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Mad Kings and Caged Sovereigns: Paradoxes of Power
in the Rhetoric of *Eight Songs for a Mad King*
and President Donald J. Trump

by

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Mad Kings and Caged Sovereigns:

Paradoxes of Power in the Rhetoric of *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and President Donald J Trump

Thesis Abstract – Idaho State University (2020)

In this analysis, I argue that *Eight Songs for a Mad King* has the capacity to reveal the lasting madness of sovereignty itself as realized in the physical bodies of the king and the subjects. In many ways, the performance of the mad king mirrors our world now and drives this project. So, I will investigate how the political implications of *Eight Songs* reverberate in the echo-chamber of (in)excusable language and behavior exhibited by President Donald J. Trump. This analysis shows that demagoguery rests at the intersection of sovereignty and democracy, enabling such a comparison. By working through the lens of demagoguery, I will reveal how dysfunction allows for assumed power dynamics and associated capacities to be inverted. These paradoxes productively feed on and result in the politicization of madness and control through affectations of ethos, which ultimately establishes a foundation for actionable political discourse.

Key Words: demagoguery, post-truth rhetoric, ethos, audience, rhetoric, political rhetoric, Donald J. Trump, paradox

Introduction

Eight Songs for a Mad King, a monodrama composed by Peter Maxwell Davies in 1969, exploits the real madness of King George III of England, appropriating his very language as recorded by a servant, as he attempts to teach bullfinches how to sing. This naturally isolated scene is turned inside-out: King George's private history is publicly presented on a stage. The king sits on a throne, accompanied by his subjects (musicians in cages), and rambles down the stereotypical path of mad destruction. Taken solely as an indictment of an individual, the piece falls into a shallow pool, unable to say much beyond the superficial, exploitative consumption of mad violence.

A complex understanding of the suasive powers of the piece can be discovered by exploring the paradoxes of the mad king, illuminated by both the material score and the resulting physical performance. The alienation of the king through the violent manifestation of his madness on stage in *front* of the polis, rather than being hidden or contained, requires an examination of the rhetorical strategies and political implications of the performance. The political nature of the piece is cemented by its intentional engagement with anti-psychiatry and the contemporaneous publication of Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la Folie* in English, a connection Alan Williams draws out in "Madness in the Music Theatre Works of Peter Maxwell Davies". More critically, I will work through the paradoxes of power in my rhetorical analysis of *Eight Songs for a Mad King* beside and through the lens of our current political climate. Such a turn towards facing the sustained metaphors of madness allows for productive testing and questioning of our extant realities, as called for by Avital Ronell in *Stupidity* (107). Instead of obviously reflecting the temporary madness of an individual, the piece has the capacity to

reveal the lasting madness of sovereignty itself as realized in the physical bodies of the king and the subjects. I will explicate the paradox of control and madness, mapped against sovereignty and precarity, which sustain the relevancy of the trope of the mad king. Specifically, I am concerned with the paradox of how the king escapes the political othering of his madness in order to retain power and evade culpability for his actions. In many ways, the trope of the mad king mirrors our world now and drives this project. So, I will investigate how the political implications of *Eight Songs* reverberate in the echo-chamber of the (in)excusable language and behavior exhibited by President Donald J. Trump.

While the rapid-fire pace of the current news cycle and the arrested development of the impeachment process have made this analysis more difficult to craft, they have also proven its salience as logos continues to bend against the brunt of irrational ethos. This is one of the dominant features of post-truth rhetoric as argued by Bruce McComiskey in *Post-Truth Rhetoric and Composition*. His definition of ethos as “inherently relational” as realized in “the rhetorical effect...that one personality has on another personality’s willingness or capacity to be persuaded” shows how logos (the grounded nature of an argument/action) is undermined by a cult of personality masquerading as ethos (21). Ultimately, according to McComiskey “Post-truth ethos is the **performance** of credibility, whether that credibility is real or fake” (22 – my emphasis). In donning the persona of king (or president), the speaker, be they George III or Trump or any other, is able to construct their own realities, regardless of truth or rationality, regardless of being “mad”. It is these constructions of a post-truth reality that must be challenged, and it is the recognition of the performative nature of power that provides a foothold for such resistance.

So, I will establish and examine parallels between the performance of mad king George III in *Eight Songs* and the actions of President Trump as enabled by irrationally credible ethos. Empty but for the its strategic performative value (McComiskey 21), post-truth ethos is given shape by the language of demagoguery. Specifically, this analysis shows that demagoguery rests at the intersection of sovereignty and democracy, enabling such a comparison. By working through the lens of demagoguery, I will reveal how dysfunction allows for assumed power dynamics and associated capacities to be inverted: the sovereign becomes caged by his own mechanisms of control and the subject claims the capacity for power. These paradoxes productively feed on and result in the politicization of madness and control through affectations of ethos, which ultimately establishes a foundation for actionable political discourse.

The Mad King and President Trump

King George III is undeniably mad. Within *Eight Songs*, he is portrayed as a manifestation of the mad musician driven by a fragmented score, which serves to double the madness to which he is already assigned by history. This duality of music interlaced with madness rests as the center of the performance, as Davies exploits the capacity of music to “*explore certain extreme regions of experience*”, as he puts it in the score notes, by materializing the king’s fractured psyche on stage (1 – emphasis in original). Theatre, in a more general sense, is implicated in the performance of the irrational as Foucault points out “the theater develops its truth, which is illusion. Which is, in the strict sense, madness” (35). Davies’ conceptualization of King George III reinforces the concept of performance justifying irrationality. His King George III is unlike most operatic characters, who, according to musicologist Carolyn Abbate in her work

on the narrative functions of voice in opera, “often suffer from deafness; they do not *hear* the music that is the ambient fluid of their music-drowned world” (120). Rather than existing outside of his own medium, King George III actually hears the music that surrounds him. The music is diegetic, as the audience is made to hear his song as it occurred within his world. Yet, the audience may not hear exactly what the king hears, because there is a possibility of distortion through the filter of his madness. While the audience is confronted with violent, chaotic vocalizations, perhaps the king hears something entirely other through his own perception, embodying the trope of the mad king.

In the rhetoric of Trump, the distortion of perception publicly manifests in his speech as well as his twitter feed. Though much of his rhetoric may seem to be irrational, it is not without purpose as he continually (re)constructs reality to serve the needs of himself and his audience. Communications academic Thomas Gallagher explores Trump’s use of twitter to manipulate voter perception by shifting his ethos according to which alternative persona holds greater sway, insider or outsider, in his article “The Outsider on the Inside: Donald Trump’s Twitter Activity and the Rhetoric of Separation from Washington Culture”. According to Gallagher, “Trump has used the rhetoric of separation at critical times to disassociate himself from elements of the Washington culture”; in this way “Trump offers his voters an alternate version of facts and directs supporters to media outlets with a similar...persona as his” (195). The success of this strategic, but otherwise empty, crafting of ethos is undeniable and will be explicitly elaborated on within this essay. At this juncture, it is critical to note the *public* nature of such rhetoric. By being receptive to such rhetoric, the audience becomes entangled in the irrationality or the madness.

Neither the king nor his subjects can be separated from his madness, which has been made public and recognizable in its performance. While the degeneration of George III is often fetishized and spoken of as an aberration, madness is not other to the function of power, but pivotal to its development as sustenance. Comparative literature academic Silke-Marie Weineck explores the role of madness in grounding philosophy and mythic histories (as a component of identity construction) in *The Abyss Above*. According to her, "[m]adness is neither excluded from history nor an episode or a footnote to it. In fact, *mania* seems to hold a central place within what we might call the different orders of history - the history of the individual, of the great families, of the state, of the nation, of the human soul" (43). So, the trope of the mad king is not antithetical to the leveraging of power, but critical to its exigence.

Madness is inherently entangled in the justification of power. Much of Foucault's *History of Madness* focuses on the function of excising irrationality in its various forms, and *Eight Songs* leans into and takes suasive force from this articulation of madness. As Foucault explains, before the enlightenment, the drive of various social forces to establish a normative foil was shown in the development of leper colonies and ships of fools, as their conditions were automatically assigned to the realm of the untouchable (7). Following this vein, the mad king as an individual is treated as such a leper – confined, micro-managed, and in-treatment – living in isolation and under the control of handlers. However, paradoxically, the king as performative figurehead is excused from such containment. After all, he is not removed from power, but remains king. So long as a logical distance is maintained and ethos rests on the laurels of position, there is no need to question, or even simply explore, the cognitive dissonance of these

paradoxical measures of control. That is, the king continues to wield power regardless of his madness.

Eight Songs

In appealing to the trope of the mad king and how it travels across contexts, *Eight Songs* continues to engage audiences. *Eight Songs* has been performed within multiple contexts since its initial publication in 1969. From the premier, featuring the vocal talents of Roy Hart for whom the part had specifically been composed, *Eight Songs* has leaned on creating a spectacle that is recognizable as such. According to Adrian Curtin in his analysis, “Alternative Vocalities: Listening Awry to Peter Maxwell Davies’s ‘Eight Songs for a Mad King’”, “[i]n their stage of [the premiere of] *Eight Songs*, the Pierrot Players mixed the conventions of concert performance and chamber opera, thereby making a spectacle of the work and the performers” (101-102). Throughout its iterations, the staging of the monodrama continues to reflect the broader preoccupations of its performers and its audiences – focus shifts from emphasizing the cages containing the musicians and the limitations of the stage/space itself to materializing insanity by dressing George III in an ineffectual straight-jacket. No longer is the king relegated to a distant place in a distant past: he moves with and among his audience as a participant in his own performance, aware of both the physical stage and his staging as an abstraction. At one point, the king directly addresses the audience as he moves into the third person to reflect on his own inevitable state of exile by “reciting his own obituary” (see image 1 of the score) as pointed out by Artistic Director Morris Rosenzweig in a personal interview.

Recit. A good-hearted gentleman, a humble servant of God, //
 (extremely) allowing husband, an affectionate sire. //
 Sanely! Poor fellow, he went mad. // He talked with trees, attacked his eldest
 son, // disowned his wife, to make a ghost his Queen — //
 a ghost his Queen. So they seized him (yes!) & they whipped
 him (ach! yes!), // starved him, jeered in his face, // while he
 *talked he talked he talked he talked: // they could not shave
 him, his mouth was never still. // Sometimes he howled like a dog. //
 [*echo slightly the "budgie" of no 2.]

REC And he veiled the mirrors not to see himself pass by // for his eyes had
 vlc. *doless.*
 turned to blackcurrant jelly. // Poor fellow, I weep for him. [♩] off.
 vlc. *gtriss*
 REC He will die howling. // Howling: //
 f
 ** rpt. word, over full
 range, disappearing off
 stage, slowly. (Stage to
 black out as King goes out.) 33.

perc. B.D. strapped on, played
 with 2 leather whips.
 follow King offstage,
 beating, ♩ = 40, steady.
 Pishaynell Davis, Bates
 Conn, April 1969.

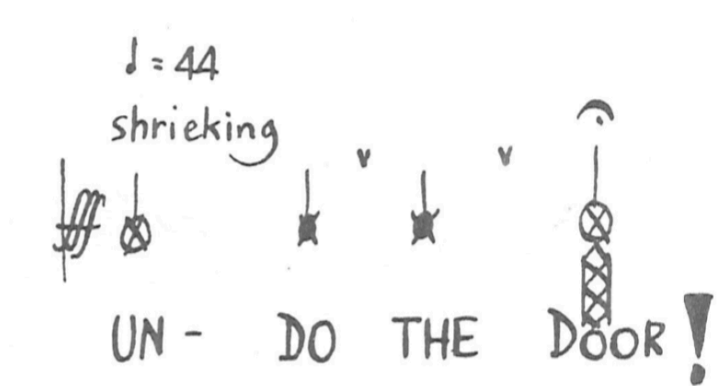
1 Image: Obituary - The Final Recitation

In manipulating the perception of the audience as well as the performer, the staging itself exerts great suasive force, providing a place, a platform from which the performance attains credibility. It is the physical presence of the stage that grants this capacity to the performance. The most recent iteration of *Eight Songs* in the U.S. comes from the Louis Moreau Institute in New Orleans. Dr. Morris Rosenzweig, the Artistic Director of this production, believes it is his role to “maximize what is available”, which in his production included the construction of cages and the use of the audience’s floor for the king’s movements (personal interview, March 16 2020). The physical use of the stage mirrors the chaotic, “found object” nature of the piece, which constitutes the mad king’s psyche.

The eight distinct “songs” in the piece are birthed from specific moments in music history and scanned against lyrics derived from primary historical texts (Davies 1). In crafting

the piece, Davies intentionally engages with fragmenting quoting to highlight the king's own fractured psyche. Davies writes in the score notes that he "regard[s] the work as a collection of musical objects borrowed from many sources, functioning as musical 'stage props', around which the reciter's part weaves, lighting them from extraordinary angles, and throwing grotesque and distorted shadows from them, giving the musical 'objects' an unexpected and sometimes sinister significance" (1). Additionally, the other players function as props in the king's performance. The king is often physically situated in the center of the performance with the other players held to their positions around him. The other performers, directed to both wear masks and be placed within individual cages (Davies 1), surround the king. In this way, both the staging and the music itself frame the king as the centerpiece of the piece.

In this musical landscape, the king's part demands the performance of extreme vocalities, as Curtin notes, "[i]n addition to requiring that the vocalist have an extended vocal range, Davies's work includes notations in the singer's part for chordal effects, articulated breathing, overtones, harmonics, and variations of *Sprechgesang* (a type of vocal enunciation between speech and song)" (102). These demands are immediate, with the first line of the vocals shown below:



2 Image: First Line of the King's Recitation

The violence forced upon the voice in order to perform the piece is one of *Eight Songs'* defining characteristics. According Williams, violence is "the most evident feature of *Eight Songs*...violence in its use of the voice,

in its staging, and in its treatment of the text" (81). While Williams questions the function of this violence, I believe that it offers an opportunity for intentional rhetorical listening, a listening despite (and because of) discomfort. Though in *Rhetorical Listening*, Krista Ratcliffe is speaking metaphorically, the literal opportunity for rhetorical listening is also present in *Eight Songs* "for hearing differences as harmony or even as discordant notes (in which case, at least, differences are discernible)...we can listen to the harmony and/or discordant notes, knowing that more than meets the eye lies before us" (25). Toward this aim of attaining meaning through listening, *Eight Songs* demands the upmost control of the performer, and the upmost patience of the listener. The voice of the mad king is not a pleasant sound, but a harsh and violent grain against the throat and the ears. The violence of *Eight Songs*' musicality blurs the distinction between noise and sound, chaos and control, madman and king. As Jacques Attali argues in his monograph *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, "The game of music thus resembles the game of power: monopolize the right to violence; provoke anxiety and then provide a feeling of security; provoke disorder and then propose order; create a problem in order to solve it" (28). In this way, music offers a false promise of harmony through the exploitation of dissonance, revealing the vulnerability of the politicization of voice, even the voice of the powerful.

Sovereignty, Democracy, and Demagoguery

The paradox that rests at the core of this analysis is the strategic claim of unreal vulnerability by those in privileged positions in order to assume power while simultaneously projecting real precarity to the body of the other. The mad king does this in *Eight Songs* as pointed out by philosopher Ruud Welten in his analysis, "'I'm Not Ill, I'm Nervous': Madness in

the Music of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies.” He claims that “the theme of the mad king confuses the relations between subject and reality: the controlling consciousness...lapses into madness” (22). In this way, the king’s madness becomes rational as it is manipulated to show that he is a victim of the system he himself represents. According to McComiskey, this contortion of reality is mirrored in the post-truth rhetoric used by Trump as “language becomes purely strategic, without reference to anything other than itself” (8). Reality is *intentionally* rejected (12). Real, material precarity is displaced by fabricated, immaterial victimization. As a result, the performance of power becomes predicated on an irrational, yet politically strategic, construction of identity: a schism better understood through the lens of demagoguery.

At the intersection of sovereignty and democracy rests demagoguery. Demagoguery has been a feature of American politics throughout its history, but recent efforts have sought to bring the concept into the criticism of the current political environment. Patricia Roberts-Miller spear-heads this movement within rhetorical studies with works like the book, *Demagoguery and Democracy*. Her definition of demagoguery focuses on relations between in-groups and out-groups: “*Demagoguery is discourse that promises stability, certainty, and escape from the responsibility of rhetoric by framing public policy in terms of the degree to which and the means by which (not whether) the out-group should be scapegoated for the current problems of the in-group*” (33). Ultimately, demagoguery is concerned with the construction of politically strategic identities at the expense of logos – a concern explicitly associated with the post-truth rhetoric of President Trump.

Rhetoric is inherently entangled in performance. Accordingly, demagogic rhetoric, much like performance in general, is dynamic, constantly shifting in order to best exploit the divisions

of the moment. More critically though, it is interactive (McDonough 143). While according to McComiskey, “[p]ost-truth ethos is the performance of credibility, whether that credibility is real or fake” (22), the actor is not alone in constructing this rhetorical dialogic. The audience is also implicated as “even the audiences have no concern for facts, realities, or truths, thus relieving speakers from the need to conceal their manipulative intent” (12). So, demagogic rhetoric cannot exist without a participating audience. In this way, the performer feeds off of the energy of the audience, just as the demagogue gorges on the preoccupations of a fractured demos. Furthermore, neither demagogues nor their audiences need believe what they are saying – all that ultimately matters is the performance itself. It is through the performance, and the participation of the audience, that the demagogue confirms their power. It is in this space that otherwise mad speech is normalized through appropriation as defined by Weineck in her discussion of how madness facilitates power: “Appropriation here means the process of recuperating mad speech as one's own - a return to subjectivity, if you will - as well as making it appropriate, i.e., acceptable to the community, bound into a system, and hence comprehensible” (127). This is the point of intersection – the rhetoric of the Mad King and President Trump is automatically normalized by virtue of their positions of power to divisive ends.

Fueled by the presence of Trump, the recent resurgence of interest in demagoguery has continued relevance. The term demagogue is no longer situated purely in specialized discourse, but has been making a comeback in popular discussion, as pointed out by Marnie Lawler McDonough in her work “The Evolution of Demagoguery: An Updated Understanding of Demagogic Rhetoric as Interactive and Ongoing” in which she quotes from the Washington Post

in 2016, “Trump has officially secured his place as one of the most capable demagogues the country has ever seen” (139). She, like many other scholars, believes that “[g]iven the extensive amount of media attention focused on positioning Donald J. Trump as a demagogue, coupled with his mainstreaming of the rhetoric of demagoguery into a presidential campaign, this is the time for a renewed examination of how demagoguery operates through rhetoric” (140). This analysis attempts to answer her call.

Taking Roberts-Miller’s work and her conceptualization of demagoguery as a spring board, Amy Mendes provides a helpful organizational schema for demagogic appeals in her work “Digital Demagogue: The Critical Candidacy of Donald J. Trump.” She designates three rhetorically demagogic patterns in Trump’s language, which I will be following throughout this analysis to establish the points of comparison between The Mad King and President Donald J. Trump: scapegoating, paranoia, and authority.

Authority

Both King George III and Trump leverage their ethos in order to claim authority, which is further reinforced by their position as heads of states. The king, though mad, houses biopolitical power as the literal sovereign of a state; in *Eight Songs* the state is manifested in the theatre space. His subjects – the other players and the audience – are made to preform according to his process as he attempts to indoctrinate and conduct them through his music. As a result, the piece privileges certain bodies, both sounding and hearing; while some benefit from thrones of privilege, others bear the brunt of the *violence* of rule. *Eight Songs* clearly showcases this asymmetry in power through its visual rhetoric. In one example shown below of

a rehearsal of The Playground Ensemble before a performance, the king stands in the foreground while the other players are regulated to the background, caged and masked.

The construction of the space also facilitates the primacy of privileged sound as the King sounds the loudest. All of the bodies of the subjects surround him according to his whim, as do the bodies of the audience, in neat, clear rows of the theatre. He is the center of the hierarchy of force, of capacity in the space of the stage just as in the space of the sovereign. The King's authority is derived from this sense of proximity as the demos (in this case the audience) is encouraged to identify with him, seemingly without mediation. We can again see this enacted in the visual rhetoric of Trump's rallies. The staging of his rallies makes material how Trump occupies a similar position as a demagogic charismatic leader. Such staging of authority appeals to ultimate in-group identification, which, according to Roberts-Miller, allows "[f]ollowers [to] have an unmediated relationship with the leader, so he doesn't lead them – he *is* them in the position of leadership" (99). Therefore, he is an instrument of larger forces.

Like a literal instrument, any given body vibrates, both receiving and projecting sound; in this way the tension of the double-sided action of hearing/sounding moves beyond simple sense toward suasive force. So, it is no surprise that sound has been a focal point in rhetorical studies, particularly in the works of Thomas Rickert, Byron Hawk, Steph Ceraso, and others. Rickert's highly influential *Ambient Rhetoric* particularly lends itself to this analysis in its attempt to address sound's force as a rhetorical ontology that gives rise to suasive possibilities in both material and symbolic manifestations. Sensory perception is a route of exposure to this suasive sonic force. In his work *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body*, historian Richard Leppert clearly articulates what is at stake in granting authority to

sound; despite the authority often automatically associating with the sounding voice, "hearing is the sense that occasions the collapse of spatial relations, of the safe boundary between perceiver and perceived" (XIX). Soundwaves present a two-way affective entanglement. Leppert continues, "[t]he body, simultaneously site, sight, and possessing sight, is an object of tactile sensation and an aural phenomenon. The body *sounds*: it is audible; it hears. Sound constitutes the atmosphere supporting and confirming life on and in the terrain of the body...The body is a sight and a sound...the body is sighted and hears; the body sees and makes audible." This duality speaks to the paradoxes of power and vulnerability as co-dependent, if opposite, conditions engendered by biopolitics.

In this way, sounding authority—the authority to give voice and be heard—grounded in biopolitics, as enacted in both sovereignty and democracy, establishes a constant state of precarity, determining that processes necessary to the survival of the state take precedent over the rights/realities of bodies that enable (and feed) those processes. The refusal to listen ensures the maintenance of control by continually denigrating logos and rejecting reality (McComiskey 20). Ultimately, the one in power speaks, but does not listen. In a space devoid of listening, the voice of authority's only grounding point is itself – a privileged, yet empty, ethos which supersedes both immorality *and* irrationality. So, despite the king's obvious madness, he cannot be conceived of as being wrong, as being a fool because, according to Ronell, such criticism fails to find footing (78). Just as counter-intuitively, yet undeniably, according to Joshua Gunn, in his article "Donald Trump's Perverse Political Rhetoric", the "success of [Trump's] populist appeals appears to transcend reason" (160). In this way, irrationality itself serves to maintain authority by rejecting inherent vulnerability. After all, resistant irrationality

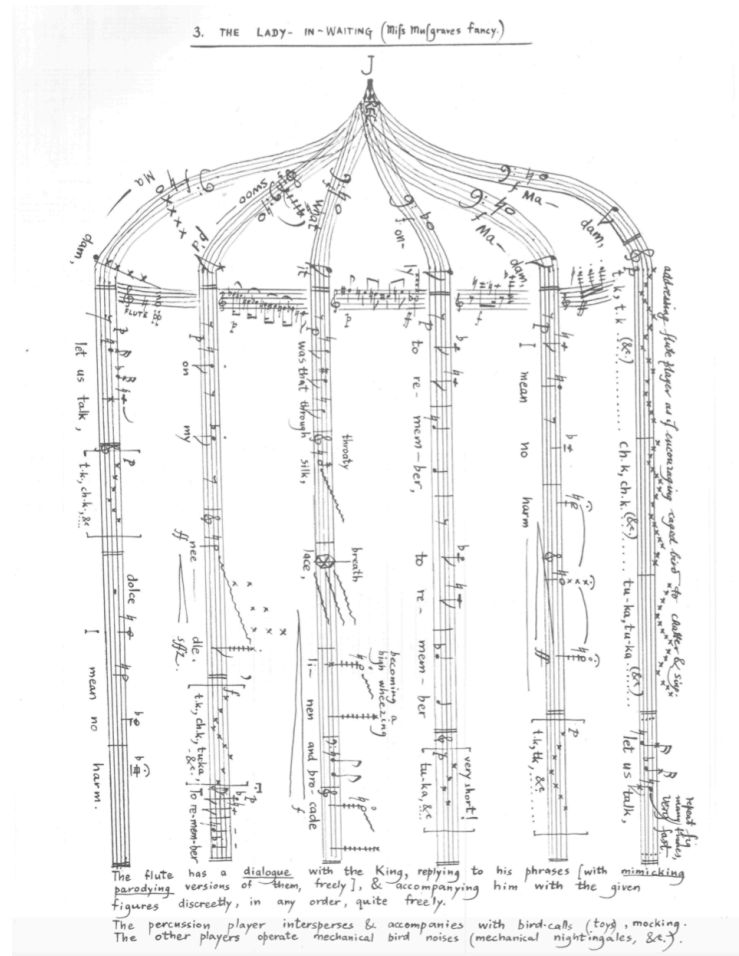
Authority rejects vulnerability at all costs – exporting it onto others through both symbolic and material methods.

One such method of delegating vulnerability is entrapment, or caging. While there are many means through which authority traps its subjects, cages are of particular importance in both *Eight Songs'* portrayal of the mad king and in Trump's spectacle as they are not left to metaphor. In *Eight Songs*, performers are meant to play as songbirds while literally caged (Davies

1). As birds in birdcages, the

instruments are forced to sing, to

perform according to the king's whims, enacting otherwise hidden components of biopolitical power. The cage is not a space of safety, or protection, but instead ties them to his side, making visible the precarity of his subjects. It is upon them that he projects his own vulnerability and reclaims his authority. Karl Steel faces this function of animal subjects in his work *How to Make a Human* when he claims that "confronted with their own worldly weakness, confronted with



3 Image: Third Song Birdcage

the certainty of death, humans recall their domination of animals and find in this domination a guarantee of human rationality and immortality" (33). Both the performance and the score itself expose this reality in its most infamous moment within the third song. The voice of the king structures the bars of the bird cage while the other voices (reduced to noise) flit about pointlessly within his narrative, an insubstantial accompaniment (see figure 5). The cages make material the authority of the king.

Caging others as an act of authority colored Trump's demagogic rhetoric from the beginning of his 2016 presidential campaign. The battle cry "Lock her up! Lock her up! Lock her up!" promised to imprison Hilary Clinton should he win the election as analyzed by Jocelyn M. Boryczka, in "WANTED: Hillary Clinton, Suspect Citizen." Perhaps more drastically, the symbolic cage of his rhetoric was and continues to be realized in the detention centers at the southern/Mexican border. Much has been done on the rhetoric of borders in rhetoric by scholars such as Karma Chavez, Kent Ono, D Robert Dechaine, and others. A timely interdisciplinary example comes from Ariana Sanudo-Kretzmann, in her article "Under ICE: The Bed Quota and Political Rhetoric in American Immigration Detention." Trump evoked the culturally ingrained, yet factually inaccurate, criminality of immigrants in his rhetoric (132). Sanduo-Kretzmaan claims that "This idea, that immigration and criminality go hand-in-hand, allows-indeed encourages-the government to lock up immigrants indefinitely while they await a hearing or removal from the country" (133). Not only are individuals literally locked up due to their status as immigrants – they are staged physically in jailcells, sometimes even in the orange jumpsuits assigned to criminal bodies (137). Trump, as the figurehead of the government, seems to have control over these bodies – and rather than listen to claims that these

individuals are not the criminals his rhetoric makes them out to be, he has a vested interest in constantly reaffirming their status as aberrative members of the out-group. As demagogues, both George III and President Trump must negotiate the tension between denying their own vulnerability and constantly justifying their groundless authority as in-group representatives. This irresolvable tension leads to the proliferation of paranoid rhetoric targeted at out-groups.

Paranoia

The paranoid state brought about by self-justified authority is reflected in power's mythical origin. According to James Martel in *Unburied Bodies: Subversive Corpses and the Authority of the Dead*, "In its anxiety to promote an image of power and authority that has no actual ontological basis, the [representative of the] state engages in various forms of violence, both literal and metaphorical, to assert the fact of and its right to its existence" (18). Though a logical response to this systematic precarity, paranoia is inverted by the demagogue to engender a sense a sympathy rather than resentment. Specifically, it is this valence of demagogic rhetoric that plays into stabilization of identities and thereby control. The in-group simultaneously rejects real vulnerability while claiming to be endangered by the out-group. Jeremy Engels' work *The Politics of Resentment*, though not explicitly concerned with demagoguery, clearly shows how paranoia and resentment cyclically feed on the resulting polarization for purely strategic ends. It is through the lens of paranoia that behaviors otherwise indefensibly unfounded become rational, as Engels makes clear: "Resentment is a powerful emotion that can be used, rhetorically, to refigure the relationship between self and other, citizen and citizen, in such a way that...is not just *logical*, not simply *justifiable*, but positively *righteous*" (152). When language does not relate to anything other than itself, as is

the nature of the post-truth rhetoric employed by Trump, logos is undermined by ethos and pathos (McComiskey 27). Such paranoia-driven resentment is a powerful manifestation of audience pathos that is easily manipulated by those in positions of power to encourage the demos to identify with the demagogue.

Paranoia, in this demagogic sense, depends on paradox as it intentionally inverts realities of vulnerability to justify otherwise irrational claims. The paradox of claiming authority through vulnerability is most obvious in claims to victimhood as analyzed by Michael J. Steudeman in “Demagoguery and the Donald’s Duplicitous Victimhood”. He claims that “in the most straightforward sense, the demagogue’s victimhood and strength have a complementary relationship. After all, a person has to be ‘under siege’ in order to plausibly fend off enemies on all sides” and it is this victimhood that provides “a way for his constituency to identify with him” (9). Similarly, there are many moments throughout *Eight Songs* that depend on a rhetoric of paranoia in order to reestablish a victimized in-group identity, including “my kingdom is snakes” (Davies 6), “deliver me from my people” (16), and “Do they starve you? Strike you? Scorn you? Ape your howls?” (19). One of the most infamous lines repeatedly uttered by the king reflects the unstable condition of the state through his own rejection of the madness of the state which he embodies: “I’m not ill, I’m nervous” (25). He is not mad, he is anxious; the state is not mad, it is paranoid – the denial of reality feeds an inescapable sense of anxiety and victimization, forcing action to reconfirm again and again a (non)existence.

One way to manage the paranoia is to again claim superiority by displacing vulnerability. Though King George III is undoubtedly under the power of the system, he still makes his subjects animals, and animals his subjects, conflating their positionalities as other in order to

maintain his own privilege. In so doing, he continues the subjugation of animals, which according to Steel, “aimed to support the human system by allocating vulnerability differentially” (66). He mocks their sound as meaningless noise through his very position. Yet, in attempting to control their noise as another object of dominance, he unintentionally makes it sound, makes it music. Jacques Attali speaks to the danger of this evolution of interaction: “Music, the quintessential mass activity, like the crowd, is simultaneously a threat and a necessary source of legitimacy; trying to channel it is a risk that every system of power must run” (14). The king cannot yet must understand or control the music he himself instigated. So, in order to retain his power despite this potential rupture, he continues to subjugate the other, continually reestablishing his superiority by bringing the discourse to a sympathetic audience. In hearing the music, the audience makes his sounding *real* regardless of the distinction between the forces actually received by the various bodies. He denies the madness inherent in his possession of control, and is enabled to do so as his delusions are realized in the affectation and participation of those surrounding him.

The carrying through of delusion, by playing along with the individual’s perception, is a legitimate method of treatment for individual psychosis. Foucault touches upon this methodology in *Histoire de la Folie* (188), but it has permeated modern approaches to psychology as well, particularly in the realm of delusions resulting from PTSD as detailed by Bessel van der Kolk in *The Body Keeps the Score* and others within his discipline of applied psychology. But in the case of intentionally false post-truth discourse, participation is dangerous. Yet that is what the audience participates in - treatment – by enabling deafness in order to reaffirm delusion.

The king refuses to listen to reality, yet is paranoid of the lies this refusal breeds. He is contemptuous of his own treatment. For the king, this paranoia and mistrust of treatment manifests in the recitation in song six: “I love Doctor Heberden best, for he has not told me a lie. Sir George, Sir George has told me a lie a white, white, white, white, white lie, he says, but I hate a white lie! If you te-hell me a li-hie, let it be a black lie!” (26-27). If a white lie is one that intends no harm, then a black lie would be its opposite – speaking to the moral paradox of a “good” lie. It is easier to accept a lie that is bald-faced because it justifies the paranoia which demands the lie be told in the first place, and according to Foucault, further engenders madness as “Madness begins where the relation of man to truth is disturbed and darkened” (Foucault 104). However, it is important to note that this madness is not limited to an individual – as truth can be disturbed on a much broader level and lies can be spoon-fed to willing audiences.

Again, herein lies the danger of audience identification with irrational paranoia. Steudeman claims that Trump also encourages his audience to do just this when he “asks his audience to share his feeling that the world is unfair and set up to harm them, even if those feelings have no basis in material reality” (10). For such actors, feeling and believing are enough to make something true, even if something is categorically false. Foucault again attaches this thought process, which echoes post-truth rhetorical concerns, to the essence of madness: “Madness is the purest, most total form of *qui pro quo*; it takes the false for the true...for it needs no external element to reach a true resolution. It has merely to carry its illusion to the point of truth” (33-34). So, once processed through an irrational (often coded as emotional) lens, fiction becomes fact, making the questioning of otherwise baseless claims difficult at best,

impossible at worst. According to McComiskey “if rhetors can control the emotional foundations of their audiences’ beliefs, then they can feed their audiences any line of bullshit or fake news whatsoever, and these audiences will accept it without question” (27).

Once questioned by an “out-sider”, which is inevitable according to the paranoid psyche, the demagogue doubles down. So, it is not surprising then that Trump’s responses are colored by paranoia. He either attacks the credibility of the questioner or positions himself as a victim, or some combination of both, often in the form of outrage. According to Amy Mendes, “One prominent feature of Trump’s rhetoric is outrage. He expresses angry disbelief...Trump references over and over circumstances which he says cause a sense of shame or discontent, and promises to bring an end to them. Trump’s paranoid rhetoric is used by him to justify extreme reactions” (66). Through the prism of outrage and denial, paranoia becomes self-justifying. In accepting such reality as truth, the audience validates the demagogue as leader and synecdoche for the whole of the in-group. With an inverted reality confirmed by the support of the demos, the resulting violence of scapegoating is justified.

Scapegoating

So, the paranoia lying at the heart of the being of the state is projected away from the necessarily rational authority through scapegoating to the inaccessible and incomprehensible other. Richard Kearney offers a clear articulation of the function of the scapegoat put forth through the work of René Girard in his essay “Aliens and Others: Between Girard and Derrida”:

Girard believes that human societies are founded on myths of sacrifice. These myths operate according to a mechanism of scapegoating which has a function to transform certain targeted ‘others’ into ‘aliens’. Holding these aliens responsible for the ills and

divisions of society, the scapegoaters proceed to isolate or eliminate them. This sacrificial strategy furnishes many communities with their sense of collective identity – that is, with the basic sense of who is included (us) and who is excluded (aliens). But the price to be paid is often the demonizing of an innocent outsider: the immolation of the ‘other’ on the altar of the ‘alien’. (251-252)

In this articulation, scapegoating furthers the ends of demagogic rhetoric. The demagogue capitalizes on the function of the scapegoat to simultaneously reinforce in-group identity against out-group demonization and to evade personal accountability.

Eight Songs provides an enlighteningly problematic construction of scapegoating – as the mad king functions as both scapegoat and scapegoater. As such, the performance of *Eight Songs* constructs again the paradox of power and vulnerability, this time in the figure of the scapegoat. According to Foucault, historically the mad often served as scapegoats for socio-political preoccupations as they “would take the part played by the leper...salvation was expected from this exclusion, for them and for those who excluded them as well” (7). Serving as the receptive, pliable other, the mad in general are enabled to accept the punishments for the greater society. Ronell pushes this analysis even further, stating “the idiot has to apologize for everything because there is nothing for which he is not responsible” (216). However, due to his position as king, this claiming of responsibility is impossible; he is a failed scapegoat. While othered because of his individual madness, he is not made in-human; he claims a position of privilege and authority through the violence he displaces to the base other – the subject, the animal. In the ultimate act of scapegoating, he destroys one of his subjects.

At the climax, the king takes a violin from one of the players and destroys it. Davies frames this death as both real and symbolic, stating in the score notes that it “is not just the killing of a bullfinch – it is a giving-in to insanity, and a ritual murder by the King of a part of himself” (1). He kills the subject as an extension of himself and in so doing he enacts the foundational myth of state, biopolitical power – designating those deserving of life versus the productivity of specific death.

Wringing the neck of the bird, the subject, the violin, silences its singing; silence is death. There is great significance in King George III silencing the sounding body of the violin, because instruments hold a sacred place in the discourse of musicians, which Dr. Rosenzweig emphasized in his interview. So, the act of destroying a literal instrument in the performance is a double violation – both the real body and the allegorical body are mournable. Leppert also addresses this double-death in the iconography of a destroyed musical, and thereby sounding, body: “The musical “body” is broken; there is nothing for its case to protect. No further possibility of musical sonority exists. The end result of the noise being produced is music silenced, men fallen: symbolic death.” (XXV-XXVI). Therefore, the remnants of the violin are best conceived of as a corpse. In this capacity, the violin as a corpse speaks for the whole of the out-group.

Simultaneously, the violin as a corpse figures as the punishable body of a proven scapegoat, and the figure of the corpse sustains and justifies extant power dynamics. This self-referential, foundational violence carries specific implications for both perpetrator and victim. According to the in-group, the out-group is punishable because their function within the state process is to maintain vulnerability to mythic violence, so that the state can continue to justify

its own existence. As Derrida works through in his essay "Force of Law", it is only through this foundational violence – the ultimate act of authority – that the sovereign can claim substance. In Derrida's words, it is "Sovereign in that it calls itself and it is called there where sovereignly it calls itself. It names itself. Sovereign is the violent power of this originary appellation. Absolute privilege, infinite prerogative" (293). If the result of the violence is accepted, it validates the mythic narrative, the "infinite prerogative" of the state. But in recognizing the violence as an act of scapegoating, there is a possibility of resisting. Reading the death of the violin in this way, as supported by Martel's claims about death and othering, encourages recognizing the death as a killing of any/every other member of the out-group – a political function of demagoguery. Seeing the remnant of the violin as a mournable corpse rather than a deserving scapegoat, according to Martel, disrupts the state's assumed ethos: "Coming up against a form of materiality that is impossible to deny (given the corpse's rotting, dreadful aspect), state authority is exposed as empty and void. In other words, the nothingness of the corpse, the way it is a marker of loss and death, exposes the nothingness of the state and other forms of projected authority in a way that little else could." (5). However, *Eight Songs* complicates this path of resistance by showing that the individual madness can be leveraged to evade such accusations. While committing violence against the scapegoated other, the king himself simultaneously functions as a scapegoat for the state. As he disguises the mythic violence fundamental to the state, the killing of the single subject, the single violin, can be written off as a result of his individual madness rather than a reflection of a fundamental component of the power he represents, while still serving the ends of that power.

Violence inherent to and springing from Trump's rhetoric is similarly excused through scapegoating. Within itself, his demagogic rhetoric assumes and justifies scapegoating. As Stuedeman claims, "[i]n the end, Trump's appeal to victimhood rationalizes virtually any act of violence against the out-group. After all, the demagogic logic goes, they would kill us if they had the chance" (11-12). This rhetorical strategy does more than solidify in-group and out-group identity. According to this formulation, Trump is not culpable for violence because it is treated as a necessary response to protect the in-group; such violence is just, even moral, and enacted against bodies deserving violence. This feeds into the "Trump Effect", first articulated by the Southern Poverty Law Center and, which McComiskey defines as "the material and social results of successful post-truth rhetoric" including "anger, fear, angst, and violence" (33). This is perhaps most obvious in the resurgence of public performances of white supremacy (36) which has resulted in at least one recognizable death, that of Heather Heyer during the Charlottesville conflict. However, he is not held responsible for these effects – instead responsibility for enacting the violence is delegated to one-off, individual perpetrators. Additionally, Trump's assumed paradoxical ethos as "outsider" allows the system that he represents to deny culpability for his rhetoric and the violence it engenders. He, like the mad king, becomes a scapegoat for behaviors stemming from real systematic injustices materially exploited yet politically ignored by those he represents. Jennifer Wingard clearly describes this phenomenon in "Trump's Not Just One Bad Apple: He's the Product of a Spoiled Bunch". She claims "as long as Trump is the one making the racist, sexist, and discriminatory statements, the GOP also have plausible deniability. You see, it is Trump, the shocking, loose-cannon president, who says those things. Ostensibly, he does not represent the core values of the Republican Party...he is

supposedly a ‘bad apple.’ ...a form of scapegoat where individual perpetrators or used to let a larger group off the hook” (49). So, if neither the system nor the man can be held accountable for the cyclical violence of demagogic rhetoric, where can we find the capacity to change?

A Return to the Real

We cannot assume that the demagogues at the center of these dramas will change – such an assumption can only be damaging. What can change, however, is the audience. When the audience swallows the bullshit of demagogic rhetoric, it becomes complicit in the lie (McComiskey 12). The audience is complicit due to the very act of watching. Making this culpability explicit is a function of performance art, which is designed to implicate both the materiality and performance of the body. Though speaking of a performance by the artist Gina Pane, Herbert Blau’s analysis of audience participation is critically insightful: "If you watched it you were complicit, and complicit, moreover, with more than the suffering there" (236). The “more” is the world beyond the stage. It is not an isolated or random act, but a reflection of the rhetorical environment in which it is witnessed.

Viewing *Eight Songs* in such a way affords us an opportunity to learn and practice such critical engagement; there is an inherent distance in a performance that is literally staged, so there is less risk in critiquing the reality that is constructed. Yet the medium of music, particularly when uncomfortable, discordant, and disruptive, invites the audience to critically engage with and continually return to its message. In this way, sound is inherently paradoxical. As Abbate makes clear, music “like any form of theater, any temporal art...traps the listener in present experience and the beat of passing time, from which he or she cannot escape” (53). Yet, it is not lost after the moment of resounding, but echoes both literally and metaphorically,

a capacity of music discussed by musical historian John T. Hamilton (84-116). It is in this echo that the message transcends the temporal limitations of a singular performance, just as the violence of the state transcends a singular death. A violin has been torn apart with every staging of *Eight Songs*, and will continue to be destroyed incalculably into the future. The audience is not allowed to leave until the king first steps off the stage. Even as the king walks away (doomed to eternal madness – as is the state he represents), the corpse of the violin remains, dynamic and suasive. It continues to project rhetorical agency through the illusion of artificial powers to the audience that is left watching it, alone, on the stage made a vacuum. They are left with body of the destroyed violin. It is in this moment that they are invited to identity with the body of the scapegoated out-group: no longer appealed to as in-group members, but instead regulated to the out-group, identifying with the corpse and, in this way, also punished.

Recognizing this vulnerability represents an opportunity to return to the real – to reject the mythic narrative put forth by the demagogue, to spit out the bullshit. It is clear that the king as an individual does not receive punishment for his action beyond his return to isolation. The killing of the out-group, despite the obvious immortality of killing in general, is not wrong according to the dynamics of demagoguery. We can also see this in the actions of Trump, though wrong fails to be punished by evidence of the assumed failure of the impeachment trial alongside all the other failed attempts at enforcing legal culpability. But it does not have to be this way. The false reality that demagogic, post-truth rhetoric has built can, and must, be rejected, and rhetorically analyzing *Eight Songs for a Mad King* provides a path to such critical engagement. Doing so will enable the audience to recognize their capacity to force change.

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