts in this play of the king himself, inheritor of the crown of “crooked” Bolingbroke, are open to question.¹⁹ And in the comic rather than ultimately tragic outcomes of *Cymbeline* and *Much Ado*, the slanderer’s account (not the “noted” female count) is revealed to be untrue.

The power of zero or “O” to make much out of nothing extended to usury, debt, or the commercial “note” crucial to *Cymbeline* and *Much Ado*, which are filled with references to debts, usury, and the “payback” of revenge. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Bassanio’s “I come by note, to give and to receive” (III.ii.140) evokes “note” as a bill to be paid as well as a kind of IOU, in a play where “bonds” are both personal and commercial. Isabella’s “due and wary note” in *Measure for Measure* (IV.i.37) turns on the double sense of a “note” that is “due” and a “notice” or remark, in a play that highlights two kinds of usury, sexual and monetary (III.ii.6). *Much Ado*’s language of credit and creditors includes trust and belief (from *credere*) as well as settling scores; Claudio’s “For this I owe you” (V.iv.52), after Benedick implies he is a bastard, means “I’ll pay you back,” in the same line as other accounts that need to be settled (“here comes other reck’nings. / Which is the lady I must seize upon?” V.iv.52-3).

In *Cymbeline*, even the Welsh pastoral retreat includes talk of “the city’s usuries” (III.iii.45), debts in a ledger (“keeps his book uncrossed,” III.iii.116), and a “prison for a debtor that not dares / To stride a limit” (III.iii.34-5). Iachimo’s account of how by “notes” and “marks” he simulated proof of the “forfeit” of Innogen’s “bond of chastity” (V.iv.205-8) combines commercial “bond” with “notes” as the imputed stain on her sexual purity. Crediting him, Posthumus concludes that her sexual *dette de mariage* has been paid to this winner, to whom, by the wager’s contract, he owes Innogen’s gift to him of the *diamond*

¹⁸ See Williams, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, p. 863-4, on “Turnbull Street whores” as practising “arithmetic” and “Arithmeticke” of a “Bawd” as carnal and commercial “Divisions & Multiplications.”

¹⁹ Eugene Ostashevsky, “Crooked Figures: Zero and Hindu-Arabic Notation in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*,” in David Glimp and Michelle R. Warren, eds., *Arts of Calculation*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 205-228.

"ring" as well.²⁰ *Cymbeline's* revenge plots range from personal to imperial, including Roman invasion in response to unpaid "arrearages" of Britain's "tribute." The "noted" or slandered Belarius' revenge is "conveying" the King's sons, the term not only for transporting but for the *ars notaria* of written transfers of property and title, as well as slang for theft.²¹ Posthumus in Act v seeks the death he reckons he owes as payback – measure for measure – for Innogen's murder, in scenes that evoke the debt owed to God together with a final Audit or Reckoning.

Debts, notes, arithmetic, and accounts are combined in the Jailer's speech in v.iii, where "no *true* debtor and creditor but it" (i.e. death) slyly calls into question the honesty and "credit" given to this form of accounting, which purported to demonstrate the honesty of commerce and an accountant's "scrupulous fidelity to his own word."²² "Debtor and creditor" or "double-entry" bookkeeping was a "vehicle for producing public knowledge — that is knowledge that was designed to function in public as a sign of something more than the information included in the books."²³ But it was also suspected of being open to counterfeiting and fraud. The female "count," *nota* or "nothing" that already figured in sexual bawdy on "accounts"²⁴ was linked to the suspect honesty of "debtor and creditor" account books, where commercial "notes" were "pricked," written or noted. The ledger, its most public "book," was slang for "prostitute because like that paper she is open to all parties."²⁵ The "nothing" of *King Lear* includes female "plackets" next to "lenders' books" (III.iv.95-8). And in *Much Ado About Nothing*, "I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books" (I.i.79) suggests "account books of a tradesman in which creditable customers were listed."²⁶ But Beatrice's "Princes and *counties*! Surely a princely

²⁰ On marital sexual "debt," "interest," and usury, see "cancel" in Sandra K. Fischer, *Econolinguia*, London, Associated University Presses, 1985, p. 51; Natasha Korda, "Dame Usury: Gender, Credit, and (Ac)counting in the Sonnets and *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 60, Summer 2009, p. 151-2.

²¹ See Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, chapters 4 and 5.

²² Ceri Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of Credit*, London, Associated University Presses, 2002, p. 28, 40, 155.

²³ Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 37.

²⁴ See Parker, "Cassio," p. 231-3; Korda, "Dame Usury," p. 129-53.

²⁵ Williams, *Dictionary*, vol. 1, p. 131-2.

²⁶ Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Claire McEachern, London, Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, 2006, p. 154.

testimony, a goodly *count*, *Count Comfect*,” in the scene where Hero is “noted” for infidelity (iv.i), impugns not the female “count” but the false account and testimony credited by Count Claudio with regard to that “not[h]ing.”

The fact that an accountant could *appear* honest, when an account was *forged*, is crucial to *Cymbeline*’s wager plot, where Iachimo wins by providing “*simular* proof enough” (v.iv.200). The accusation of “counterfeiting” (homophone of counter-fitting, a “fit” sexualized by Cloten in iv.i.3) is made by Posthumus against the “*woman’s* part,” charged with coining “counterfeit” or bastard issue with some “coiner” (ii.v.5-6, 20). But in this play filled with simulacra and doubles, the definitive defamatory noting of Innogen is enacted as both Posthumus and Iachimo join in *refiguring* her body’s “natural note” (ii.ii.28) as a note or “stain” produced by the *act* of noting itself. Even after Iachimo leaves the stage, Posthumus continues to generate the powerfully voyeuristic imaging that produced the look they both shared, as the perceived “stain” of the “mole” descended from breast to lower bodily “hell” (ii.iv.135-40) — forging his own *participatory* sight of Iachimo as a “German” boar penetrating what Innogen should “from encounter guard” (ii.v.19).²⁷

The power of words themselves to make much out of nothing or counterfeit creation *ex nihilo* is foregrounded in *Cymbeline* as well as *Much Ado*. Evil in the Bible is both negation and counterfeit, lookalike, or double, in ways reflected in *Cymbeline*’s multiple forms of simulation, both within and beyond the wager plot. As early modern dictionaries underscore, “noting” was related to the problem of knowing, since *notus* was derived from *nosco* (“to know”) and meant both “notable” and “known.” But the problem is how to discern counterfeit from true, knowing from not knowing. In the public accusation of Hero, “know,” “known,” and “none” sound ominously, for a woman, as slandered, dishonored, and “tainted” with “infamy.” But ironically, Claudio’s “What

²⁷ “Like a full-acorned boar, a German one” (ii.v.16) not only evokes the boar as emblem of lust from Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* and Spenser’s *Gardens of Adonis* (along with the “wild boar” of Psalm 80: 13) but may add to the sense of “germens” (or “seeds”) sounding in “German” the fear that Iachimo might have impregnated Innogen. The curious use of “German” (for “Italian” Iachimo) also recalls Shakespeare’s ironic combination of “german” as “honest” (as well as “kin”) with *geminus*, double, or twin, appropriate to Iachimo and Posthumus as simultaneously rivals and secret sharers. See Parker, *Margins*, p. 127-32; and the comparison in *Love’s Labor’s Lost* (3.1.190-3) of a woman to a “German” clock, in lines that include the ironic resonance of “german” as “honest.”

men daily do, *not knowing* what they do!" (IV.i.20) reveals his (nought) knowing as the reverse of what he assumes, since Hero's infidelity (which he now takes as certain knowledge, *not known* to him before) is based on the false "noting" of ocular proof (or *looks*) outside Hero's window. This nexus is crucial to *Cymbeline*, which foregrounds *claims* to "knowledge" (including *carnal* knowledge), false security in interpreting "signs," and "cognitive impenetrability,"²⁸ even as it invokes multiple forms of "penetration" (including attempted invasion – military, voyeuristic, and sexual – and Cloten's musical notes intended to "penetrate" Innogen's "ear" and sexual "case").

In *Cymbeline* as in *Much Ado* – where the success of sexual slander depends on assumptions by Posthumus and Claudio that they "see" and "know" what they do not, this nexus matters not only to wordplay but to the potentially tragic plot itself. Knowledge as carnal "knowledge" (*Cymbeline* II.iv.51) is evoked in Claudio's "If I have *known* her, / You will say she did embrace me as a husband," in response to Leonato's questioning whether he "made defeat of her virginity" (IV.i.47-50). In the context of the hidden female "nothing" or "O" and anxieties of cuckoldry when a father could not know for certain whether his child was a bastard, the absence of access to certain knowledge is one of the ways both plays engage, without an ultimately tragic ending, the epistemological problem of (not) knowing that is the tragedy of *Othello*.

Clothing as outward "note" or sign is related in *Cymbeline*, as in *Much Ado*, to knowing but also to *who* is "known" in the hierarchical sense – or "of note." After Posthumus changes his fashion from "Italian gentry" (V.i.18) to "Briton peasant" (V.i.24), it is scoffed that he "brags his service / As if he were *of note*" (V.iii.93-4). John Ferne's *The Blazon of Gentry* (1586) roots "nobility" itself in the "knowe" from which *noting* derived: "The word Nobilitas [...] is deriued of the verb Nosco, to knowe [...] A Gentleman or a Nobleman is he [...] which is knowne, and through the heroycall vertues of his life, talked of in euey man's mouth." Conversely, "ignotus" meant ignoble or "base" (the term used for Posthumus by Cymbeline and Cloten); as well as "unknowing" and "unknown," which converge in the "unknown" of the text of Jupiter in Act V. "Note" is sounded as noble and high reputation in *Cymbeline*,

²⁸ See Ellen Spolsky, "Women's Work is Chastity: Lucretia, *Cymbeline*, and Cognitive Impenetrability," in Alan Richardson and Ellen Spolsky, eds., *The Work of Fiction*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, p. 51-84.

including when Belarius recalls his status (or “note”) before the note or stigma of the slander against him, in a speech that underscores their antithetical meanings: “this story / The world may read in me: my body’s marked / With Roman swords, and my report was once / First with the best of note” (III.iii.55-8). In the wager scene, Iachimo says of Posthumus’ status earlier in Britain: he “was then of a crescent note, expected to prove so worthy as since he hath been allowed the name of” (I.iv.2-3), a combination of “note” with “name” that recalls “of name” in *Much Ado*, for “gentle” status. But his “crescent note” was before the play’s beginning, where he is banished and Innogen “condemned and noted” for making the “throne / A seat for baseness” (I.i.141-2) — a crime for which the punishment is to “*pen* her up” (153). The King continues to “note” or condemn her for not having “tendered” what daughters *owe* to their fathers (“We have noted it,” III.v.31-4), a “noted” that combines noticed (or committed to “pen”) with the commercial sense of “note” the Queen makes explicit, the duty left “*unpaid* to you / Which daily she was bound to proffer” (III.v.48-9).

“Note” is also foregrounded as the *notice* that elevated soldiers to higher social status (as Posthumus’ father Sicilius gained the “sur-addition Leonatus,” I.i.33); in Pisanio’s “These present wars shall find I love my country, / Even to the note o’th’king, or I’ll fall in them” (IV.iii.43-4); and in Cymbeline’s making “knights of the battle” of the unknown “old man and two boys” who repulsed the Roman invaders, an ironic turn to Belarius’ worry that “we being not known” by “the King’s party” might “drive us” to “render” an account resulting in torture and death (IV.iv.10-11). Arviragus argues against Belarius that the King’s party will not “waste their time upon our *note*, / To *know* from whence we are,” IV.iv.20-1), lines ironically recalled in the Recognition Scene, where he and his brother are not only to become “knights” but are revealed to be the king’s sons (“of note,” nobility, and “name,” though “unknown” to themselves).

The slander against Innogen brings together different parts of this nexus — including “known,” “renown,” “notable,” “notorious,” “marks,” writing, defaming, stigmatizing, and staining. The wager scene — in which the female “count” or “con” repeatedly sounds — begins from the men’s praise of their “country mistresses” (I.iv.46), a rhetorical display that recalls Sonnet 21 (“I will not praise that purpose not to sell”), opening their “mistresses” not only to the mind’s eye but to

potential theft, as happens in *The Rape of Lucrece* where Lucrece is “shamed with the note.”²⁹ The letter of introduction to Innogen that Posthumus writes for the “gentleman” Iachimo, combines “note” as nobility, reputation, name, and status: “He is one of the *noblest note*, to whose kindnesses I am most infinitely tied.”³⁰ In the night scene in Innogen’s bedroom, Iachimo’s “design” is “to *note* the chamber. I will *write* all down” (II.ii.23-4); and also to note the “contents” of his “story” (or “sufficient testimony”) for Posthumus back in Rome, including the “mole,” most valuable of the “*notes* about her body” that “testify, t’enrich mine inventory” above “ten thousand meaner movables” (II.ii.27-30).

When Iachimo performs his detailed account (and recounting) in the Recognition Scene, he brings together even more of the compound senses of notes and noting:

That I returned with simular proof enough
To make the *noble* Leonatus mad,
By wounding his belief in her *renown*
With tokens thus, and thus: averring *notes*
Of chamber-hanging, pictures, this her bracelet –
O cunning, how I got it! –nay, some *marks*
Of secret on her person, that he could not
But think her *bond* of chastity quite cracked,
I having ta’en the *forfeit*. (v.iv.200-8)

“Cracked” here, as the forfeiting of a commercial “note” or “bond,” includes the *dette de mariage*. But at the same time, it figures the cracked “coin” of the female “count,” *quaint*, or *coint* blamed for unfaithfully coining bastards in Posthumus’ tirade in Act II, where “the woman’s part in *me* [...] be it lying, *note* it, / The *woman’s*” (II.v.20-3)

²⁹ See Nancy Vickers, “‘The blazon of sweet beauty’s best’: Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*,” in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, eds., *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, London, Methuen, 1985, on Sonnet 21 and rhetorical “display” (from *displacare*, “unfold to the view”). *Cymbeline* foregrounds such display in the mens’ praise of their “country mistresses” in I.iv, as well as its own explication, un-folding or un-tying of enigmas and knots, including in the complicated dénouement of the Recognition Scene.

³⁰ When she reads Posthumus’ later letter accusing her of playing “the strumpet in my bed” (III.iv.21-2), Innogen compares his falseness to Aeneas and to Sinon, whose false account convinced the Trojans to open Troy’s gates. Sinon might seem more appropriate to Iachimo, whose false story of a partnership that includes Posthumus (I.vi) is the stratagem that gets him into Innogen’s chamber (II.ii). But in the wager (unknown to her) these men are partnered as co-signers; and Posthumus’ letter of introduction (I.vi.22-5) plays Sinon by asking her to give this “stranger” her “trust” (Folio, sometimes emended to “Your truest Leonatus”: see Butler, *Op. cit.*, p. 107). Posthumus’ letter also performs the function of women-bawds in earlier wager stories (evoked in Cloten’s attempt to bribe Innogen’s female attendant).

projects that *noted* stigmatized “part” outward as “the woman’s” and swears “I’ll *write* against *them*” (32).

In *Cymbeline*’s emphasis on suspect ways of *knowing*, “letters” as part of the *ars notaria* or “notes” as *writing* are joined by “characters” as handwriting (III.ii.28); and the Queen’s “note” in I.v.2 as a *written* list (recording her dissembled *hidden* “knowledge,” but at odds with concern it remain unnoted/unknown). Innogen, seeing a “letter” from Leonatus (“learned indeed were that astronomer / That knew the stars as I his *characters*; / He’d lay the future open,” III.ii.27-29), suggests confidence that she *knows* his “character” as well; but this scene ends with uncertain knowledge (“Nor what ensues, but have a fog in them / That I cannot look through,” III.ii.80-1). Both passages ambiguously anticipate the Roman “Soothsayer” Philharmonus, whose title suggests “sooth” (or truth)-teller but who may be simply a spin-meister or time-serving imperial refashioner of enigmatic notes or signs. The “glass darkly” of *Cymbeline*’s echoes of 1 Corinthians 13 (where knowing is only “in part” and seeing is *per speculum in aenigmate*) complicates any deciphering of *enigmas*, including his; or any claims to “knowledge” that is more than *partial* (in both senses).

Cymbeline further complicates “note” or “sign”-reading by reminders that its actions are being performed by actors, including the boy actor *playing* the “woman’s part.” The very moment in the “Recognition Scene” where Innogen is revealed to have been on stage all along, though regarded by others as the “boy” they *see*, is the moment when “play” and “part” (v.iv.228-9) call attention to a transvestite theater that itself *dissimulates* and *simulates*, subverting Stubbes’s distinguishing “notes” or signs by requiring the audience to see *double*, both boy player and female character at once.

Christian or Jacobean imperial readings of Jupiter and his Roman eagle are differently complicated by reminders in the descent of Jupiter on his eagle (v.iii) of the rape or *raptus* of Trojan Ganymede, classically linked to Juno’s revenge against Troy and familiar not only from Ovid but from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, in relation to the trials of Aeneas recalled in Jupiter’s own speech.³¹ And more recent contemporary

³¹ See *Aeneid* I.28 and V.255-7 with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* X.155-61 and XI.756 and *Fasti* VI.43. On the play’s *Aeneid* echoes, see Patricia Parker, “Romance and Empire: Anachronistic *Cymbeline*,” in George M. Logan and Gordon Teskey, eds., *Unfolded Tales*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989. The name “Polydore” for Guiderius in Wales has been linked to Polydore Vergil (Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 79). But “Polydore” also clearly recalls *Aeneid* III, where

"Ganymedes" are evoked from the play's beginning, in the reference to the King's "Bedchamber" in the opening scene (1.1.42).

Cymbeline's biblical echoes underscore that the final Recognition Scene of Apocalypse (the ultimate separation of counterfeit and true) may be foreshadowed, but even the epiphany of Nativity remains forever in the future at its end. There is in the play itself no final (or "true") "debtor and creditor," Audit, or Reckoning, and no ultimate "Faithful and True."³² For "noting" in relation to the counterfeit or "bastard," however, we need to return to the "Nothus," as part of the network of noting and nothing.³³ In a definition from Isidore of Seville iterated in English texts, "Nothus" was the title for "a bastard borne of a noble father and ignoble mother" (for example a concubine or adulteress), in contrast to "Spurius," born of a noble mother and ignoble father. In addition to being linked with "nothing" (the *filius nullius*, or heir of nobody), "nothus" like "spurius" was identified with the adulterate and counterfeit, including counterfeit coins.³⁴ The "Nothus" or high-born "Bastard" was well known from Virgil and Ovid, among other writers (*Aeneid* ix.697; *Heroides* iv.22). But the *nothus* as counterfeit or simulacrum was also familiar,³⁵ including from Catullus 63 on the gelded Attis as "notha mulier" or counterfeit woman – a text often cited in relation to the suspect counterfeiting of transvestite theater, undermining clear gender distinctions, "notes," or signs.

Hercules (prominently cited in *Cymbeline* and *Much Ado*) was a famous "Nothus," bastard issue of Jupiter's cuckolding of Amphitryon by counterfeiting his identity. Shakespeare clearly knew this story in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* ix) but also the other sense as simulacrum or counterfeit, since he used this story for the mistaken doubles or twins of

Polydorus, the youngest son of Priam of Troy, tells how *his* surrogate father in the wilds of Thrace murdered him for his "gold." This famous episode's "cursed love of gold" thus provides a potential *critique* of empire. Gold and coins figure prominently in *Cymbeline*; but coins are *refused* in *its* wilds in Wales.

³² Revelation 19:11. See Parker, *Margins*, p. 56-82 on biblical counterfeits and simulacra in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Othello*, and other texts, including "angels" as coins.

³³ See Claude Peltrault "Nothus et bouts cousus; des formes de la bâtardise dans *Much Ado about Nothing*," *Colloque Shakespeare/Marlowe*, 1992.

³⁴ On spurious, bastardy as adulteration, and "mongrel" tragicomedy, see Michael Neill, *Putting History to the Question*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, ch. 5-6; Parker, *Margins*, ch. 6.

³⁵ For famous "Nothi," including William the Conqueror, King Arthur, and Hercules (in Alciati's *In Nothos* emblem), see Alison Findlay, *Illegitimate Power*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994.

The Comedy of Errors.³⁶ This is important for the combination of cuckoldry or bastardy with simulation or counterfeiting in both *Cymbeline* and *Much Ado*. *Cymbeline* combines bastardy with counterfeiting in Posthumus' "woman's part" speech, which moves from "We are all bastards" to the idea that he is himself a bastard "counterfeit," since "my father was I know not where / When I was stamped (II.v.2-5). Both plays depend on the forging of false accounts, including the "Counterfeit Representation" of *enargeia* or *evidentia*.³⁷ But the forgeries *succeed* as long as they do because of the partnerships forged by those who credit them, because they plausibly second, double, or twin, a belief structure that was already there.

The "nothus" as "bastard" stood as "note" or sign of a suspect female "nothing" ("ignoble mother"). The "nothus" as "counterfeit" is avatar of the simular or "simular proof." In *Much Ado About Not[h]ing*, the first scene where John the Bastard shares his slander of Hero with Claudio and others (III.ii) is followed by Dogberry's "Are you *good* men and *true*?" (III.iii.1). *Much Ado* is filled with "notes" as misread signs (and "looks") as well as fears of cuckoldry and female spots or stains. But at the same time, like *Cymbeline*, it foregrounds "illegitimate construction" (III.iv.50) – "notings," construing, and constructions that pass for truth, even though there is "no art / To find the mind's construction in the face" (*Macbeth*, I.iv.11-12). *Cymbeline* is pervaded by forged accounts, simulacra, counterfeits, and doubles, including Posthumus and Iachimo as secret sharers or "cozen Germans."³⁸

³⁶ See Parker, *Margins*, chapter 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, chapter 7. Although there is not space to develop this here, *Nothus* as a familiar early modern spelling for *Notus* (Auster or south wind) is also suggestive for Don John the Bastard (who recalls Philip II of Spain's brother Don John of Austria, the "foreign Papist bastard" of James's *Lepanto*), and by extension for the "infection" from the "spongy south" by "Italian" Iachimo. Stephen Bateman's *The Travayled Pylgrime* (1569) makes "infections Nothus blows" part of Protestant England's travails caused by Habsburg Spain.

³⁸ On "cozen Germans" see Parker, *Margins*, p. 129, 155, 178.

The scapegoating of the “noted,” ink-blackened Hero, and the retaliatory “letter” to “kill” Innogen have as their basis the *nothing* of *illegitimate* constructions. Scapegoating the “Bastard” of Aragon or counterfeiting “Italian fiend” would be itself yet another “illegitimate construction” – projecting outward the similar simular simulacrum within, like the abjected “woman’s part” itself.

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