DEEDS CHRONICLED IN HELL: THE POETICS OF DRAMATIC HISTORIOGRAPHY IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

By

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship of Shakespeare's history plays to the historical imagination of early modern England.

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History is the most pleasing theatre imaginable; for there a man learns for himself at the expense of others, there he can see shipwrecks without fear, war without danger, the customs and institutions of many nations without expense. There he descries the origins, means and ends and the causes of the growth and downfall of empires, there he learns why some princes reign in tranquillity and others are burdened with many troubles, some flourish through the arts of peace, and others by valour in war, some spending lavishly without profit, others sparingly and with dignity.

—Giovanni Botero

Happiness, whether in business or private life, leaves little trace in history.

—Fernand Braudel

To Samantha.

Contents

Chapter 1

The abstract (and brief chronicles of the time)

> It certainly seems that Shakspeare's historic dramas produced a very deep effect on the minds of the English people, and in earlier times they were familiar even to the least informed of all ranks…Marlborough, we know, was not ashamed to confess that his principal acquaintance with English history was derived from them; and I believe that a large part of the information as to our old names and achievements even now abroad is due, directly or indirectly, to Shakspeare.
>
> —Samuel Taylor Coleridge

When Hamlet flatters the visiting players as the "abstract and brief chronicles of the time," whose ill report does more harm than a bad epitaph, he does more than evoke the historiographical function of theater by slyly referencing one of Shakespeare's most celebrated dramatic genres. Although the figuration of the players as "chronicles" is a knowing nod to the history plays that so dominated the early English stage, it is also an extension to the theater of the Renaissance poet's claim to the power of immortalization. History was often celebrated in the Renaissance, in accordance with Cicero, as "truly the witness of the times, the light of truth, the spirit of memory, the teacher of life, the messenger of antiquity."[1] But this is a commentary on history as an abstract discourse about the past, history in general. Hamlet's remark suggests that, in appropriating this discourse for dramatic presentation, the dramatist-poet imbues his own historical text with poetry's capacity to sublimate particular circumstances into general truths. Shakespeare, in this fashion, yokes history and poetry together, suggesting that poetry—specifically, the poetry of the stage—is what breathes life into history. Living performers literally perform the parts of historical actors, but the dramatic-historiographical text itself lives on, too, immune to the obsolescence and supersession to which non-dramatic, non-poetic historiographies inevitably succumb. History, in other words, supplies the tenor of this dramatic memorializing while poetry provides the vehicle. Hamlet admonishes Polonius to treat the players well, lest they tarnish his reputation through their performances and lest their performances

be captured into text (an ironic threat since Polonius is himself a theatrical construct). A performance is a poetic act in motion, after all, and a historical performance that raises the dead from the past can manipulate their representations on behalf of the future.

When the "chronicles of the time" are given parts to play from the actual chronicles of history, Hamlet's rebuke acquires added resonance. A fictional scenario performed theatrically does not threaten posterity, but our conception of the past is indeed at stake when actual figures from history are rendered in drama—are, in effect, made fictional. Although the distinction between *fabula* and *historia* had been recognized well before the early modern period, there was, as yet, no agreement on where exactly the dividing line should lie. Whether true or not, history shared with fiction among many thinkers the obligation to at least be morally useful. While historical investigation became increasingly oriented toward the criticism of original sources, standards were inconsistent and poetic material was not discounted on the basis of form any more than historical episodes were for being patently impossible. The Christian valence of history remained in the background, as well. To some extent, as pointed out by Peter G. Bietenholz in a discussion of Erasmus (one of few contemporary skeptics about the veracity of ancient myths), history was like fiction, in that both were related to stagecraft: while *fabulae* were like the stories enacted in plays, *historiae* were performed on the universal stage of God. As products of human invention, "both terms shared a fluid quality of truthfulness; both might involve flattering and lying, and both might reveal an abyss of profound meaning'' (**Bietenholz**). As far as plays themselves were concerned, English historical drama evolved coterminously with the rediscovery of the ancient histories that would go on to redefine historical thinking throughout early modern Europe. Shakespeare's kings and Caesars were storming across the stage at exactly the same time that Justus Lipsius was promoting Tacitus throughout the intellectual circles of the continent.

Universal history of Polybius vs. the tragic, psychological Tacitus (rediscovered drama evolved at a time when history was being redefined by the rediscovery of actual histories, and by the circular logic that true histories were to be verified based on their antiquity

The personages depicted in a play might have been real, that is, as might the scope of their activity, but the rendering of history into drama transforms disinterested facts into an artificial representation: a work of art that may be aesthetically astute or intellectually stimulating but, unrestrained by objectivity or accuracy, remains prejudicially selective. It is in this vein that many early modern writers complained about the theater, that its performances were lies precisely because they involved actors pretending to

be other people. When theatrical actors imitated historical actors, these polemicists could have judged the threat greater still, a contamination of England's sacred national memory if not of truth itself. They would not have been so incensed by the theater, however, had its fictions not been so effective. As a part of the era's historical discourse, the history play, specifically, was arguably much more effective in capturing the public imagination than the chronicles and classics from which they were derived (though, as I will argue below, early modern histories could be just as "poetical" as their dramatic representations if not as viscerally compelling). In the plays, as opposed to the historiographies, characters, personified by roles in the texts and ventriloquized by body doubles on stage, speak directly for themselves and directly to their audiences. Dramatists caricature their subjects with words and actions that were never exactly theirs, and actors infuse their parts with idiosyncrasies, recognizable personalities, psychological fullness—indeed whatever extra-historical flourishes they choose. Early modern drama related history not through detached narrators, the here-say of old documents, or even second-hand speeches, but through vivid representations of those who lived it, who, living again on both page and stage, indulged readers and audiences alike in their desire, coveted as much by Renaissance humanists as modern New Historicists, to speak with the dead.[2]

The driving conceit of historical drama, of course, is that its dramatis personae did actually live. It is a conceit necessarily borne in mind by readers and audiences of plays and particularly vulnerable, therefore, to exploitation by playwrights. This was especially the case in England at the turn of the 17th century, when the subject of history was much in vogue and history plays themselves extremely popular. Since early modern history writing tilted more toward moral exemplarity than objectivity or evidence-oriented argumentation, playwrights had enormous latitude to dramatize the past without having to pay obeisance to accuracy or verisimilitude. The national history of England—increasingly a source of identity and pride—was even more labile. A discourse still in the early stages of its articulation, the writers of the time freely shaped it into whatever form they needed. If there is merit in Hamlet's praise of the players, it is as much because of its accurate assessment of the theater's opportunistic impact on the historical imagination of the period as it is a channel for the self-praise of a successful historian-dramatist.[3] Shakespeare implies that actors, and by extension the personages they dramatize could justly claim to be historians, "chronicles," in their own right: "so long as men can breathe or eyes can see," that is, so long lives the account of history created by his plays. It is perhaps ironic that he was correct not because traveling bands of actors would remain England's primary vehicle of information dispersal, and not because poetic lines are

figuratively immortal, but because his works, and the historical ones not least of all, were in fact printed and ultimately pored over with as much fervor and editorial scrutiny as any actual chronicle.

This dissertation argues that the early modern theater had a particularly influential role in crafting the public understanding of the past and that the history play was a vital constituent of the historical imagination of early modern England. My argument is based on the following premises:

1. The literary culture of early modern England, specifically at the turn of the seventeenth-century, reflected a burgeoning interest in historical matters in the society at large, but the idea of history was also flexible and open to broad interpretation, on the one hand, and calculated exploitation on the other, making the methods of history seem much like those of poetry.

2. History plays, at the same time a cause and result of this expansion of the historical mentality and its poetic quality, were among the most popular products of the theatrical world, both as performances and as printed publications.

3. The close alliance of history and poetry as genres and the availability of historical "content'' to poetic "form'' meant that these plays were themselves a legitimate form of historiography, neither universally dismissed as fictional contrivances nor perceived as merely representations of some prior historical truth.

4. As popular historiography, these plays participated in the elaboration of the "historical imagination'' that was beginning to spread throughout early modern society, and their usefulness for gauging the contours of this historical imagination stems from their unique status as "performance-texts,'' variable theatrical productions that emerged as equally variable printed texts, striated by the cultural consciousness of their audiences and readers and by the entire panoply of theatrical practices and contexts in which that consciousness was embedded.

5. Insofar as history was supposed to be useful and inasmuch as printed books were "used'' by their readers, plays were also subject to pragmatic uses, even if those uses were less about annotation and textual repurposing and entailed more diverse, and more nebulous, modes of reception and dissemination.

The history play combined drama's sensitivity to the role of language in fashioning reality with the uniquely "writable" [4] quality of early modern historiography to supply to readers and audiences a

uniquely illuminating and affective encounter with the past. Rather than specifying the historical context of a particular form of literary activity or assuming the priority of historiography to poetry in a society's articulation to itself of its past, I wish to propose instead a specifically literary context for the historical consciousness of the period. While this may look, in part, like a recursion to Sir Philip Sidney's own elevation of poetry over history, my intention is rather to treat the writing of history itself, contrary to Sidney's low opinion of it, as a practice no less informed by the methods of poetry and the sensibilities of poets than poetry itself. The heyday of Shakespeare's interest in historical topics, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, happens to have been a singularity in the development of historical discourse. A newly nationalistic England had begun to take its own history seriously even as, or perhaps because, it clung to the myth of its historical exceptionality, but before history itself became a discipline in the modern sense with methodological standards, disinterested analyses, and endowed university chairs. Secondarily, by focusing on three plays—*Richard II*, *Coriolanus*, and *King Lear*—I demonstrate the relevance of my thesis to a cross-section of the most prominent historical modes: historical, classical, and mythical. These plays form a discernible arc of development in Shakespeare's own historiographical project, as well, his career as a dramatist having been particularly concerned with the relationship between past and present. In elaborating this argument, I have drawn on insights gleaned from work on the nature of historical discourse, on the historical culture of early modern England, and on the history of books as it pertains to reading practices pertinent to plays and playgoing. In addition, and in keeping with the literary orientation of this project, I consider the formal qualities of these plays as the working out, in poetic language, of a kind of historical thinking rather than second-order representations of an a priori rationale or set of expectations about history in the abstract. That is, the case I want to make is that the formal features and linguistic characteristics of Shakespeare's history plays have as much to do with his inferences about the meanings of history as their generically historical content. Obviously, early modern people thought many different, often contradictory things about history—what it was and what counted as true history or not—so it is impossible to establish a concept of history as either a firm ground the dramas built on or as a definitive discourse toward which they thrust. What the dramas do manage to represent, however, is the capacity for a historically-inflected imagination to hold contrasting positions and incompatible beliefs simultaneously. History plays were in a unique position to capture this uniquely heterogenous quality of historical thinking in early modern England, its multiple voices and the multifarious uses to which it could be put.

I have chosen to concentrate my efforts on Shakespeare not merely because he wrote more history plays than any other contemporary playwright, but since the extant body of his work in historical drama, and what I am including in that category, spans an exceptionally lengthy period of time during which we can trace his thinking about history and its relevance to the milieu in which he wrote. An unexpected argument in favor of Shakespeare as the primary example of dramatist-historian rests, ironically, on the extent of his collaboration with other writers working in the theater. While it is convenient, as it will be for me, to speak of "Shakespeare" as the author of these plays, it is perhaps closer to reality to regard his authorial function as an editorial convenience, a symbolic substitute for the host of compositional contexts and practices that went into the creation of any dramatic work in early modern England. Some of his earliest plays, as attribution studies have shown, were very likely co-authored, and a number of these are history plays. And while such studies argue that Shakespeare himself appears early on to have dispensed with this practice until the end of his career, we can never be sure exactly how much of his plays were his work alone. So many of them exist in multiple and often irreconcilable versions, satisfying conclusions about his own particular intentions are elusive. Even if textual fixity were a possibility, and not merely a contrivance of editors, each performance itself would have represented a different "reading" of that text and a potential spur to revision. From one to another, parts could have been swapped in or out, speeches amended in advance or extemporaneously, or lines simply forgotten. Also, the full texts of many plays were too long to ever have been performed in full. They would necessarily have been cut down or even excerpted, depending on the nature of the venue, the mood of the censors, the expectations of the audience, and the indeterminate, unpredictable whims of casts and crews. And this is to say nothing of their reception, whether by audiences at different performances or readers of different published editions. Furthermore, Shakespeare does not even appear to have been particularly concerned with print publication, so often the desideratum of literary analysis, at least of his plays.[5] The concept of authorship being so different then, if it existed at all, he probably did not regard them as entirely his own, either as creative works or personal property. The characters he devised were not simply the idols of his imagination, after all. He wrote them as parts for specific members of his company (as partly indicated by the careless prompting of actors as opposed to the characters they portrayed in some of the plays, e.g. "Will Kemp" for Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*), and the contingencies of performance meant that his colleagues and business partners were as much involved in the production of his dramas as he was himself. In fact, his company owned the play scripts and most likely weighed in on their development. Why shouldn't

they be considered as much "authors" of them as Shakespeare? When the scripts were eventually passed on (or leaked) to publishers, the publishers took over the copyright, as it were, since they owned whatever they printed. The usual practice of these publishers, when they printed plays, was to ascribe "authorship" to the companies that produced them, not the playwrights who happened to supply the words. If they mentioned Shakespeare's authorship at all, it was to sell more copies, not because the printed works in any way represented a final and ideal text handed down by him to posterity.[6]

However much stock our modern notions of authorship place in the fantasy of Shakespeare's intention, his plays were, in their own time, a far more open medium than has until recently been allowed, inscribed by all the social practices of the theater and by the social pressures of theatrical production. It is for this reason that his dramatic histories occupied such a distinctive position in the early modern historiographical landscape. Inasmuch as all early modern plays both catered to and educated popular taste, the history plays reflected as well as shaped the Renaissance obsession with the past and the pastness with which the present was felt to be imbued. This was partly a function of the popularity of the theater and partly a function of the ascendency of historical discourse, in general. Within the gap between nostalgia for a lost cultural origin and the recognition of the lingering traces of that origin was the anxious anachronism by which the Renaissance has so often been defined—anxious because the past lived on in the present as a reminder of what could not be recovered and what could not hope to be its match. Although the awareness of historical difference did not necessarily appear suddenly in the Renaissance, it did evolve into an issue of markedly greater intellectual interest as texts became newly available and a self-selected, international community of scholars began tentatively to rebuild the classical legacy. Both the quantity and quality of historical writing, as well as its critical rigor, certainly surpassed anything that had come before.[7] Moreover, history had become, by the early seventeenth century, a substantial component of the imaginative life of the nation and not purely a scholarly matter. Any reading of the early modern English history plays must contend with these problematics. What these complications engender, however, are not obstacles to arriving at authorial intentions or historical/ideological representativeness, but a critical sympathy for the kind of intellectual struggle that historical topics precipitated in the early modern period. Coming from a textual tradition that was gradually losing both its authority and the reassurance that came with it and venturing into new terrain where little was known for certain and there were more questions than answers, the people who attended and read history plays did so to gain some purchase on where they might be headed. Indeed, I think these plays present an opportunity for considering not what

"Shakespeare" thought but what sort of historical thinking they, for lack of a better word, channeled. They were, as both performances and printed literature, an important outgrowth of a society starting to think about history in creative, if not quite recognizably modern, ways.

As a way to consider the history play's treatment, through language, of its historical subject, I think it is useful to regard early modern history as a species of poetry. It is not, obviously, a mode of writing that necessarily employs meters and stanzas, rhythm and rhyme, though it sometimes did. Rather, it is the product of the same poetic inclination that colored so much of the period's writing, whether that writing positioned itself as "poetical'' or not. Poetry, in the sense I mean here, is not simply writing in the form of verse or even just writing that is avowedly "fictional,'' as Sidney defines it, but an attitude toward writing that accepts that 1. all writing, including historiography, is "made'' by writers and its materials adapted and shaped by them in a "poetic'' fashion and that 2. the character of such writing may be ironic with regard to its formative processes but is not, on that account, directed solely toward artifice or deception. The sort of writing that we find in early modern histories, including dramatic histories, may evince a self-consciousness about its narrative strategies but can nevertheless be sincere in its explication of a certain kind of truth. I am not suggesting, that is, that early modern writers approached their task with the same detached cynicism as our own, post-structuralist attitude toward the text, an attitude that presupposes a text's inevitable rhetorical undoing of itself. They were capable of their own forms of cynicism, to be sure, but their appreciation of language's slipperiness combined an indulgence in its polysemous variety with a recognition of its limitations that was canny but not resigned: they may have found it necessary to constantly revisit and replenish their representations of the "truth,'' but they did not have any such concept as the illimitable circularity of all utterance that they stopped aiming in that direction. What I want to argue instead is that poetry supplied Shakespeare with a semantics of understanding for the interpretation of history. The poetic process at work in his dramatic historiography was more than a process of appropriation whereby a distinct literary genre has poured into its thematic shell the hearty sustenance of an equally distinct historical one; likewise, Shakespeare's plays were not simply versions of history, adaptations of the real thing, or fanciful dramatizations everyone knew to be false. Poetry, rather, is the means by which Shakespeare's plays worked to give history meaning. Though they were certainly interpretations of available source materials, they would not necessarily have been received as anything other than true and accurate. The boundaries of historical understanding he would have shared with his audiences and readers were different than they are now, and the definition of historical truth much more

flexible than even subsequent decades would allow. Strict standards of evidence did not exist, and the protestations of individual scholars, however ahead of their time they may have been, had as yet little influence on popular mentalities. Since the aims of history and poetry remained so similar, even if they were not always formulated as such, they borrowed freely from each other; as usual, in the Renaissance, discretion and credulity could coexist happily. And at a time when the past's primary value was in its applicability to matters of present concern, Shakespeare's method was to use history to practice his ideas in ways no less legitimate than would-be councilors of state, who gave wings with history to their own flights of poetic fancy.

My intention here and following is not to argue that history is poetry and poetry is history, as if distinctions do not matter and as if early modern writers had no sense of or opinions about their differences, but rather that their practical uses of the terms, as well as the overlaps in their perceived utility, means that neither in its early modern manifestation is prior to the other. The very fact of their family resemblance surely made any attempt to define one in terms of the other (even in opposition) an exercise in exactly the sort of rhetoric from which they both descended. I bear in mind throughout Sir Philip Sidney's remark that "many times [the historian] must tell of events whereof he can yield no cause; or, if he do, it must be poetically"(Sidney 36). This is more often than not the case. If the terms were not exactly used interchangeably, the debate over the relative merits of history and poetry, which goes back to Aristotle and was continued by Renaissance scholars, indicates their common intellectual heritage and close semantic relationship.[8]

What is history?

The analysis of history strives to distinguish between history as the practice or conceptual framework of a historian and history as the object of study, a content that appears neutral as to that framework. The methodology, however, is inseparable from the object of its analysis, because they are mutually deterministic, the one setting in advance the parameters for the interpretation of the other. That is, history does not, like philosophy, advance abstract and universal propositions; the arguments of historiography rest on some purported basis of facts or data—the materials of investigation—however mediated by subjective processes of selection, which delimit the scope of its scrutiny inasmuch as their arrangement is itself determined by the procedures of that analysis. In his famous essay on the subject of history, E. H. Carr writes that history is neither "a hard core of facts surrounded by a pulp of disreputable interpretation" nor "a hard core of interpretation surrounded by a pulp of disputable facts" (Carr 23–24) but "a continuous

process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past" (30). Going further along these lines, Paul Hamilton notes the opening that skepticism about the truth claims of historiographic rhetoric creates for literary criticism:

> Even after we as readers have ceased to be convinced, looking back at dated historical interpretations, what we notice are the master-tropes employed, the strategies for persuading us that evidence is being used in the proper sense, the mechanics of articulation. The justification of an interpretation is lodged in its expression. Explanation and historiography, history and its writing, appear to have become the same thing. (Hamilton 18)

While Carr's definition can serve just as well for literary criticism as for history, it aptly describes the no less dialectical process inherent in the poetic rendering of history. Hamilton merely collapses a distinction that, for early modern writers at least, was tenuous at best. According to Michel de Certeau:

> History is not an epistemological criticism. It remains always a narrative. History tells of its own work and, simultaneously, of the work which can be read in a past time. Besides, history understands the latter only as it elucidates its own productive activity, and reciprocally, it understands its own work through the set of productions, and the succession of productions, of which this history is itself an effect. (Certeau 43)

Though lacking the sophisticated methods and metrics of inquiry since developed by historians, particularly in the scientifically-oriented twentieth-century but no less impressively by their immediate successors in the seventeenth, writers of and on history contemporary with Shakespeare would have recognized the broad outlines of this problem. They could have asked, as we continue to, "What is history as distinguished from other kinds of writing, and what is it good for?" The content of history in early modern Europe would have been unanimously agreed to be the corpus of Greek and Roman historians. The usual method of analysis would have been to mine it for morally edifying exempla. This, at least, was the starting point for any humanist writer. Toward the late sixteenth-century, an energetic wave of writers began rethinking the means and aims of historiography. They did not subscribe to a unified program, however, and past models mingled freely with the latest thinking. Even myths and forgeries had a place in the understanding of what counted as history. As William Camden argues, the fiction that a people is descended from a noble race is useful, because it at least implies the importance of virtue.

"History is truly the witness of the times, the light of truth, the spirit of memory, the teacher of life, the messenger of antiquity."[9] We also find this exact sentiment expressed in the commendatory poem that prefaces The History of the World by Sir Walter Raleigh, who translates it as "Times witness, Herald of Antiquitie, / The light of Truth, and life of Memorie" (Raleigh N. pag.) historia magistra vitae "Until the

eighteenth century, the use of our expression remained an unmistakable index for an assumed constancy of human nature, accounts of which can serve as iterable means for the proof of moral, theological, legal, or political doctrines. Likewise, the utility of our topos depended on a real constancy of those circumstances implying the potential similitude of earthly events. If there were a degree of social change, it occurred so slowly and over such a period that the utility of past examples was retained. The temporal structure of past history bounded a continuous space of potential experience" (Koselleck, *Futures Past* 28).[10]

(compare Collingwood and Grafton, What was History? who points out that not everyone bought this). For the decline of the *ars historica*, see Grafton, *What Was History?* 189–254. Practical history never entirely died out, however. Bolingbroke, in the eighteenth century, was still defending it as history's principal purpose in incendiary terms: "That the study of history, far from making us wiser, and more useful citizens, as well as better men, may be of no advantage whatsoever; that it may serve to render us mere antiquaries and scholars; or that it may help to make us forward coxcombs, and prating pedants, I have already allowed. But this is not the fault of history: and to convince us that it is not, we need only contrast the true use of history with the use that is made of it by such men as these. We ought always to keep in mind, that history is philosophy teaching by examples how to conduct ourselves in all the situations of private and public life; that therefore we must apply ourselves to it in a philosophical spirit and manner; that we must rise from particular to general knowledge, and that we must fit ourselves for the society and business of mankind by accustoming our minds to reflect and meditate on the characters we find described, and the course of events we find related there" (Bolingbroke 47–8).

Much ground between the Ciceronian "magistra vitae" Sidney: "bare was" "the historian in his bare *Was* hath many times that which we call fortune to overrule the best wisdom. Many times he must tell events whereof he can yield no cause; or, if he do, it must be poetically" (Sidney 36).

Hayden White, Metahistory:

"In this theory I treat the historical work as what it most manifestly is: a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse. Histories (and philosophies of history as well) combine a certain amount of "data," theoretical concepts for "explaining" these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past. In addition, I maintain, they contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic, in nature, and which serves as the pre critically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively "historical" explanation

should be. This paradigm functions as the "metahistorical" element in all historical works that are more comprehensive in scope than the monograph or archival report." (White ix)

Spenser's forms of history:

"The long-established argument for the Renaissance recovery of such concepts as 'anachronism', 'awareness of evidence', and 'interest in causation' holds within it an important element of truth: irrefutably, late sixteenth-century England was gradually moving towards a new understanding of its distant past. On the other hand, what such accounts of progressive struggle find more difficult to convey is the simultaneous highly diverse picture presented by a synchronic approach. If, in retrospect, it is possible to trace such developments as the decline of the chronicle, or the abandonment of myths about the country's Briton heritage, these conclusions were inevitably beyond the reach of late sixteenth-century observers" (Van Es 8).

The method and substance in Early Modern history writing "appear to have depended greatly on one another. Although 'truth' was something to which almost universal claim was made, it was in practice a malleable quality. For the authors of humanist histories, for instance, truth was often as much instructive or aesthetic as it was factual… The balance between competing factual, political, or moral 'truths' was–at least in part–a question of genre. The author of an antiquarian discourse (a mode that made little claim for its ethical content) could judge a story on criteria very different from those of a chronicler" (Van Es 12–13).

"Forms of history" according to Van Es varied depending on the genre of the text with no priority granted to one over another in a period of intense confusion about what counted as true history and what didn't and intense interest in dialogue with the past (vs. detached observation from a critical, clinical distance).

To read Shakespeare historically is not only to check his plots against hard evidence, interpret his plays as fantasies that concealed contemporary personages in antique garb, or determine what nexus of material and ideological culture determined the rhetorical disposition of the plays's contents, but is to consider the historical content as one component in an array of imagery that points but does not contain. "In formal imitation, or Aristotelian mimesis, the work of art does not reflect external events and ideas, but exists between the example and the precept. Events and ideas are now aspects of its content, not external fields of observation. Historical fictions are not designed to give insight into a period of history, but are exemplary; they illustrate action, and are ideal in the sense of manifesting the universal form of human

action. (The vagaries of language make "exemplary" the adjective for both example and precept.)" (Frye 84). History was something that could be explored in a speculative way, such that the distance between a historical fiction and historical fact was not a practical one.

Joel Altman proposes that Renaissance drama were "fictional realizations of questions" that raised but did not answer them, in keeping with the rhetorical education of the time, in which students were conditioned to argue on both sides of the question, resulting in the "frequently disconcerting shifts of viewpoint" characteristic of so much writing at the time. Might be used (c.f. Used Books) by audiences to construct their own hypothesis or as bases for learned conclusions or prejudiced opinions. (Altman 3)

Historiographical methods in the early modern period could be scrupulous and farcical at the same time, with no tenor of irony undermining suppositions that were more the product of ingenuity and deductive improvisation than what we would recognize as sound principles of research. This is not, however, to be critical of those writers who indulged their historical imaginations. The early modern world, after all, was itself becoming ever more historicized: there was a general thirst for history and for historical explanations that could make sense of the present by means of the past. Geography, architecture, economics, politics, institutions both secular and religious, laws, lineage, and names had all acquired for people a veneer of temporal significations. In the devising of explanations for a society that was newly alert to its own historical contingency, but had as yet neither standards for the authentication of evidence nor a practiced objectivity in approaching it, history writers groped after answers using the critical tools that were available. In so doing, they cleared as much new intellectual terrain as they reinforced bulwarks of traditional knowledge. William Camden speculates about the origin of the name of the British people much along the lines of Isidore of Seville, the Medieval encyclopedist who was canonized the same year, 1598, that Shakespeare and his colleagues were securing funding for the Globe, and whose *Etymologies* remained enormously influential:

> What if I should conjecture, that they were called Britans of their depainted bodies? For, whatsoever is thus painted and coloured, in their ancient countrey speech, they call *Brith*. Neither is there cause why any man should thinke this *Etymologie* of Britaines to be harsh and absurd; seeing the very words sound alike, and the name also as an expresse image representeth the thing, which in *Etymologies* are chiefly required. For *Brith* and *Brit*, doe passing well accord: and that word *Brith* among the Britans, implieth that which the Britans were indeed, to wit, *painted*, *depainted*, *died*, and *coloured*, as the Latine Poets describe them; and Ααἰολονώτων, that is, *having their backs pide*, *or madly coloured*, as Oppianus termeth them. (Camden, *Britain* 26)

Camden glosses this passage with a reference to the *Cynegetica*, a verse hunting treatise from the turn of the third century A.D. ascribed, probably erroneously, to Oppian of Apamea. In this work, there is a passing reference to the tracking dogs of the "Βρετανῶν αἰολονώτων," or "painted Britons" (Oppian 1.470). Isidore's own etymology of "Britain," to which Camden refers on the page following this passage, invokes the Roman poet Virgil as well as another popular myth about the origin of the British people: "Brittones quidam Latine nominatos suspicantur, eo quod bruti sint, gens intra Oceanum interfuso mari quasi extra orbem posita. De quibus Vergilius (Ecl. 1, 67): Toto divisos orbe Britannos" (of Seville, *Etymologiarum* 9.2.102); "Some suspect that the Britons were so named in Latin because they are brutes (*brutus*). Their nation is situated within the Ocean, with the sea flowing between us and them, as if they were outside our orbit. Concerning them, Vergil (*Ecl.* 1.66): The Britons, separated from the whole world" (*The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* 198). They are brutish, that is, *because* they are separated from the Mediterranean world, the civilized "orbit" of Isidore and his contemporaries. The authority of Virgil and the resemblance of "British" to "brute" will, of course, serve as the foundation for yet another origin myth, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, which is itself the origin of the story of *King Lear*. Camden puts this myth into question at the outset of his history, though he hesitates to deny its credibility entirely.

There is contained in this intertextual side excursion a remarkable encapsulation of early modern knowledge transmission. A church father, Isidore, quotes Virgil—and does so frequently—as if a pagan poet were a reputable source of knowledge; a humanist historian, Camden, himself cites an ancient poet, Oppian, to illustrate his own Isidorean free association—and only to offer an alternative, with respect, to the popular Brutus legend, which also has a Virgilian antecedent. Christian and pagan, ancient and modern: they remain to the early modern mentality part of the same intellectual culture, a culture in which truth is formed out of correspondences and inferences that take place among a web of texts all talking to one another.

Historical Culture

Dorislaus, Cambridge's first lecturer in history, relieved of his post for delivering a lecture on Tacitus that was, according to the intellectual bureaucrat and courtier Matthew Wren, "stored with such dangerous passages (as they might be taken) and so applicable to the exasperations of these villainous times, that I could not abstayne before the Heads there present to take much offense that such a subject should be handled here, and such lessons published, and at these times, and E cathedra theologica, before all the university" (qtd. in Mullinger 87)

Indeed, the history play's idiosyncratic purchase on the historical imagination of early modern England was the product of an entire culture that had itself become increasingly historical. Moral and political lessons drawn from the Greek and Roman historians had long held an honored place in the humanist's repertoire, and historical narratives and antiquarian analyses of the English past were coming into vogue.

"A historical culture consists of habits of thought, languages, and media of communication, and patterns of social convention that embrace elite and popular, narrative and non-narrative modes of discourse. It is expressed both in texts and in commonplace forms of behavior—for instance, the resolution of conflicts through reference to a widely accepted historical standard such as 'antiquity'. The defining characteristics of a historical culture are subject to material, social, and circumstantial forces that, as much as the traditionally studied intellectual influences, condition the way in which the mind thinks, reads, writes, and speaks of the past. Above all, the notions of the past developed within any historical culture are not simply abstract ideas, recorded for the benefit of subsequent generations… Rather, they are part of the mental and verbal specie of the society that uses them, passing among contemporaries through speech, writing, and other means of communication." (Woolf, *Social Circulation* 9–10) There is evidence that these changes extended well beyond the much-studied bounds of a rapidly-expanding London, as well. Much of England's medieval period housing stock, for example, was rebuilt and reequipped in the early modern period, effecting, in a country of entirely reconstructed villages, a greater degree of visual change from the past than had hitherto been experienced. See W. G. Hoskins, *Rebuilding,* 44–59.

"Historical discourse was increasingly a key part of sociable relations, including casual conversation, playfulness and courtship, human interactions that run a gamut of feeling from the sublime to the ridiculous, and which embrace an even wider range of conversational contexts from the political and economic to the sexual and drunken." (Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* 131)

"One reason it is so hard to write at large about Renaissance historiography is that there were so many competing and overlapping notions of what 'history' was or ought to be—but, at the same time, from this muddle emerged meaningful experiments in establishing ways of recording and commenting on societies changing over time." (Colie 95)

François Baudouin, Institution of Universal History and Its Conjunction with Jurisprudence (1561) (see also No Island is an Island), Jean Bodin, Method for the Easy Comprehension of History (1566) (see also

Grafton noting that Bodin's Republic was popular in England). Baudouin's indirect influence on Sidney, Puttenham, and other defenders of poetry, see Carlo Ginzburg, No Island is an Island, 26–42.

Error, ars historica, forgery

Francis Rigolot and the "cultivation of error" which has a certain aesthetic truth. Humanists interested in seeking out errors, but errors were also deliberately created for the explication of a different sort of truth. (Rigolot 1219–1234)

"In its heyday, the new art of history seemed to carry all before it. In the decades just before and after 1600, the ars historica glowed with all the prestige and charm that can invest a fashionable genre… Bliss was it, at least for Bodin, to be alive in 1580 in Cambridge, where every desktop sported a copy of his Republic—a work that he saw, for all its theoretical departures from the Method, as a formal continuation of the earlier book. Baudouin, Bodin, and the rest convinced the erudite patricians who managed universities and learned gymnasia across Europe to see history, as they did, as a formal discipline, one comparable to law in utility and status." (Grafton, *What Was History?* 192–193)

History is not a background against which anything is explained for early modern subjects—their own peculiar psychology or the present state of affairs in domestic or international politics. Identity is a nebulous word to describe a condition of being that is alleged always to be at once inherent and spontaneous and also shaped, limited, or accumulated by outside forces (these either deliberate, as in the case of propaganda or official ideologies, or unintended consequences of ideologically-driven acts—subversive, unconscious, or otherwise). There is a sense in which history is as ineluctable as a god, but history is a gnostic god hiding behind the scenes and which had to be discovered by a humanity desperate to confront reality in its empirical thingness, with no illusions. To the early modern humanists, illusions abounded in the world made up of texts in which they lived, and they saw it as their job to penetrate them, striking down shibboleths large and small, offering to unravel society's quilting points with one hand while performing the most incidental atheteses with the other. These humanists struggled with history, struggled to make sense of an incomplete historical record that had desperately to be clawed back from the oblivion of the Middle Ages against which they defined themselves.

Problem: poetry tends to cling to traditional structures of knowledge, folklore, myth, there is a kind of poetic sentimentality about these ancient structures and stories, an inherent conservatism that creates a kind of shared ground of experience that also makes it difficult to discover in literature of the period influences of the most cutting-edge contemporary thinking. There were new thoughts in the air, but people

did not want to give up the traditional ones. As with Annius of Viterbo (see Grafton on wanting to cling to these things). Also Spenser who could write The Faerie Queene using the Tudor myth but also A View of the Present State of Ireland which is wholly practical in its design. Annius of Viterbo's Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium (1498) was "the most complex, meticulous, and systematic effort of literary counterfeit ever recorded" (Stephens, *Giants in Those Days* 102).[11] (this is where I justify the popularity and publication of history plays as part of the historical-minded culture of the period)

"The rediscovery of the classical tradition in the Renaissance was as much an act of imagination as of criticism, as much an invention as a rediscovery; yet many of the instruments by which it was carried out were themselves classical products rediscovered by the humanists. Paradox, contradiction, and confusion hold illimitable dominion over all." (Grafton, *Defenders of the Text* 103)

Relationship of history to poetry

(Perhaps combine this section with Nash, above, with reference to: In the most recent Shakespeare Survey, devoted to "Shakespeare's English Histories and their Afterlives" (fix citation below), Jean-Christophe Mayer marks off the the appreciation that many of the period's writers had for the singular ability of history plays "to make the dead present through remembrance and to renew the acts of the dead by action" (Mayer 20). Mayer discovers in this appreciation a species of practical fiction-making that frequently takes the form of an "as if"' analogy. Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* he cities as paradigmatic of this sort of thinking.

Letter from Philip to Robert Sidney on poetry and history: "In that kind you have principally to note the examples of virtue and vice, with their good or evil success, the establishment or ruins of great estates, with the causes, the time, and circumstances of the laws then written of, the enterings and endings of wars, and therein, the stratagems against the enemy, and the discipline upon the soldier; and thus much as a very historiographer. Besides this, the historian makes himself a discourser for profit, and an orator, yea a poet, sometimes for ornament. An orator, in making excellent orations 'e re nata,' which are to be marked, by marked with the note of rhetorical remembrances: a poet, in painting forth the effects, the motions, the whisperings of the people, which though in disputation one might say were true, yet who will mark them well, shall find them taste of a poetical vein, and in that kind are gallantly to be marked: for though perchance they were not so, yet it is enough they might be so." (Sidney and Languet 220–221)

"If the oscillation of Renaissance writers between fact and fiction disconcerts modernity, it becomes intelligible once we recognize, in the history and poetry of that time, not distant or opposing activities but alternative and complementary means of instruction, which alike brought material beyond the real and present world to bear upon it. In the educational practices and the adult reading of the time, history and fiction reinforced each other's lessons." (Worden 77) Blair Worden. Compare with Peter Mack, who points out the interrelations among histories, conduct manuals, and romances: "Texts in all three genres reuse material from earlier writings and in turn present subject-matter for further reuse" (Mack 135). Donald R. Kelley, "Between History and System,", surveys the changing semantic field of the term history from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment. Also useful is Kelley, "The Theory of History," which discusses history's emergence from and eventual overshadowing of poetry as a discourse of truth and utility.

"His style, like that of most of his contemporaries, abounds with poetical terms and allusions bordering a little on conceit. As far as language is concerned, it has been the translator's intention to make the Britannia an English classic, calculated for every reader" (Gough vii).

The historical culture of early modern England combined the vibrancy of a cutting-edge field of inquiry with the intensity of an avant-garde artistic scene. On the one hand, the humanist recovery of the past had evolved, by the early seventeenth century, into a high-stakes debate about the purposes to which the past should be put in the present. The questions asked were many. Does history light the way to correct behavior? Does it provide the key to human motivation? Should knowledge of their origins cause us to fundamentally reevaluate our cultural practices and institutions? Does the past, in fact, have anything at all to say to a present that is circumstantially different? On the other hand, the flourishing of literary activity and the lack of clear disciplinary boundaries in which it occurred meant that writers of a more poetic inclination freely applied to the outpouring of historical scholarship their own imaginative acumen. The didactic examples of history were perfectly at home among the ideal archetypes of poetry. Moreover, they possessed equally the capacity to critique and transform their source materials and enjoyed just as equally an elevated status among the discourses of the period. No definitive claim to superiority could be made by one or the other, though such claims were made. It is a testament to the unique literary formation of the early modern period that an opposition between history and poetry could even be imagined. But historiography could be as multivocal as literature (see Annabel Patterson). and the critical capacities of both genres are hardly to be distinguished at the high level at which both of them operated.

Edward Hall introduced into English history writing elements of the dramatic, such as invented speeches, heavy-handed moralization, and dichotomous characterizations of important figures, that would go on to influence Holinshed and, by extension, Shakespeare. He was also responsible for extending the Tudor myth beyond what his source and predecessor Polydore Vergil had achieved and introduced into the popular imagination the stereotypical characteristics applied to, e.g., Henry V, Richard III, and Margaret of Anjou. According to May McKisack, Holinshed exhibits "not much in the way of literary artistry," "the lack of any selective principle governing the composition of the histories," and "lack of critical discrimination" (McKisack 117–118). Selden, a follower and correspondent of the great continental philologist and chronology Joseph Scaliger, friend of Ben Jonson, did more to advance the study of history in England to something approximating its modern form than anyone hitherto.[12]

The first part of the life and raigne of King Henrie the IIII by John Hayward (1599) based partly on Shakespeare's Richard II according to some perceptive critics.

A burgeoning interest in British history registered not only an invigorated appreciation of historical difference, as significant a paradigm shift as that was in the intellectual life of Europe, or the formative stages of nationalistic sentiment, but also the incipient availability of history as a resource ripe for all sorts of "poetic" exploitation: lawyers mythologized a pre-Norman source for English common law; heralds dreamt up lineages demonstrating the descent from Adam of their aristocratic patrons; scholars and learned editors mixed authentic with spurious sources in their struggle to piece together the early accounts of antiquity; "chorographers" yoked localized history and folklore to geographical description; and poets heaped up grand narratives in verse onto an already vertiginous pile of rehashed, mytho-historical romances.

A whole literature discussing legal theory and practice in early modern England exists. The most useful entrée for the literary scholar is probably Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England*. The classic study of the subject after Maitland remains, however, J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century*. See especially, for the present discussion, 30–55. Also useful are Donald R. Kelley, "History, English Law and the Renaissance," a follow-up, with an alternative perspective, by Christopher Brooks and Kevin Sharpe, also entitled "History, English Law and the Renaissance," and Kelley's rejoinder in the same issue. For detailed analyses of witting and unwitting heraldic forgeries and the genealogical sciences that eventually emerged to critique them, see J. Horace Round, *Studies in Peerage and Family History*. Of especial

interest to Shakespeare scholars is his chapter on the origin of the Stuarts, 115ff. An excellent overview of the heraldic literature that came out of Renaissance England's fascination with symbols of honor is available in J. F. R. Day, "Primers of Honor: Heraldry, Heraldry Books, and English Renaissance Literature." As Day points out, the fabrication of lineages was commonplace enough for Sir Thomas Smith to state matter-of-factly that any self-appointed gentleman could purchase a coat of arms from a herald, "the title whereof shall pretende to haue beene found by the said Herauld in perusing and viewing of olde registers" (Smith 28). Kevin Sharpe argues that the Elizabethan obsession with heraldry was part of a broader engagement at all levels of society with with visual signification and representation, the best-selling heraldic literature of the period playing a part in the fashioning of "an educated interpretive community, fully able to read visual symbols as encodings of values and virtues and of privilege and power" (Sharpe 359). Surely this uptick in the elaboration of symbolic imagery, though perhaps by Sharpe overstated, mingled with the verbal significations so vital to the early English theater, another prominent venue for fictional historicizing, as well. The best account of the "creative forgers" who brandished the tools of textual criticism in support of fraudulent documents of long-standing authority is Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*. For discussions of chorography and local history, see Helgerson 105ff; W. G. Hoskins, *Local History in England,* and more recently Jan Broadway, *'No Historie so Meete': Gentry Culture and the Development of Local History in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England.*

And these were often the same people. Insofar as their makers applied their imaginative faculties to existing historical knowledge in order to produce their own particular creative interpretations—embellishing some accounts while diminishing others, adding to or reducing their stock of facts and confirming, refuting, expanding, or rearranging them as they saw fit—these interpretations were, I would argue, the products of rhetorical and stylistic conscientiousness about the disposition of discourse—of, that is to say, poetic processes. I am following here those early modern writers who regard the poet as a "maker" of fictions, the truth value of which resided more in their usefulness or verisimilitude than in their factual accuracy, standards of evidence being not totally absent in the period but certainly much looser in strictness, vaguer in definition, and lacking applicability to a well-defined and institutionally policed genre of historical writing. That history or at least some portion of it tends to be fabricated is allowed, e.g., by the author of *The Arte of English Poesie*:

> "These historical men neuerthelesse vsed not the matter so precisely to wish that al they wrote should be accounted true, for that was not needefull nor expedient to the purpose, namely to be vsed either

> for example or for pleasure: considering that many times it is seene a fained matter or altogether fabulous, besides that it maketh more mirth than any other, works no lesse good conclusions for example than the most true and veritable." (Puttenham 55)

The point is not simply that Renaissance histories were mere fictions because of their reliance on principles of rhetoric shared with poetry but that both genres, by means of persuasion and exemplarity, aspired to a variety of truth not necessarily coextensive with the proofs of experience. Until Francis Bacon, there was no program of falsifiability to distinguish the natural from the human sciences, both of which began their careers as derivatives of history. On the general application of "history" to all categories of knowledge prior to the Enlightenment, see Arno Seifert.

Though much early modern historical writing would persist in reputation and was indeed a significant part of the flowering of Renaissance letters, the true "de-poeticizing" of history, instigated by the cultural ascendance of a more trenchant intellectual skepticism, would require the intervention of a later, more avowedly empirical age.*4* The historical work of Francis Bacon is a commonly cited terminus a quo, but the real breakthroughs did not take place until the later seventeenth century, when Shakespeare's works themselves became subjects of scholarly inquiry. Until the current shifted in that direction, the difference between history and poetry as kinds of writing was fine enough to advantage reflection on the mutual, cross-genre borrowings that blurred the distinction to begin with.

*4*The process was not entirely without precedent, of course, and we can perhaps recognize its first glimmers in the celebrated Pyrrhonism of Montaigne. The emergence of abstract skeptical attitudes in certain quarters, however, did not yet inspire a widespread divestment or reconsideration of long-standing opinions and prejudices, nor did they save continental Europe from the convulsions of reformation:

> "Tentation de plus en plus explicable d'ailleurs, que celle du doute, à mesure que s'écoulait le siècle. On s'apercevait que ce merveilleux épanouissement des lettres humaines, salué avec tant d'espoir, n'avait pas rendu les gens plus sages; il semblait qu'on n'apprit du nouveau que pour se défier de ce qu'on savait déjà; l'enthousiaste élan de la première génération humaniste s'arrêtait aux aspérités de la recherche, s'accrochait aux épines de l'erreur, de l'illusion, du fanatisme, se brisait contre la passion politique et la haine religieuse: après avoir magnifiquement présumé de sa puissance, l'homme constatait quelquesunes de ses incurables faiblesses." (Pintard 45)

A strong sectarian bias thus remained at the heart of most historical writing of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, compromised as it often was by, e.g., strident religious sentiment, a reliance on patronage, and state censorship. History, while benefiting immeasurably from the searching critiques of

Humanism, was hard to separate from projects of national identity and the concomitant expectations of religious and political allegiance.

History Plays

Drama turned out to be an ideal form for the dilation of the edifying themes and exemplary characters found in early modern historical matter. The histories of the Renaissance were generally concerned with expounding on universal themes, such as the inevitable fall from power of proud and mighty princes or the teleological thrust of all history toward the preeminence of a great nation—Rome in the case of Polybius, the most popular ancient historian, England in the case of his insular imitators. Such themes were hardly absent from the Renaissance stage, but the structural role they played in organizing historiography was complicated in drama by the foregrounding of character, which introduced into the understanding of history the ambiguities of motive as well as the full breadth of human psychology with all its capacities and flaws, its strengths and weaknesses of spirit. Fortune and fate would remain powerful ideas but only in the discourse of actors taking subjective positions, applying these themes to their attempts to understand their world. Indeed, drama and history seemed to discover each other all of a sudden at the end of the sixteenth century. A vogue for the new historical currents sweeping the intellectual culture of the Continent reached England at a time when that country's national identity was, in the wake of decades of religious strife, more unstable than ever. This adaptation of history for the stage was not inevitable, however.

Prior to the 1590s, drama in England consisted almost entirely of moralizations, court entertainments, adaptations of Bible stories, and plodding translations of Seneca. While savvy criticism and historical investigation can find plausible resonances among these plays with all manner of contemporary events, their formal qualities were nothing like the richly characterized, multiply plotted works to come at the end of the century. Moreover, they were never staged for mass public consumption, and there is little evidence for their impact beyond the occasion of their composition. When Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* swaggered onto the scene in the late 1580s, a new era in dramatic writing appears to have been inaugurated. The abstractions and Roman imitations of the preceding decades were suddenly displaced by a bold, humanistic protagonist and the blank verse of "Marlowe's mighty line." There were few precedents for this new style of stagecraft. The change in the topical content of English drama can be seen even from their titles. A survey of the Stationers' Register, which records the publication of these plays, turns up for the early part of the century such works as: *The World and the Child* (1522), *The Nature of the Four Elements* (?1526-7), *Temperance* (?1528), *1 & 2 Gentleness and Nobility* (?1529)—perhaps indicating an early affinity

for two-parters—*Magnificence* (?1530), *The Play of Love* (1534), *1 & 2 Nature* (?1530-1534), and *Youth* (?1530-1535).[13] *Gorboduc*, published as *Ferrex and Porrex* in 1565, is an exception and the play usually marked as the first proper tragedy, but it seems to be an early outlier and retains the strong Senecan stylization that later history plays would drop. *Jocasta*, translated from the Greek of Euripides by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh and published in 1573 is much the same (the Elizabethans, at least, seemed to prefer the Romans), though also indicative of the exceptional learning that could go into the composition of early modern plays. *Tamburlaine*, published in 1590, was born *ex nihilo* where drama is concerned. Its precedents must be located elsewhere: in the flourishing of non-dramatic poetry at the time, a new fad for both historical writing and exotic travel literature (*Tamburlaine* is, arguably, both), and in Marlowe's peculiar, tendentious genius. But Marlowe's literary achievement, however notable, was also a historiographical one. As Irving Ribner pointed out long ago, "it is sometimes forgotten… that the first part of *Tamburlaine*, the play whose overwhelming success virtually ushered in a new era in the English drama, is also a history play"(Ribner 251). The sudden vogue for and incredible popularity of history plays is probably as surprising as their equally sudden fall from fashion. But in their heyday, they did much to fix the parameters of what were previously far more amorphous genres as well as to explore the limits of what history, as a genre, could contain: it could synthesize all the others, and all the others would eventually break free from history. The history play was the site of this first experiment in dramatization by a literary culture that made its energy felt at an extremely history-oriented time. While it is easy to point out that genres meant little to early modern writers, before their dramas explored the limits of history the style of early modern English plays possessed little heterogeneity and did not engage in the sort of intertextuality that could allow a literary culture to generate identifiable categories, whether to imitate or subvert them, and all art tries to do both within its self-selected bounds.

The generic labels of most sixteenth century plays were, in fact, extremely fluid and often have very little descriptive purchase on the works they attach to. In many cases, the titles themselves were entire discursive sentences, perhaps invented by printers rather than authors in order to more securely confirm their copyrights. The titles by which we know most of Shakespeare's plays, for example, are condensed from far lengthier originals. In the earlier plays of the sixteenth century, "interlude" comes up often in the Stationer's Register to describe a work. "Comedy" is used just as frequently. "Tragedy" appears sometimes, and even "tragical comedy," a genre more usually associated with Jacobean plays, occasionally pops up. *Tamburlaine* was originally identified on its title page as "two tragicall discourses"

though it is entered in the Stationer's Register as "the two commicall discourses of Tomberlein the Cithian Shepparde" (Greg 171). Even plays published as histories might only qualify if one took "history" merely to mean "story." Shakespeare's play *The Taming of the Shrew* was published in 1594 as "A Pleasant Conceited Historie." The flurry of historical dramas that followed Marlowe's blockbuster are described in similarly elusive terms, but there is no denying the critical mass they represent. If "history play" did not achieve the status of a recognized genre until the First Folio—and even there the designation is arbitrary—there are nevertheless clear signs that playwrights were seeking to emulate Marlowe's successful formula, whether they regarded their works as histories or histories with tragic overtones, as plays depicting the falls of kings would have. And there are clear signs that the history play was at the forefront of both dramatic innovation and historical inquiry.

Far more plays were probably performed than published, but even those for which we have publication records indicates a swell in the production of dramatic historiography—performances and publications both—at the end of Elizabeth's reign: *1 & 2 The Troublesome Reign of King John* (1591); *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward the first, sirnamed Edward Longshankes* (1593); *The Life and Death of Jacke Straw* (1594); *The First part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster* (1594) (later *The Second part of King Henry the Sixt,* though not known as such until the First Folio and originally appearing before the "first" part); *The Wounds of Civill War* (1594), a play by Thomas Lodge about Marius and Sulla—Roman plays, as well as histories set among Turks, Persians, and Greeks were interspersed among the English histories; *The True Tragedie of Richard the third* (1594) (not Shakespeare's); *The troublesome raigne and lamentable death of Edward the second* (1594) by Marlowe; *Locrine* (1595), falsely attributed to Shakespeare; *The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke* (1595), printed in the First Folio as *Henry the Sixth, Part Three*; *The Raigne of King Edward the third* (1596); *The Tragedie of King Richard the second* (1597); *The Tragedy of King Richard the third* (1597), this one Shakespeare's and also demonstrating, as would the two versions of *Lear*, how familiar ground could be trodden and retrodden again; *The Hystorie of Henry the fourth* (1598), or *Henry IV, Part One*; *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* (1598); *The Scottish Historie of James the fourth* (1598); *The First and Second partes of King Edward the Fourth* (1599), possibly by Thomas Heywood and reprinted many times; *The Chronicle History of Henry the Fift* (1600), another Shakespearean remake, reduced to a pithy "Life of" in the First Folio; *1 Sir John Oldcastle* (1600), also attributed to Shakespeare; *The Second part of Henrie the fourth* (1600); *The True Chronicle History of the whole life and death of Thomas Lord Cromwell* (1602); and, of course, *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke* (1603).

With the accession of King James, the so-called tragicomedies, city plays, satires, romances, and masques began to be more popular. Though the clustering of "history" plays evident in the 1590s smooths out, the occasional edition, sometimes more biographical than historical in a broad sense, manages to achieve publication in the years leading up to Shakespeare's death: *The Tragicall History of D. Faustus* (1604); *When you see me you Know me, Or the famous Chronicle Historie of king Henry the eight* (1605); *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* (1605), *1 If you Know not Me you Know Nobody. Or, The troubles of Queene Elizabeth* (1605) and reprinted many times; *The Second Part of Queene Elizabeths troubles* (1606); *Nobody and Somebody. With the true Chronicle History of Elydure, who was fortunately three severall tymes crowned King of England* (1606); *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyat* (1607); *M. William Shakespeare: His True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three Daughters* (1608); and a play called *Troia-Noua Triumphans* (1612) indicates the legend of Britain's Trojan origins still had some currency even at the relatively late date of its publication. In addition, Sir William Alexander was able to publish three times (in 1604, 1607, and 1616) a volume of *Monarchic Tragedies*, a title suggesting the tragic valence of so much of what passed for history.[14] In its latest edition, this book contained the plays *Croesus, Darius, The Alexandrean Tragedie,* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

The sheer number of history plays produced at the end of the sixteenth century and the proportion of them that found their way into print indicate how much and how rapidly the Elizabethans were developing a robust historical consciousness and how far that consciousness penetrated the populous at large. Though many of Shakespeare's plays were first printed in quarto, the histories seem to have gotten special attention. The entirety of both tetralogies were published, as were numerous other plays with historical pretensions. The bulk of historical plays published at the end of Elizabeth's reign is testament to an interest that was not confined to a tiny, educated vanguard but that permeated society. The dramatic form, appealing as it did to the lettered and unlettered alike, was perhaps more effective than any other form of history at both communicating an interpreted body of facts and making them resonate with audiences. Plays were, in one sense, adaptations of chronologies, but they also opened up a new role for history in the consciousness of society. Brian Walsh describes how "theatrical performance emerged as a unique locus of historical work. In a sense, history plays were parasitic on written histories, but they simultaneously broke from those sources to enable new modes of historical presentation, conjecture, and interpretation" (Walsh 121). What passed for history, of course, was often itself parasitic on other histories and on the rhetorical heritage that history shared with poetry. One of the inherent strengths of drama for the presentation of

history in early modern England was its concurrent participation in the cultures of performance and print. The playhouse in early modern London set a formal constraint on the dramatic writing of the period as surely as rhyme schemes did to sonnet sequences. The conditions of performance fashioned the composition of plays, a transaction at its most basic level between authors and acting companies on the one hand and audiences on the other, much as the no less social and material conditions of manuscript circulation lay behind even the most seemingly abstract of lyrics. The content that was poured into the theatrical edifice, however, could be far more variegated than that generally allowed in the more metrically policed verse of the period. Whereas formal experimentation in poetry strictly speaking—including much of Spenser's work, the quantitative interludes in Sidney's *Arcadia*, and the songs of Thomas Campion—typically adhered to an exacting, sometimes algorithmic standard inspired by classical models, a play was freer, even if not completely liberated, to attempt the condensing into a unity of contents expounded in all the forms of literary writing then available, simultaneously shaping "the forms of things unknown" while having the resources of a rich and evolving poetics from which to draw. With neither rigorous theories nor exclusive coteries of taste to restrict it, early modern drama was free to continuously refresh and reinvent itself.

The process of converting history into drama is a poetic process. A history play is not simply a play in the genre of history but belongs to a larger category that articulates in a particular mode what a specific episode in history means. In general, history must have seemed an ideal source for dramatic plots. Chronicle accounts provided an interweaving of dull facts with famous incidents, particularly the wars and usurpations that featured so largely in Shakespeare's history plays. They also provided interesting, celebrated characters and speeches alleged to have been delivered by them. In the Elizabethan period, which saw the emergence of the historical drama, when the chronicles were converted by poetry into a fiction, tragedy was often the result. *Gorboduc*, the play usually held to be the first English tragedy, written and first performed at the very beginning of Elizabeth's reign, was based on the reign and deposition of one of England's mythic early kings. Significantly, one of its authors, Thomas Sackville, also contributed to the other great collection of tragic tales of that time, the *Mirror for Magistrates*. As a kind of a dramatic analogue, the deposed rules of the *Mirror* speak directly to us in a manner resembling a play, if not exactly respecting the fourth wall. Certainly, tragedies were as popular as histories in the late sixteenth century, due in no small part to the newly available works of Seneca, who exerted so much influence on early English tragic form. The two "genres" would soon fuse and then go on to appropriate every other style of

writing that could be incorporated into a dramatic rendering of history, into something that could bring personality, motive, and social meaning to otherwise stale accounts.

That history is home to a series of "actors" conforming to simplified types, either virtuous or villainous, was only a starting point for Shakespeare. In the theater, he could literally flesh out the slight adumbrations of history offered by chronicles and their versified reductions in order to develop, both telescopically with regard to time and expansively with regard to psychology and motive, what was in effect an interpretation. He could not have anticipated the influence his interpretations would have on subsequent generations, but it is not insignificant that he was writing for an increasingly literate audience increasingly interested in the elaboration of England's history. And that history was only then being manufactured, a nation invented from the patrimony of numerous peoples almost always in conflict. The new style of writing of histories that became such a vital influence on the Elizabethan sensibility could at the same time justify the traditional structure of that society, support its political and religious innovations, and question the authenticity of such authoritarian structures merely by making them all subject to a poetic act. What Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists did was bring historiography into collaboration with its natural interpreter: poetry. As so much history had provided matter for poetry in the past, it was only natural that the poetic energies of the early modern theater first apply themselves to the most fitting supplier of the theater of the world.

The conceit of *theatrum mundi*, that the world is a theater that enables mankind to perform a plenitude of roles, was a commonplace in early modern Europe and found its way into philosophical as well as imaginative writing. There is, of course, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's famous address by God to Adam:

> Thou, like a judge appointed for being honorable, art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine. (Mirandola 5)

A century after Pico wrote his encomium, the idea still had life, though its inherent optimism had darkened in the shadow of a divided and embattled Christendom.[15] By the time of Shakespeare's Renaissance, a Renaissance we identify in retrospect because he lived in it but that was, at the time, a period of political instability and economic hardship hardly identifiable with the late medieval prosperity of Florence and Venice, "man" had become a contemptible worm. The French humanist Pierre Boaistuau, writing in his

own extremely successful *Theatrum mundi*, saw humanity's place in the theater of the world as fallen from whatever virtue it might once have possessed:

> If we will consider man in the first estate that God created him, it is the chief and principal of Gods work, to the end that in him he might be glorified as in the most noblest and excellentest of al his creatures. But if we consider him in the estate of the general corruption spred all ouer the posterity of Adam, wee shall see him nooseled in sinne, monstrous, fearefull, deformed, subiecte to a thousande incommodities, voide of beatitude, unable, ignorant, variable, & an hypocrite. To be short, in steade of being Lorde of all creatures, he is become slaue to sinne in the which he is borne and conceyued. (Boaistuau 285)

The new, divine human being, "the molder and maker of thyself" optimistically announced in Pico's oration, becomes a degraded wretch in Boaistuau's estimation, free only to suffer the indignity of a fallen nature. The terrible price of the freedom of self-invention promised by humanism was for such writers the unleashing of the worst part of the human personality. An unmoralized history, decoupled from a providential vindication, was no guarantor of justice and offered no hope for the future. This attitude, which pervaded the literature of the time, also influenced the writing of plays and no doubt contributed to their enduring popularity, as this melancholia about the human condition would come to be marked as distinctively modern. But it was not necessarily a lesson that everyone cared to see taught. And the theaters, being places of public assembly, had a great deal of cultural power, enough for them to be perceived as threats to social order as well as public morality. The threat that drama would deviate from the traditional didactic role of poetry and show mankind as it really was and not as it could be is perhaps why some of Shakespeare's contemporaries were so aghast at what the theaters represented: a mirror of the worst vices of a depraved humanity, offering no simple lessons on proper Christian conduct and instead secreting in Machiavelli by the back door. This suggests a rather naive view of the theatrical audiences of the time, who were part of, according to Kevin Sharpe, "an educated interpretive community, fully able to read visual symbols as encodings of values and virtues and of privilege and power" (Sharpe 359). The usual, practical complaint was about the idleness of people who spent their days at the theater instead of pursuing more useful activities. [16] Between a chapter on "Scurrility or Scoffing" and one on "Cruelty," William Vaughan wonders Plato-like "Whether Stageplayes ought to be suffred in a Commonwealth?" Clearly, not everyone regarded the theater as a valuable contribution to a burgeoning new cultural scene. Vaughan thought them a waste of time that could never be recovered:

> men spend their flourishing time ingloriously and without credit, in contemplating of plaies. All other things being spent may be recouered againe, but time is like vnto the latter wheele of a coach, that followeth after the former, and yet can neuer attayne equally vnto it. (Vaughan N. pag. Book 1, Ch. 51)

Later in the same work, however, he follows convention by referring to poetry as the chief civilizer of heathens whereas stage plays he condemns for having in antiquity been dedicated to Bacchus. Drama was not, to him, poetry since it did not achieve the same ends poetry was meant to. Thomas Nash, on the other hand, found much good in the plays of the time, particularly the history plays so popular at the time he was writing:

> To this effect, the pollicie of Playes is very necessary, howsoeuer some shallow-braind censures (not the deepest serchers into the secrets of gouernment) mightily oppugne them. For whereas the afternoone beeing idlest time of the day; wherein men that are their owne masters, (as Gentlemen of the Court, the Innes of the Courte, and the number of Captaines and Souldiers about London) do wholy bestow themselues vpon pleasure, and that pleasure they deuide (howe vertuously it skils not) either into gameing, following of harlots, drinking, or seeing a Playe: is it not then better (since of foure extreames all the world cannot keepe them but they will choose one) that they should betake them to the least, which is Playes? Nay, what if I prooue Playes to be no extreame: but a rare exercise of vertue? First, for the subiect of them (for the most part) it is borrowed out of our English Chronicles, wherein our forefathers valiant acts (that haue line long buried in rustie brasse, and worme-eaten bookes) are reuiued, and they themselues raised from the Graue of Obliuion, and brought to pleade their aged Honours in open presence: than which, what can be a sharper reproofe to these degenerate effeminate dayes of ours. (Nash N. pag.)

Nash's defense of plays is so interesting because his premise is the same as Vaughan's, that poetry should be an inculcator of virtue, but he includes the depiction of "our forefathers valiant acts" as having the same worth and at least diverting the unoccupied gadders about town from even more debauched activities. Whether he is naive enough to truly regard all his forefathers' acts as valiant is hard to say, but he does see merit in rescuing them from the obscurity of unread chronicles and at least presenting them for public discrimination. Perhaps he simply has more faith in audiences to make something of their history, valiant or not, and in the dramatic arts to interpret them to their profit.

Readers vs. audiences (making a case for drama)

What made early modern plays so unique and culturally resonant a medium was their simultaneous existence as texts to be read and performances to be witnessed. Though materially ephemeral, many of Shakespeare's play scripts, in particular, enjoyed multiple printings and circulated among a literate and learned readership. And despite Shakespeare's famous lack of interest in publication, "in his own age more

editions of his plays circulated than of any other contemporary playwright"(Kastan 21)[17] This fact alone would seem to make of Shakespeare, if he were not already, a special case. Certainly he may be, or his company was, or else his works simply mark the beginning of an increased interest in published plays that would continue to increase throughout the seventeenth century, culminating in their elevation into subjects worthy of editorial emendation and commentary, themselves. Whether qualities of his writing or his choice of subject matter—and the popularity of history plays—made his works stand out, we can hardly determine. As with much else in the early modern period, it is difficult to do much more than identify certain traces which would later crystallize into identifiable cultural practices. By the time the First Folio was published, however, its editors felt confident enough about both Shakespeare's legacy and the dignity of drama that they could urge its purchasers to "Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe: And if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to vnderstand him" (Heminge and Condell sig. A3r). To the literate public of the seventeenth century, this may have seemed an incredible statement, to some even scandalous, that a book of plays should be set alongside other monuments of literary culture. Are Heminge and Condell really suggesting that plays deserve the same respect, to be read not just once but repeatedly and intently, that there is something about them that is worthy to be understood, something that would reward intense concentration and careful study? This is hardly the sort of reading practice associated with ephemera, just as a folio is hardly the form in which one would have expected ephemera to be published. What the status of Shakespeare's plays as texts to be read indicates for us is their manifest participation in the larger literary culture of the period. They were not separate from that culture for being a sometime vulgar entertainment but drew from it and contributed to its elaboration, as well. At the time Shakespeare was active, the national history of England was a foremost concern of the literary vanguard. The fictional, poeticized histories he made, therefore, have some legitimate claim to bearing out Hamlet's otherwise flip statement. But in what ways might Shakespeare's dramatic historiographies have been appreciated by their readers? In what ways were these texts used?

In their oft-cited discussion of the "goal-directed" reading practices of the Renaissance, Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton argue that early modern readers actively reinterpreted their texts to suit specific circumstances. The methods of such readers involved more than the silent appropriation and subjective scrutiny intrinsic to reading as we understand it. Jardine and Grafton extend the notion of active reading from the field of mental play into the world of practical affairs, finding that the "activity" of Renaissance readers included "not just the energy which must be acknowledged as accompanying the intervention of

the scholar/reader with his text, nor the cerebral effort involved in making the text the reader's own, but reading as intended to *give rise to something else*" (Jardine and Grafton 30).[18] The most useful texts for would-be councilors of state were, not surprisingly, the historical accounts of antiquity, which supplied ready bullion for scrupulous readers to stamp into modern currency. Thomas Blundeville, for example, dedicated *The true order and methode of wryting and reading hystories* to Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, praising him for his love of history and his desire "to gather thereof such iudgement and knowledge as you may therby be the more able, as well to direct your priuate actions, as to giue Counsell lyke a most prudent Counseller in publyke causes, be it matters of ware, or peace" (Blundeville sig. A2r). Likewise, William Camden dedicated his *Britannia* first to Elizabeth and then later to James: grand volumes of history were appropriately aimed at history's most visible actors and likeliest students. While Jardine and Grafton restrict their scope to the reading-influenced maneuvering of Elizabethan grandees—using as a case study the efforts of Gabriel Harvey to trade on his own interpretive prowess—the uncanny power of reading they identify, that it can "give rise to something else," also bears crucially on the dramatic texts of the period, out of which so much could be made by so many. Indeed, though their concern is more for the reading practices of scholars, they aver that "even in the realm of popular culture, a variety of kinds of reading were understood to take place, and such readings were not sealed off from more "serious" and "educated" encounters with the written word" (32).

The goal-directed, scholarly reading of history might have been oriented toward some specific policy or outcome, but toward what goal are the "readings" of the past found in the history plays oriented? Propaganda? Allegory? Abridgment? Critique? And what were the unforeseen outcomes of exposing such a text to the judgment of the public? What did that give rise to? Ancient works in Latin and Greek could be put to individual uses by individual readers, but the dramatic works of the English Renaissance had larger, more differentiated audiences. On the one hand, they were performances tailored to exhibition at court, in the city theaters, and in the courtyards of provincial inns. The aristocratic patrons of the acting troupes could sponsor performances for reasons of politics or taste, and the troupes themselves might try to capitalize on literary fashions or current events. On the other hand, plays comprised a published genre of literature in their own right, consumed perhaps as amusing ephemera, perhaps as legitimate reading matter complete with paratexts and glosses even before they appeared in prestige, folio editions. They were, at the same time, works that could be pored over and enjoyed as isolated objects and as events to be experienced in the moment and deeply immersed in a social, cultural, and political context. These play texts

captured in perdurable form what otherwise would have been transitory cultural moments, transforming highly localized occasions into a body of printed literature that could circulate with and play against the products of higher intellectual echelons. The frequently-published history plays, in particular, were thus woven into the quilt of the period's historiographical discourse as surely as any chronicle or chorography.

As the inheritors of a literary canon so much influenced by Shakespeare, we take for granted the legitimacy of early modern drama as an art form deserving of serious study. That one might read a play text in lieu of attending a performance might not strike us as particularly exceptional, but it would have been baffling to much of the readership of sixteenth century England. We should consider how dramatic writing transformed itself from the ephemeral substrate of occasional entertainments into a legitimate genre of writing that was not only worth publishing but worth reading intently, independently of staged productions, alongside more "serious" sorts of reading matter. The change in fortunes for drama was not entirely a slow process of elite recognition combined with gradual cultural acceptance, though. Even as they were writing and producing their plays, early modern dramatists fought for their art and promoted it vehemently. They were not satisfied with clinging to some tertiary role in the backwaters of cultural production. Using all the resources of wit and learning at their disposal, they positioned themselves at the vanguard of the period's literary flourishing. However much their contemporaries might have smiled at such presumption, hardly a generation passed before their battle was all but won and the very best of their plays were appearing in handsome folio editions complete with the imprimatur of engraved portraits and dedicatory poems. Lukas Erne argues that the printing of plays (and, according to him, Shakespeare's direct hand in it) had as much to do with their rather sudden legitimation as printed lyric poetry had on the "formation of Elizabethan poetic taste and practice" (Erne 33). I would only extend his point by adding that Shakespeare's history plays became, at the same time, a legitimate source of historical knowledge. Not everyone, of course, subscribed to this position. As the famous reprimand of Thomas Bodley, founder of the eponymous Oxford library, to his agent Thomas James indicates, plays were not universally considered to belong among the best that had been thought and said:

> There are many idle books, and riff-raffs among them, which shall never come to the library, and I fear me that little, which you have done already, will raise a scandal upon it, when it shall be given out by such as would disgrace it, that I have made up a number with almanacs, plays, and proclamations: of which I will have none, but such as are singular. (Bodley and James 219–222)

Of course, this might only represent a minority view. As we shall soon see, more than one noteworthy scholar-writer of the time found plays, if not all of them, perfectly acceptable as edifying reading material. Indeed, what would, for Bodley, have made a play "singular" enough to gain admission we can only guess at, though certain plays did make it into the collection. In a realm scant of evidence, however, the Bodleian provides a useful index to their broader cachet. When standards finally shifted in drama's favor, they appear to have done so decisively and sooner than we, and Bodley, might have expected. Stephen Orgel finds the time lag, as reflected by the Bodleian's purchases, remarkably swift:

> The library's accounts for 1623 record the purchase of a copy of the Shakespeare folio in unbound sheets, and an order for a special binding with the university's arms stamped on the cover. The library was, indeed, the first purchaser of whom we have a record—this order constitutes our earliest evidence that the book was actually in existence. It required only eleven years, and more important the publication of the folio, for Shakespeare's plays to become suitable reading for Oxford's scholars. (Orgel 5)[19]

That may be going too far, as Gerald Bentley believes that "the increased dignity which the appearance of the Jonson and Shakespeare folios brought to plays and playwrights must be seen only as a rise from an exceedingly low status to a moderately low one" (Bentley 57). The demand for players at court, see note 5 in Peter Thomson, Shakespeare's Theatre, pg. 23? But they rose to the challenge. In Shakespeare's own work, we have to search for indications of assertive apologetics on behalf of drama.

"where thousands spend the moitie of the day, the weeke, the yeere in Play-houses, at least-wise far more houres, then they imploy in holy duties, or in their lawfull callings. If we annex to this, the time that divers waste in reading Play-bookes, which some make their chiefest study, preferring them before the Bible, or all pious Bookes, on which they seldome seriously cast their eyes; together with the mispent time which the discourses of Playes, either seene or read, occasion: and then summe up all this lost, this mispent time together; we shall soone discerne, we must needs acknowledge, that there are no such Helluoes, such Canker-wormes, such theevish Devourers of mens most sacred (yet undervalued) time, as Stage-playes." (Prynne 307)

Given the extent of their publication and how often the theaters were closed, it may even be that the theater of the mind frequently had to serve, for those with the capacity, as an important substitute for the theater in the round. (See Lukas Erne, Leeds Barroll) Could the demand for drama and the scarcity of performances together have encouraged the market for printed plays and thereby their eventual elevation into artifacts of both national pride and careful study?

Shakespeare's plays might even have been read more often than performed, as the theaters were closed due to plague or politics more often than not, particularly during the Jacobean period, and that is not even including the famous plague of 1601-3 (?) when he is believed to have composed his sonnet sequence. See Leeds Barroll, 172ff.

Whatever these historical dramas gave rise to lay at the intersection of their adaptation of historical discourse and their own reception and appropriation. There is, of course, always the potential for semantic struggle, resistance, and misprision between the writing and reading of a text. In the case of drama, "reading" includes a communal component not entirely dissimilar to the public recitations of texts, devotional and otherwise, typical of the period. The occasion of the public performance is an opportunity for group identification and a collective shaping of response that is largely absent from the act of reading alone. The silent reflection of the solitary reader can, in a public setting, be either amplified or attenuated. The unreliable and suggestible nature of audiences was enough for Ben Jonson, in the "induction" of *Bartholomew Fair,* to record the appearance on stage at the Hope theater in 1614 of a "Book-holder" (prompter) and a "Scrivener" with "articles of agreement" according to which the audience, provided they remained for the duration of the performance, was contracted to agree

> that euery man heere, exercise his owne Iudgement, and not censure by Contagion, or vpon trust, from anothers voice, or face, that sits by him, be he neuer so first, in the Commission of Wit: As also, that hee bee fixt and settled in his censure, that what hee approues, or not approues to day, hee will doe the same to morrow, and if to morrow, the next day, and so the next weeke (if neede be:) and not to be brought about by any that sits on the Bench with him, though they indite, and arraigne Playes daily. (Jonson sig. A5v)

As a playwright, and notwithstanding the withering criticism he suffered late in his career, Jonson must have been particularly sensitive to the unpredictability of a text's reception. In private, a reader's thoughts have a better chance of passing over a text uncontaminated by the opinions of others. During a public performance, a general opinion is more likely to sway individual sentiment. Even worse, the reaction to a performance might influence a play's reputation once it is printed, affecting its chances to withstand comparison to its literary peers. Moreover, in the case of historical drama per se, the text is received against an existing discourse that is itself already a significant part of public intellectual exchange.

"The emergence of the author did not, as traditional narratives have suggested, coincide with the development of private and passive reading habits; instead, authors established their authority by invoking readers who would participate directly in their texts" (Dobranski 22)

Heywood, one of the greatest popularizers of historical knowledge, fed into many of his plays the knowledge that informed his chronicles.

> Do not the Vniuersities, the fountaines and well springs of all good Arts, Learning and Documents, admit the like in their Colledges? and they (I assure my selfe) are not ignorant of their true vse. In the time of my residence in *Cambridge*, I haue seene Tragedyes, Comedyes, Historyes, Pastorals and Shewes, publickly acted, in which Graduates of good place and reputation, haue bene specially parted: this is held necessary for the emboldening of their *Iunior* schollers, to arme them with audacity, against they come to bee imployed in any publicke exercise, as in the reading of the Dialecticke, Rhetoricke, Ethicke, Mathematicke, the Physicke, or Metaphysicke Lectures, It teacheth audacity to the bashfull Grammarian, beeing newly admitted into the priuate Colledge, and after matriculated and entred as a member of the Vniuersity, and makes him a bold Sophister, to argue pro et contra, to compose his Sillogismes, Cathegoricke, or Hypotheticke (simple or compound) to reason and frame a sufficient argument to proue his questions, or to defend any axioma, to distinguish of any Dilemma, & be able to moderate in any Argumentation whatsoeuer. (Heywood, *An apology for actors* N. pag.)

History and drama reinforced one another as appropriate reading matter for as long as they were held to possess similar virtues, until the dramas themselves became historical documents, privileged components of a literary-historical culture they themselves helped to promulgate, which finally came itself to reward study and understanding both as antiquities of the nation and still for the value they have in their own right, a value some few saw too at the time of their original devising.

Sallust: "Historie ought to be nothing but a representation of truth, and as it were a Map of mens actions, sette forth in the publicke view of all commers to bee examined; And therefore the predescanting opinion of the writer cannot but bring much discredite to the Action, in that hee presumeth to prepossesse the minds of Artists with imaginarie assertions, seeming to teach those, who knew better then himselfe what belongeth to such affaires, to the wiser sort, who will not he deceiued (for that he cometh to Counsel before he be called) he seemeth verie suspitious." (Heywood, "Of the choice of History, by way of Preface, dedicated to the Courteous Reader, upon occasion of the frequent Translations of these latter times" N. pag.)

This is a long way from *A Mayden-Head Well Lost*.

The Iron Age: "I presume the reading thereof shall not prooue distastfull vnto any: First in regard of the Antiquity and Noblenesse of the History: Next because it includeth the most things of especiall remarke, which haue beene ingeniously Commented, and labouriously Recorded, by the Muses Darlings, the Poets: And Times learned Remembrancers; the Histriographers." (Heywood, "To the Reader" N. pag.)

Performance

Richard Schechner, who locates the English Renaissance theater at the chronological intersection of the decline of "efficacious" performance in the medieval mold and the rise of popular entertainment (Schechner, *Performance Theory* 123). describes a communication circuit of his own: "To some degree the theater is the visible aspect of the script, the exterior topography of an interior map. Performance is the widest possible circle of events condensing around theater. The audience is the dominant element of any performance. Drama, script, theater, and performance need not all exist for any given event. But when they do, they enclose one another, overlap, interpenetrate, simultaneously and redundantly arousing and using every channel of communication" (91). Diagrammed on pg. 72

The performance text The varying influences of plays performed versus plays published is difficult to gauge. Historial dramas offered a unique window onto the historical imagination of the period partly because of the contingencies of their production. Less the products of independent, creative geniuses, they were collaborative improvisations that responded to and shaped the expectations and attitudes of their audiences. As publications, we might best consider the plays as we have received them as snapshots of particular moments of their lives. This is one way of reformulating the problem of multiple editions as one of the strengths of drama as a medium: it captures in its own inconsistent form the inconsistencies of a historiography comprised of multiple, competing perspectives. There is no definitive edition of any play, because definitive editions were not the goal of an acting company accustomed to variations in performance as a matter of course; because publication was out of most authors's hands; but also because the dramatic genre is inherently flexible about the presentation of its subject matter. Those who perform and those who observe had more impact on a dramatic text than readers of books would have, because the "communication circuit" in the case of play texts was that much more complex.[20] It does us little good to argue that one version of a play or another represented an author's original intent or ultimate revision. Even if we could, the conditions of their publication, dissemination, and performance render authorial intention the product of critical transvaluation.

Adrian Johns "in its modern sense the very concept of an "edition" is entirely anachronistic. For books such as the first folio of Shakespeare, not only is there no pair of identical copies in existence, but there is no straightforward way of positing a "typical" printed copy against which "variants" might be calibrated" (Johns 91).

"Shakespeare habitually began with more than he needed, that his scripts offered the company a range of possibilities, and that the process of production was a collaborative one of selection as well as of realization and interpretation" (Orgel 7)

Those snapshots, however, as they could sit beside more conventional historiographies and offer to readers their own The publication of plays created a permanent readership for the cultural contribution of the stage. Drama was one of the principal transmitters of historical culture in early modern England: it served as an interface between scholars, playwrights and middle class readers and audiences. Drama created a body of national histories everyone could potentially witness and also participate in, as the playgoing experience was far more participatory than it is now. It was, in fact, just one more form of reading in a culture that embraced diverse reading styles: aloud and communal; silent and solitary; deep and introspective; cursory and selective.

"each show is "a palimpsest collecting, or stacking, and displaying whatever is, as Brecht says, "the least rejected of all the things tried." The performance process is a continuous rejecting and replacing. Long-running shows—and certainly rituals are these—are not dead repetitions but continuous erasings and superimposings. The overall shape of the show stays the same, but pieces of business are always coming and going. This process of collecting and discarding, of selecting, organizing, and showing is what rehearsals are all about. And it's not such a rational, logical-linear process as writing about it makes it seem. It's not so much a thought-out system of trial and error as it is a playing around with themes, actions, gestures, fantasies, words: whatever's being worked on. From all the doing, some things are done again and again; they are perceived in retrospect as "working," and they "kept." They are, as it were, thrown forward in time to be used in the "finished performance." The performance "takes shape" little bit by little bit, building from the fragments of "kept business," so that often the final scene of a show will be clear before its first scene—or specific bits will be perfected before a sense of the overall production is known. That is why the text of a play will tell you so little about how a production might look. The production doesn't "come out" of the text; it is generated in rehearsal in an effort to "meet" the text. And when you see a play and recognize it as familiar you are referring back to earlier productions, not to the playscript. An unproduced play is not a homunculus but a shard of an as yet unassembled whole." (Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* 120)

On multiple perspectives: Annabel Patterson, intro p. 43

A. P. "Its motives were to make available to the reading public enough of the complex texture of the national history that the middle-class reader could indeed become his own historian—that is to say, a thoughtful, critical, and wary individual" (Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* 8). This is an explanation of all the random information contained in the chronicles, for which see also Patterson on anecdotes. In the chronicle narratives that inspired drama, we get a signature feature of drama: "the presence of random information and unintegrated source narratives, the chaotic multivocality resulting from the diverse authorial pens" "the qualities of this text impose a set of exegetical rules on the readers and compel them to read it with a 'literary' eye that is attuned to rhetorical nuance. Whatever meaning a reader can glean is inevitably derived from the interpretation of those nuances" (Djordjevic 22). Shakespeare doesn't use history to propound lessons as much as he propounds a version of history inflected by poetry and leaving thereby the sense up to the critical auditor to determine. Perhaps it was this polyvocal aspect of history that inspired Shakespeare's own quite polyvocal historical plays, that inspired the very polyvocality of drama itself, creating situations it is up to audiences to decipher. And wasn't the revival of drama during the Renaissance part and parcel of the general classical revival happening in other areas? The men of the universities, after all, were the same ones who wrote and attended plays and compiled the histories that both preceded and followed them.

Concluding paragraph:

What Shakespeare inherited from Marlowe was a notion of history that not only questions its providential quality but exposes its relentlessness, its illimitable, interminable inertia in spite of all human struggle or ingenuity. Tamburlaine (considered the ideal virtuous prince by Bracciolini and others) looking at his map, to see how much of the world is left for him to conquer is a pre-figure of Lear, who also asks for a map of his nebulous domain, to see how he might also work his own fiction upon it: Tamburlaine to possess as much as possible, Lear to control its destiny. Or both to control destiny against the implacable logic of history which throws down every conquerer. In the history plays themselves, we see iterations of the cycle. In King Lear, we see the cycle itself, as a fiction, broken and burnt on a wheel of fire. Tamburlaine wants his sons to continue his conquests as Lear desires his daughters to execute his living will. We can only achieve such a reading by reading across the plays instead of only inside them. This note refers to Marlowe's Tamburlaine and how it exhibits the ascendency of Machiavellian virtu instead of Christian virtue.[21] Is there some transition from the wheel of fortune to the mirror of insight?

As a principle of inquiry, I will not confine myself to the "history plays" proper or even read those history plays I do examine as history plays strictly speaking. My interest, instead, is to look closely at a selection of plays incorporating historical matter and identify in each how Shakespeare's invention, his poetic method, organizes its historical meaning. Across his entire body of work, Shakespeare transforms history into poetic fiction. That is, he performs a kind of research by which he assembles dramatic arguments out of the diverse materials available to him. Some of these materials belong to a more explicit category of historiography than others, but it is doubtful he cared to distinguish very much between chronicles strictly speaking and other sorts of "histories" such as contained equally unverifiable "true tales" from far-removed times and places. Even his more putatively factual sources were not absent of fictitious gestures, whether legendary accounts reported for the sake of completeness or clearly contrived but no less illuminating speeches allegedly delivered by important historical actors. The fictions Shakespeare derived from these sources are a kind of dramatic historiography that is historical insofar as it recapitulates material from a traditional corpus of narratives about the past and poetic for incorporating into its design overt markers of its fictionality. These markers are integral to the construction of these fictions and vital for an understanding of them as species of historical interpretation. Shakespeare uses poetry to propose to his audiences (and readers) alternative meanings in history. He discovers through his process, and discovers to us, a significance beyond anything on the order of causation, the proper sequence of events, or even fidelity to the truth—a significance that could best be articulated in a poetic register. I will consider how Shakespeare used the form of drama to translate history into poetry and test the ways in which his poetic interpretations of history, in dramaturgically diverse circumstances, participated in and worked to enrich the historical imagination of early modern England. Rather than simply identifying and commenting anew on the sources Shakespeare is traditionally supposed to have relied on in composing his plays, however, I propose instead to initiate a reevaluation of the evidence within specific plays of his engagement with the historical culture of which his own historical writing was a significant component.

I want to call attention to three traits, in particular, shared by early modern history with Shakespeare's historical drama: its self-conscious constructedness as literary performance (Richard II), its publicness as the common property of its audience (history is literally staged in a public arena, the counterpoint to public-ation) and as the only available window to expose otherwise private matters, of which history is full (and which Coriolanus himself is reluctant to expose) (Coriolanus), and its anxiety about continuity (King Lear), where we see history plays occurring in cycles that look back as well as forward and no

conclusion without resolution (King Lear disrupts this). See Spenser's history with its telling gap during the reign of Arthur. Poetry is well suited to an epic presentation of history, too, as its repetitive forms carry the reader from foot to foot, line to line, or stanza to stanza as fluently as the narrative proceeds from reign to reign. There is a relationship between the unbroken line of descent to the present and the monarch as "the mirrour of succeeding ages" (Camden, *Remaines of a greater worke, concerning Britaine, the inhabitants thereof, their languages, names, surnames, empreses, wise speeches, poësies, and epitaphes* 3) as William Camden refers to Queen Elizabeth using a metaphor that appears also in Macbeth. Poetical was used as often to mean false or even seditious as poets themselves were enlisted as sources of truth. Edward Hall, the author of that thing, laments that so much of his country's past, for want of writing, is lost to oblivion and dedicates his own work to preventing that from happening in the future: a link from the past to the present, quite in keeping with the Ciceronian idea of history that he happens to quote.

Literary drama might seem to be located at least one remove from the surer ground of sober historical narrative, but in a culture less interested in outright discriminations between fiction and nonfiction than, to paraphrase Francis Bacon, in judging the suitability of texts to be variously tasted, swallowed, chewed, or digested, a play had as much claim to be thoughtfully ruminated on as any handsomely bound chronicle. This is not to say that the distinction between the factual and the fabulous was either insignificant or ambiguous but that the stakes were different. Moreover, plays—the successful ones—arguably enjoyed a more substantial exposure, being dual-form literary products that were consumed both as printed texts and as live-action performances. As such, they occupied a unique position in the imaginative economy of the period: at the nexus between the visually stimulating, rhetorically provocative stage and the intellectually engaging, theoretically practicable text. Indeed, the play in early modern England perhaps represented in its time an artistic singularity whereby the theater of the senses came closest to correspondence with the theater of the mind. History in the Renaissance merely provided a convenient crucible for this to occur.

In a famous letter dated October 8, 1594 from Henry Lord Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlain of the Household, to Sir Richard Martin, then Lord Mayor of London, Hunsdon requests that his "nowe companie of Players" be permitted "to plaie this winter time wthin the Citye at the Crosse kayes in Gracious street." His request comes with the assurance that, now that the plague had passed, his company had "vndertaken to me that where heretofore they began not their Plaies till towards fower a clock, they will now begin at two, & haue don betwene fower and fiue and will nott vse anie Drumes or trumpetts att all for the callinge of

peopell together, and shalbe contributories to the poore of the parishe where they plaie accordinge to their habilities" (Society 73–74). This letter has hitherto comprised the entirety of our evidence for the duration of dramatic performances in the early modern English theater.[22] That a Peer of the Realm, cousin of the monarch, and one of the most powerful men in the country had to make formal supplications to a Lord Mayor in order to get his players permission to perform is surprising. More surprising are his assurances that the players will conform to earlier start times, refrain from making noise, and, least plausibly, give to the poor. The performance of plays was at least an important enough issue to spark a power struggle between the Privy Council and a series of Lords Mayor of London that was finally put to rest when playing companies came under the incontrovertible protection of royal patronage.[23] Plays had cultural power, and they earned that power rapidly, more rapidly than the intellectuals and commentators of the period could keep up with. Condemn them though they might, they were a form of artistic expression officially sanctioned by the government and popular among the public readership.

Notes

[1]"Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis" (Cicero 2.36).

[2]The first sentence of Stephen Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations* is, famously, "I began with the desire to speak with the dead" (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* 1).

[3]The notion that the intellectual culture of early modern England in particular was historically-oriented is developed at length in Kelley and Sacks, *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500–1800.* D. R. Woolf has also written a number of books that explore the historical sensibility of early modern England including *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England: Erudition, Ideology, and 'The Light of Truth' from the Accession of James I to the Civil War* and *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500–1730.* Also relevant are older studies: T. D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity*; F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought, 1580–1640*; F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*; Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England*; and Joseph M. Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography*.

[4]See Barthes on writeable..

[5]Except see Erne for a refutation of this conventional assumption and Honigmann (1965: 189–192) for an earlier countervailing assertion that the absence of evidence of Shakespeare's interest in publication does not entail evidence of absence. My own argument, that the text of a play was an elaboration of many minds and that lay athwart more numerous cultural attitudes and theatrical practices than could be reduced to one man's singular creative vision, makes this point somewhat moot. Whether Shakespeare was or was not involved in the publication of the plays that bore his name is an economic argument that does not bear as much on the literary qualities of the plays as I have characterized them.

[6]See Bentley (264–292) on some of the intricacies of the ownership and publication of play texts.

[7]Peter Burke provides a comprehensive introduction to the Renaissance discovery of anachronism that focuses, with extensive excerpting, on the historiography of the period. The various works of Woolf cited above complicate Burke's account by extending the awareness of anachronism to the capacity for, and specific modes of, more sophisticated historical thinking than had obtained during the Middle Ages.

[8]See Kelley, "Theory of History," for an overview of this debate as it was (inconsistently) pursued in the Renaissance.

[9]"Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis" (Cicero 2.36)

[10]"Bis zum 18. Jahrhundert bleibt die Verwendung unseres Ausdrucks ein untrügliches Indiz für die hingenommene Stetigkeit der menschlichen Natur, deren Geschichten sich zu wiederholbaren Beweismitteln moralischer, theologischer, juristischer oder politischer Lehren eignen. Aber ebenso beruhte die Tradierbarkeit unseres Topos auf einer tatsächlichen Konstanz jener Vorgegebenheiten, die eine potentielle Ähnlichkeit irdischer Ereignisse zuließen. Und wenn ein sozialer Wandel strattfand, dann so langsam und so langfristig, daß die Nützlichkeit vergangenen Geschichte begrenzte einen kontinuierlichen Raum möglicher Erfahrbarkeit" (Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft* 40). An important piece of Koselleck's evidence for this semantic transition is the gradual displacement in German of Historie by Geschichte, a linguistic differentiation lacking in English but indicative of an ideological process then occurring throughout the learned community of Europe.

[11]For his more extensive account of Annius of Viterbo, see Walter Stephens, "When Pope Noah Ruled the Etruscans: Annius of Viterbo and His Forged 'Antiquities."'

[12]See Woolf, *Idea of History*, 200–42.

[13]W. W. Greg Bibliography of English Drama.

[14]William Stirling

[15]See Bouwsma, 112ff.

[16]Though it is perennially popular to condemn the idleness of the poor, it is likely that the lack of industriousness among the Elizabethans had as much to do with the economic conditions of sixteenth century England as with any sort of culturally ingrained laziness:

> Wages were so inadequate that productivity was probably impaired by malnutrition. From a quarter to a half of the population lived below the level recognized at the time to constitute poverty. Few of the poor could count on regular meals at home, and in years when the wheat crop failed, they were close to starvation. It is not surprising that men living under these conditions showed no great energy for work and that much of the population was, by modern standards, idle much of the time. See Morgan, 602.

Plenty of time was therefore available for attending the theater and becoming absorbed in the historical narrative it created.

[17]This case, however, should not be overstated. Peter Blayney's examination of publication records and sales figures has shown that the supply of printed plays generally exceeded the demand and selling them was hardly a road to riches: "No more than one play in five would have returned the publisher's initial investment inside five years" (Blayney 383–422).

[18]See also Sherman.

[19]I cannot find any evidence for a 1623 purchase by the Bodleian of a First Folio. Since the library had an arrangement to receive all books registered with the Stationer's Company gratis, it is unclear why an extraneous purchase would have been necessary. Furthermore, there is no listing for Shakespeare in the Bodleian Catalogues of 1603 or 1620. The 1623 Folio does appear in the Supplemental Catalogue of 1635 but was apparently discarded before the publication of "Hyde's Catalogue" in 1674 in favor of the Third Folio of 1664. In fact, the Bodleian would not come to possess another copy of the First Folio itself, which originally bore no intrinsic value (quite the opposite with subsequent, "improved" editions regularly appearing) until it incorporated the Malone collection in 1821. While many books seem to have suffered the fate of supersession by newer editions, it seems to me unconvincing that the works of dramatists were already beginning to be valued in the first few decades of the seventeenth century as highly as Orgel suggests. See the overlapping accounts in William Dunn Macray, 52 and Robert C. Barrington Partridge, 21. The almost identical language indicates that Barrington was likely working from Macray, though he contributes a useful discussion on what the history of legal deposit says about the valuation of different genres at the time.

[20]On the communication circuit, see Darnton.

[21]See Ribner, 251–266

[22]See Peter Thomson, 21.

[23]For an extensive analysis of this letter and its context, see Andrew Gurr.

Who is the author of history?

Chapter 2

Is not the king's name twenty thousand names?

In the very middle of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the doomed king returns from Ireland to discover that he has been been outmaneuvered by his upstart rival, Bolingbroke. While Richard has been absent from England, he learns, his aggrieved cousin has managed to conquer, on top of the kingdom itself, the hearts and minds of its people. Stephen Scroop, one of the few lords still loyal to the king, describes Bolingbroke's rapid progress as if he were a force of nature:

> Like an unseasonable stormy day,
> Which makes the silver rivers drown their shores,
> As if the world were all dissolv'd to tears,
> So high above his limits swells the rage
> Of Bullingbrook, covering your fearful land
> With hard bright steel, and hearts harder than steel. (3.2.106–111) [1]

An accumulation of synonymous details worthy of Richard himself, this epic simile—more an epic mixed metaphor—depicts Bolingbroke's invasion as a freak occurrence. He likens it to a hundred-year storm that, in causing the rivers to flood, has instigated the land to rise up in the chaotic fury of unnatural, revolutionary fervor and overthrow itself. This highly affected language is characteristic of the play. Written entirely in verse and with frequent use of such higher level poetic devices, it transforms history into an artifact of language. The excesses of that language bespeak the excesses of the poetically formalized world in which the drama of *Richard II* unfolds. Poetry in this play, in other words, is the reflection of nature. Scroop's comparison of the king's presumptuous cousin to a natural catastrophe discloses an ideal of nature as ordinarily balanced, harmonious, and placid: there is no "unseasonable'' without seasonable. He came unexpected, has been irresistible, and in his excess of ambition is like a surfeit of nature itself, an over-going of "his limits'' as monstrous in its unseasonable appearance as the normally predictable flow of rivers suddenly rising up to "drown their shores'' (and, perhaps, as monstrous rhetorically as the compar-

ison of flooding rivers with swords and stubbornness). The image of nature gone awry speaks powerfully to the theme of legitimate kingship that runs so prominently throughout *Richard II*. While the king volubly identifies his royal mandate with the divinely ordered natural world, Bolingbroke's seizure of the throne occasions more than one prophesy of the bloodshed it will precipitate. Most vivid is that of Carlisle, who warns that "tumultuous wars / Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound. / Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny / Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd / The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls'' (4.1.140–144). Such prophecies carry all the more force, because they are not merely idle threats. History has borne them out, as has Shakespeare's own prior series of historical plays. "Real'' histories, however, were also prone to report supernatural affiliations with political events. Echoing Scroop in Shakespeare's play, the Jacobean historian John Speed credits s similar watery catastrophe:

> Fearefull were the tragedies which ensued these times; and heare now what is written of some Portents or wonders, presaging the same. The Bay or Laurell trees withered over all England, and afterward reflourished, contrary to many mens opinion; and upon the first of January, neere Bedford towne, the river between the villages of Swelston and Harleswood where it was deepest, did upon the sodaine stand still, and so divided it selfe, that the bottome remained drie for about three miles space, which seemed (saith Walsingham) to portend that revolt from the King, and the division which ensued. [2]

Natural calamity combines with tragedy to presage, retroactively, history. What Scroop's elevated language and Speed's fanciful account together illustrate is the mentality that both history and poetry shared in early modern England. The "historical imagination'' of the period combined the desire to narrativize and thus experience the past with the poetic license required to paint of that past a useful picture. History was, at the time, something like the natural philosophy of politics: part description, part interpretation, and always seeking to admonish the complacencies of the present in relating the faults and deviancies of the past. To accomplish these ends, documentary evidence had to be supplemented with flourishes of creativity: lacking first hand accounts, almost anything might be admitted, and what was missing was often contrived. On the other hand, such was the indeterminacy of the past that passionate debates about the reliability of sources and the conclusions that ought to be drawn from them made history seem inchoate and malleable. History, it was beginning to be realized, is not the product of mere fortune or an unfathomable, providential intention. History emerges from human imagination as much as the human actions of which it consists. The early modern stage, then, offers an ideal lens for examining how the dramatists of

the period reflected on history's inherent poetic qualities. Among Shakespeare's "history plays'', *Richard II* is the most conspicuously involved in opening history up to a poetic sensibility.

Richard II has an ironic relationship to the historical imagination of early modern England. On the surface, the play appears well in keeping with the moralistic strain of traditional historiography. A corrupt king is punished for stereotypical excesses, meeting a deserved end so that the social order can be reintegrated. Richard's tragic demise could easily be read as this sort of cautionary tale for rulers, as Holinshed explicitly recommends[3], or, more generally, as a rendering of the allegory of fortune that is so marked in medieval writing. In this view, the play that Shakespeare wrote does not participate in the fervid historicism transforming early modern intellectual life but merely disposes historiographical material to serve rather conventional literary ends: the commentary on events provided by the historiographers, in its own context dissociated from its subject, becomes in his dramatic writing fully realized in the condensed plots and overwrought characterizations required by its far less discursive composition. That is, the role of the literary text is to take what must be interpolated into strictly historical accounts—motives, psychological complexity, sayings and speeches—and seamlessly integrate (or narrativize) it into their literary derivatives. While the arrangement of historical content into literary form might be lauded for giving rise to interesting novelties in terms of plot and rhetoric, novelties for which Shakespeare is particularly well known, such a perspective neverthless relegates such appropriations to an isolated domain of literary effects.

This is, however, to separate histories too much from the literary energies enlisted in their composition and the generally "poetic'' quality of much historiographical writing in the early modern period.[4] While the utility of categorizing Shakespeare's play as history, a version as good as any other, is questionable, it is certainly the case that history in general performed different kinds of work at the time he was writing than we expect of it now. The usefulness of a particular account might depend more on contemporary applicability than evidentiary accuracy. And if "truth'' was purportedly the goal of history writing, then as now, a moral truth might have been just as good as a "factual'' one. Indeed, historical texts had to carefully negotiate the contradiction between their potentially subversive discoveries and the conservative justifications of the present that were often required of them. This typically led them to enlist the tools of poetry: in the invention of intellectual genealogies, for unsubstantiated narrative exposition, or even to provide cover for dangerous ideas. Genre boundaries were less carefully looked after, as well, and drama especially was comprised of borrowings from chronologies, romantic "histories,'' verse, and non-dramatic

de casibus tragedies. In particular, history and tragedy, as varieties of literature, share many correspondences through the early modern period, before history embarked on its distinctively non-literary course. Simply put, *Richard II* can be categorized as a history play, because it happens to dramatize historical material, but it can also be categorized as a tragedy, because that material entails the fall from grace of a heroic figure. In its time of initial production, it was labeled a tragedy despite containing history, because it was then most readily compared to popular stories about the falls of princes. Later, when it appeared in the First Folio, it was grouped with the histories, because it was only in retrospect that it could be identified as part of a once-fashionable dramatic trend. A question we are forced to ask is how glib these labels were and, to the contrary, how useful they are in helping us to parse their intellectual status in the early modern literary field.

Worth keeping in mind, as well, is the fluid state in which history found itself at the turn of the seventeenth century. Texts of long standing authority and the institutions and organizing principles of society based on them were exposed to so much correction, contextualization, and overall scrutiny that an Elizabethan subject could be forgiven for concluding that the world is made entirely of self-authorizing fictions.[5] Most relevant to *Richard II* is the fiction of the absolute power of monarchs, a Renaissance idea spuriously projected back onto a period during which the king's actions were far more circumscribed. Indeed, it was treated by the Parliamentarians of the Civil War period as "an innovative phenomenon to be resisted by an appeal to deep-rooted constitutionalist traditions.''[6] Also, as a historical figure, there are few kings as archetypal as Richard II. Even in his own time, he was regarded (at least by his detractors) as a fantastical figure: effeminate, unmanly, disgracefully unwarlike, stubbornly adolescent in his behavior, addicted to pleasure, overly concerned with clothing and appearance, and prone to favoritism. He is not entirely dissimilar to Bolingbroke's "unthrifty son'' and possibly, as we will see, just as conscientious about his self-presentation. This attitude toward Richard, as discussed by Christopher Fletcher, continues to the present day, inasmuch as we assume Shakespeare's attitude toward the king must have somehow been unilaterally informed by the common opinion about him circulating at the time, which was itself comprised of numerous, contradictory sources. The complex array of rhetorical strategies in which documents from Richard's reign and its aftermath are engaged, however, makes dubious any attempt to authenticate his traditional reputation as childish and dissolute: "it seems entirely possible to argue that this picture of the king, far from representing an exaggerated version of reality, represents almost the inverse of the truth.''[7]

The question here is whether or not Shakespeare's writing could have risen above Richard's proverbial status as a figure of incompetence and tragedy.

Richard II, as a special case, seems designed with these very questions in mind. More explicitly than any other so-called "history'' play, it plays on the unstable boundary between history and poetry. History, of course, could mean "story'' rather than "inquiry'' strictly speaking. And tragedy, though a poetic category itself, could easily migrate into the subtext of rhetorically "factual'' accounts of the past in its more general meanings. These categories, however, tended to be as interchangeable as they were malleable. Enough contexts existed for differing uses of history and poetry that it is only by anachronistically inserting ourselves into what was even then a debate[8] that we can discover stable meanings for either of them. Rather than determining whether or not a play like *Richard II* would have "counted'' as history at the time is less interesting than accepting that it did, in fact, participate more than casually in historical discourse and investigating what might have been its contribution. As far as this goes, it is admittedly natural to see the play as a rather commonplace figuration of the tragic in history, a figuration typical of so many history plays at the time. This chapter will argue, however, that another reading is possible, one that takes these entirely legitimate—but more obvious—interpretations into account but moves one step beyond them to reveal an even more interesting text than previously considered. *Richard II*, I contend, is a play that takes the ferment of early modern historical thinking for granted and as the basis for a fascinating theatrical game, a game in which Richard and Bolingbroke's contention to dominate language exposes the poetic furnace at the heart of historical discourse. At its most subtle, the play functions at a level of abstraction layered above the assumptions we might normally make about the properties of early modern historiography and thereby recasts them in new and profound ways. Most of all, it ironizes the act of thinking historically by asserting the constructedness of historical representations through a relentlessly poetic form; by dramatically undermining its own didactic subtext; and by deploying in Richard a character who seems to be self-consciously aware of his historiographically contrived, and thus hopeless, situation.

When Richard finally takes the full measure of Bolingbroke's triumph, he oscillates back and forth between postures of sweet despair and royal afflatus. "Mock not my senseless conjuration, lords,'' he says at first, "This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones / Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king / Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms'' (3.2.23–26). He is in his conception both Cadmus, the nation-founding sower of dragon's teeth, and Orpheus, whose music charmed flung stones to fall harmlessly at his feet.

He envisions himself, in his royal capacity, as coextensive with nature and speaking a king's language of command, command over nature, a language that sets the limits of language itself. This language may seem the issue of a deranged, self-absorbed mind, but it also produces the necessary fictions that make kingship possible. But the assertion of divine authority—indeed, its overexertion—always entails a denial of the truth of actual human frailty, and this contradiction produces in Richard, in the form of his utterances, a divided mind. The artificiality of his performance is at loggerheads with the suppressed truth of his divinely-sanctioned authority, which is only divinely-sanctioned for as long as people believe it is.

The function of this play is to make that performance stick out. In a fictional world delineated by poetic meter, Richard's verbiage comes across simultaneously as the native idiom of this world and a cancerous excrescence that overdevelops it into something monstrously excessive. Like the Player Queen in *Hamlet*, Richard protests too much. From his boasts that stones will fight on his side and that God has angels employed on his behalf (3.2.58–62), he blanches at the first bad news, suffering a synecdochic anemia as "the blood of twenty thousand men'' rushes out of his face. Reassured by Aumerle, he picks himself up again: "I had forgot myself, am I not king? / Awake, thou coward majesty, thou sleepest. / Is not the king's name twenty thousand names? / Arm, arm, my name!'' (3.2.83–86). His confrontation with historical necessity, the implacable inertia of human events that defies all attempts to contain it with the idols of dogma, provokes his sublime confrontation with his split self. He is a mortal king facing a usurper (a crisis more historically banal than dramatically apposite), but he is also the "majesty'' that his mortality imperfectly embodies (a crisis in the poetic construction of his self, which must face the historical-dramatic crisis). Under the stress of enacting that majesty, his imagination explodes. He talks to it. He calls it to arms. From actual soldiers, to their hyperbolic quantification, to animated rocks, he finally arrives at the quilting point of them all, of all his imaginative constructs. As if reaching the pinnacle of subjective crisis, he perceives his very identity shattered, like the mirror in his deposition, into twenty thousand pieces, only to be reassembled extemporaneously into a new ideal form, like some many-limbed Eastern deity: Richard as Avalokitésvara. This moment of apotheosis, however, does not last. More bad news follows—the return of historical reality—and along with it the culmination of Richard's solipsistic philosophizing on the pattern of history he is trapped in. Sentient in this moment of clarity to the extra-dramatic circumstances of his inscription into history, Richard delivers his most famous ode to the despair of kings:

> Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs,
> Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes

> Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
> Let's choose executors and talk of wills;
> And yet not so, for what can we bequeath
> Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
> Our lands, our lives, and all are Bullingbrook's,
> And nothing can we call our own but death
> And that small model of the barren earth
> Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.
> For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
> How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,
> Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
> Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping kill'd,
> All murthered. (3.2.145–160)

Characteristic of the world-making language exemplified by Richard throughout the play is his repetition of grammatical structures. Here, they are the hortatory phrases that describe this moment as they look at the same time toward their own abstractions as general truths. "Let's talk of graves…'' refers to the foreboding he feels in the present for an end that is inevitable no matter who holds the throne. "Let's choose executors and talk of wills…'' gloomily forecasts a future in which Richard imagines himself stripped of his trans-human qualities, of the twenty thousand names that make him both more than human but also reaffirm that he is human (much like the superfluity insisted on by Lear)—of everything that makes him more than a forgotten corpse. His is a voice from history imploring on his audiences generations hence to rescue him from history's power of turning fiction into truth, a power that we see slipped from his grasp. In both of these phrases, he refers to writing. He speaks of writing in the dust with tears and writing out wills for the next generation, suggesting the writing of an account of present sorrow for the sake of future edification, of writing a history not out of words but out of affect. This briefly considered possibility is undercut, however, but his realization that Bolingbroke—more a symbolic function than anything else, at this point, of history's uncontainability—sets the terms of history now, or at least Bolingbroke thinks he does. This is, in a way, his first lesson to Bolingbroke. Later, he will have the chance to school his rival directly in what history actually makes out of the human desire to control it. As we come to the last of the "Let's'', we also approach Richard's most succinct encapsulation of history: kings deposed, slain, haunted, poisoned, killed in their sleep, "all murthered.'' Here, we see even more repetition, compressed so as to give point to that which is a king's only destiny in history: death. It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that so many of Shakespeare's own kings suffered such fates.

There is also in this speech an interesting play on the word "deposed.'' Richard repeats it three times (and once more earlier in the scene). While, as many critics have pointed out, it does indicate the king "self-indulgently anticipating total defeat''[9], it also, as another instance of repetition woven into the text, figures the language that restrains him. Richard's fate, in chronologic and dramatic history, is to be both overthrown king and dead body, both senses of "deposed'' facts of history that will continue to haunt Bolingbroke, continue to define Richard's posterity, and together comprise the archetype of what he describes as the general fortune of all those who presume "to monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks'' (3.2.165). Like a deponent verb in Latin, which has a related meaning, Richard's deposition is passive in form but active in meaning. It is part of the historical irony according to which Shakespeare characterizes *Richard II* that he elucidates this historical affectivity himself.

One might usefully compare Richard's highly nuanced subjectivity in this scene with Gaunt's comparatively wooden sensibility. Gaunt, who has his own anthology-ready, set piece oration earlier in the play, seems to exist only to die. As the upholder of traditional values, he is a foil to Richard's impetuosity. And since Bolingbroke is his heir, his death sets the rest of the plot in motion. We should otherwise wonder, given his early demise, why he is in the play at all. Gaunt's famous lamentation, however, for an idealized England that never was manages to graft a genuinely nationalistic sentimentality to a wistful, perhaps even cynical, despondency that his effusive encomium is itself, partly because he dies so early on, a failed historical fiction. As the rest of the play will bear out, Gaunt's conservative picture of his country's exceptional nature is exactly the sort of beautifully bland fantasy that canny rulers would like their subjects to believe without truly believing it themselves. The promise of renewal brought by Bolingbroke, who is hardly the sort to indulge in his father's brand of sententious mythologizing, is predicated on exactly this image of the golden past, of a history that demands restoration. Bolingbroke, however, will come to have his own reckoning with the inevitable contradictions inherent in such attempts at language control. The most ironic deployment of this rhetorical strategy will, of course, be demonstrated by his son, Henry V. The newly-crowned Prince Hal, who is well-practiced in his own, personal style of restoration based on an imagined past (one that he partly borrows from Hotspur), raises the fiction-spinning of historical revision to its most spectacular pitch. Much like *Richard II* if through different means, *Henry V* formalizes the dramatic, and therefore suspect, nature of historical discourse. And as we are with Richard II's gorgeously-wrought despair, we are easily seduced by Henry V's grandiose bravado—until he too ends up as a corpse on a stage, the basis for yet more historical nostalgia, yet another "deposed'' king.[10]

By looking at the play as a commentary in form and action of the nature, limitations, and frustrations of history, we have the opportunity to consider some concrete ways in which literature itself shaped, sublimated, and often short-circuited historical thinking. The alternative, which I propose to reject, would be to regard the play as operating in a closed, literary system that merely reflects the "real'' symbolic structure of its context without any feedback returning the other way. Even the historicist arguments which are most sympathetic to literature tend to presume upon a "culture'' that informs it, even if this culture is only resolvable as an intellectual back-formation. This is, admittedly, a difficult bind to think oneself out of, since all historical interpretation, including the interpretation of literary texts from a discrete "past'', is an unavoidably subjective enterprise. Even in the case of the New Historicism, the set of reading strategies most interested in situating the speech acts of literature within an ideologically neutral and genre agnostic matrix of cultural practices, there is no escaping the modeling of literature as a projection of some other, more fundamental, background. Alan Liu goes even further, suggesting that a New Historicist is really "a subject looking into the past for some other subject able to define what he himself, or she herself, is; but all the search shows in its uncanny historical mirror is the same subject he/she already knows: a simulacrum of the poststructuralist self insecure in its identity.''[11] Liu's critique of the New Historicist desire to encounter the past both in its unmediated plenitude and with full cognizance of the inescapability of an analytical subjectivity grounded in the present offers a useful perspective on early modern historicism. Then, as now, the effort of the imagination to bring the past closer is a species of intellectual wish fulfillment, but it is also an integral component of modern subjectivity, in general. Shakespeare's plays very much seek to answer this innate desire to commune with our own history while at the same time foregrounding what that means on an affective level. The slippage between historical objectivity and poetic subjectiveness is marked throughout the "history of the history'' of Richard II, the king. The narrativizing of his reign by contemporary and near-contemporary commentators, their Renaissance redactors, and all of this material's modern inheritors has turned his life into paper: there is little about this king, as Fletcher shows, that is not the product of one fiction or another. And it is undeniable that the "fiction'' of Richard II served as a model for other monarchs seeking to articulate their own representative functions. Literature and history were equals in this regard. If Elizabeth I could exclaim, "I am Richard. know ye not that?'' while looking over a history with the antiquarian William Lambarde,[12] it was no more surprising to find Charles I, on the eve of his execution, alluding to Shakespeare's play directly.[13]

Indeed, as a dramatic meditation on the late Elizabethan fascination with vernacular history, *Richard II* is perhaps Shakespeare's strongest and most artistically consistent statement. Having completed a kind of dramaturgical apprenticeship in the history play genre with the first tetralogy, he seems to consolidate his art with the first installment of the second. With *Richard II*, that is, Shakespeare moves beyond the chronicle-driven plots and hackneyed moralisms characteristic of earlier history plays and toward a more subtle style of dramatic representation, a style that saturates history's raw materials with something approaching a historiographic philosophy. *Richard II*, in particular, demonstrates how history is a poetic artifact created by human will. This is reinforced by the form of the play as well as its treatment of its historical content. On the one hand, it is written entirely in verse. There is no varying of registers, as we find in the later plays of the second tetralogy, and no prose interludes as we find in most of the plays Shakespeare wrote. Much of the language is affected, as well, with frequent usage of couplets, embedded stanzaic forms, rhymes, epic similes, and set piece speeches. On the other hand, the dramatic action is consistently formal in nature as well as structure, with the two ritualistic (and mutually parodic) judgment scenes that bookend the play pivoting on the climactic deposition scene at the center. They even meet having arrived at the center of their contention, England, from geographically opposed directions: Richard from Ireland, Bolingbroke from France. An intriguingly post-colonial dimension to the play hides here and possibly alludes to the two most prominent sites of English imperialist ambition before the early modern period. It is certainly a subtext of the play that, amidst all the highly wrought speculation about the symbolic nature of the monarch, whoever happens to be occupying the throne inevitably leads the kingdom to war. After four plays in which the crown is passed around like a prize in an aristocratic game, *Richard II* ruminates almost comically on the emptiness that it encircles. Once again, *King Lear* will bring these ideas to their ultimate conclusions. Bolingbroke coming from France as a savior figure, but also as a usurper in a military action, almost looks like Cordelia. In Lear, however, there are no saviors and there is no historically informed moral to be drawn. The idea that royal authority means anything at all is completely annihilated. *Richard II*, however, has not yet gotten there, though there are enough interesting correpondences that a case can be made for comparing them.

What Shakespeare may have realized—or decided—with this play is the potential of having characters perceive themselves as actors in history: a kind of irony of anachronism that allows for richer poetic possibilities than a mere versified rehearsal of nationalistic prejudices and popular myths. What makes *Richard II* particularly successful as a history play is the extent to which the often opposed genres of

which it is comprised, history and poetry, are seamlessly integrated. The entirety of the play's "historical'' content is delivered in verse, and the action of the play is pointedly focused on the events leading up to, catalyzing, and falling out as a consequence of Richard's abdication. There are no subplots, comic interludes, or scenes written in prose to offset the poetic ceremoniousness in which everything that happens in this play is couched. By these means, history is presented in the play, in fact, as an effect of poetry, a rhetorical remainder that indicates how mistaken we are to privilege the historicity of poetry over the "poeticity'' of history. If it is indeed the office of poetry to body forth the forms of things unknown, what Shakespeare produces with his history plays are real bodies purporting to stand for the unknown dramatis personae of the past. If there is a certain built-in irony to the retrospective representation of historical events, Shakespeare exploits that irony fully. Insofar as his characters trope quite happily on their configurations as theatrical spectacles, they are able commentators, if obliquely, on the ideological underpinnings of their modes of representation, too. Richard II may be the ultimate meta-theatrical monarch, reveling in the performance of his power, but he also serves a function that is distinctly meta-historical.

Much has been written about the meta-theatrical qualities of Shakespeare's dramatic writings. Inasmuch as his plays were meant in a literal sense to be staged, in their ironic gesturing toward the histrionics of daily life and, a fortiori, the performative natures of power and politics, they also stage us—as witting or unwitting actors in the drama of human existence. The analogy of the world with the stage that extends across his work, however, is not the sole means by which his characters signal the constructedness of their (and thus our) reality. Historical self-consciousness, an awareness that societies are not static but grow out of their own pasts, also contributes to the intellectual landscape of his plays. In the learned society of early modern England, as elsewhere in Europe at the same time, the concept of "history'' was reaching a turning point. If the relationship of the present to the past was the subject of keen interest during the Renaissance, the literature of the time reflected the emerging awareness of the significance of historical difference. While the recognition of historical difference by itself might mean little, writers and thinkers were beginning to consider history more as a series of problematics than as a basis for reductive moralizing or revisionist nationalism. They began looking at history critically, seeking both to authenticate their sources and derive arguments from them about the nature and origins of human institutions. New kinds of texts appeared to challenge the chronicle form and the reduction of history to moral lessons useful to the present. In many ways, however, history was still regarded as a cousin to poetry, and historical accounts provided raw material for texts engaged in more imaginative pursuits. This literary work, however, was no

less interested in a critical analysis of both history itself and the historicist sensibility then in ascendance. History as a mere chronicling of events or stockpiling of exempla is confronted in Shakespeare by its more affective dimensions.[14] Or it might be more accurately stated, at least in the case of *Richard II*, that Shakespeare critiques the status of history as an affective attachment: how we perceive it, how we instrumentalize it, and what utility it has for better understanding our own subjectivity. Just as allusions to theatricality in the plays demystify the structure of human relations, dramatic representations of historicity interrogate the necessity and origins of those relations. In different ways, Shakespeare's dramatic works communicate his searching response to the persistent question, "What is history?'' In *Richard II*, he shows the uselessness of trying to master it, of answering that question in hegemonic terms. In protesting too much for triumphalist teleologies or golden ages to come, the poetic histories of early modern England encoded within themselves the markers of their own instability.

From very early on, usually in the idiosyncratic depiction of certain figures (Henry VI, Margaret of Anjou, Richard III) Shakespeare has his characters engage in historical-literary reflection that is both contained within historical action but also rises above it. This is partly a function of the subjectivity his characters so persuasively enact: their extra-dramatic perspective on themselves and the events occuring around them dovetails with ours as we become "readers'' of the dramatic action along with them. The nascent (and never absent) form of this reflection typically manifests as foreshadowing in curses, prophecies, and proleptic summaries of future events disguised as homiletic predictions or political disquisitions.[15] In later plays, however, reckoning with history becomes a more subtle affair: characters struggle against the historical inevitability already written into their futures—they are, literally, always at the growing edge of what is about to be, what they are about to become—as if confronted by a terrible, unavoidable destiny. The character of Henry VI is one of Shakespeare's earliest forays into this form of prophetic anachronism. The king in Henry VI, Part Three dies with a prophecy on his lips:

> That many a thousand,
> Which now mistrust no parcel of my fear,
> And many an old man's sigh and many a widow's
> And many an orphan's water-standing eye—
> Men for their sons, wives for their husbands,
> And orphans for their parents' timeless death—
> Shall rue the hour that ever thou wast born. (5.6.37–43)

He is, of course, speaking to the Duke of Gloucester, the future Richard III, the character whose historically predetermined villainy is so pronounced, he becomes a caricature. But we see in Henry's dying doom the outline of Richard II's own imprecations against Bolingbroke. Like Richard, Henry speaks in heaps of paratactic language. As if to reinforce his soothsaying through the rhetorically ritualistic repetition of parallel elements, he piles on every possible contingency, followed up by an interminable accounting of the evil portents surrounding his murderer's birth. His review of bad omens goes on for so long, in fact, that the impatient and impious Duke stabs the king mid-sentence, going so far as to admit the truth of these signs and oracles for the times yet to come. Interestingly, given Richard II's own last words, in which he calls on his soul to mount to heaven, Gloucester observes sardonically how Henry's blood does not mount but sinks into the ground, "down, down to hell'' (5.6.67).

It is, perhaps, only in remembrance, only with the aid that history brings to memory, that kings mount to heaven or descend to hell. Richard III, whose own deeds had long since been "chronicled in hell,'' is hardly meant to evoke much sympathy, but it is a question what role Shakespeare wanted us to believe that we have in determining the course of history in a world of dark omens and curses that seem always to bear their poisonous fruits. Only the most simplistic reading of Henry VI's prophecy would reduce it to the level of irony alone, of a recounting of things to come that are already known to have been. At this stage of his career, however, it may be that Shakespeare had not yet matured enough as a writer to entirely avoid cheap plot devices, as he certainly has by the time of *King Lear*, in which he narrativizes signs and wonders only for the sake of rejecting them as the products of witless imaginations. In Richard III's case, his inability to rise above his entirely scripted nature is partly due to his embodied form and partly because the historical inevitability in which he participates, a current that runs through the entire first tetralogy, is fragmented among many characters. Even his body is a historically determined artifact. He "is not only deformed, his deformity is itself a deformation. His twisted and misshapen body encodes the whole strategy of history as a necessary deforming and unforming—with the object of reforming—the past.''[16] History, that is, is to be molded and shaped, not simply received. Put another way, it cannot simply be received since it is necessarily made by our own molding and shaping of what we learn about the past. Richard III's body is the body we gave him, in a sense, and for the sake of explaining why history has the shape that it does.

The strategy of deforming, unforming and reforming history, I would add, is fully realized in the character who lurks behind him, almost like an alter ego, dogging his every move: Queen Margaret. Mar-

garet is memory in the first tetralogy. Certainly, by the time of *Richard III* the play, she has risen beyond her role as a supporting character to serve as a harbinger of historical necessity, if a simplistic variety of it. As she tells Richard outright, she continues to exist only to make "repetition of what thou hast marr'd'' (1.3.164). And repetition, as we see with Henry VI and Richard II both, is the form that world-mastering language frequently takes—always occurring in epic catalogues of deeds done, qualities ascribed, symbolic objects, names, etc. Repetition also structures the history plays as a group, if we consider them parts of a greater historiographical project and not only as discrete units. *Richard III*, the last in the sequence chronologically but only halfway through in order of composition, ends quite pointedly with Henry, Earl of Richmond and the future Henry VII, promising an end to conflict:

> England hath long been mad and scarr'd herself:
> The brother blindly shed the brother's blood,
> The father rashly slaughter'd his own son,
> The son, compell'd, been butcher to the sire,
> All this divided York and Lancaster,
> Divided in their dire division,
> O now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
> The true succeeders of each royal house,
> By God's fair ordinance conjoin together!
> And let their heirs (God, if thy will be so)
> Enrich the time to come with smooth-fac'd peace,
> With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days!
> Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord,
> That would reduce these bloody days again,
> And make poor England weep in streams of blood!
> Let them not live to taste this land's increase
> That would with treason wound this fair land's peace!
> Now civil wounds are stopp'd, peace lives again;
> That she may long live here, God say amen! (5.5.23–41)

As easy as Richmond's speech is to read as Tudor triumphalism, it should not be glossed over that *Richard III* is followed immediately by its namesake *Richard II* and the dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray that set brother against brother, father against son to begin with. Retroactively, it becomes ironic: the bloody days were only beginning. Richmond's language, here, is also characteristic of kingly speech. The multiple appeals to God, the piling on of parallel phrases, and the illocutionary assumption that his words effect their intended actions—the reconciliation of the Yorks and Lancasters, the marriage of their heirs, peace in the nation, the fertility of the fields, are emblematic of royal language that endeavors to work its will on history. The most unkindest cut of all is that following up Richmond's victory with Richard II's deposition

undercuts what looks otherwise like the unambiguous procession of history into the hands of the Tudors and Elizabeth. Marjorie Garber, in reflecting on the unstable boundary between the tetralogies, articulates the important question with which this strange dilemma confronts us: "Which time takes priority here, 'historical time' or the time of theatrical history? The fact that the first comes second and the second comes first instructively problematizes the whole question of double time as it relates to the genre of the history play. The first tetralogy predicts the second; the second also predicts the first.''[17]

Richard II, who arguably suffers a psychological deformity analogous to, if more imaginatively febrile than, his descendant, elevates this style. As a character, he is a kind of masterpiece of exactly this sort of linguistic grandiosity. While he shares with Richard III a terrible fate and infamous reputation, he comes much closer than his successor in history and predecessor in drama, and precisely because of the excessiveness of his language, to articulating the schizophrenic nature of his own circumstances. For a period during which popular assumptions about free will might have wobbled uncertainly between the old dispensation and the new[18], such deterministic plotting could have seemed simultaneously appropriate, in keeping with the fatalistic flavor of Protestantism, and deeply troubling, as it typically dabbles in the supernatural and robs from these historical actors part of their humanity, and perhaps plausibility, too: belief in predestination does not come packaged with any certainty as to what one's destination is. And this is the rub for Richard. He behaves as if being the master of poetic idiom, of the form of his literary reality, makes him the master of that reality, too, like an Orpheus whose music could inspire stones to build cities and elicit the favor of hell itself.

The poetic idiom of *Richard II*, however, does seem to reflect the imaginative diktats of its master poet. Richard's characteristic self-inflation through numbers is echoed by other characters who let large numbers colorfully substitute for sober accounting. Gaunt admonishes Richard that "a thousand flatterers sit within thy crown'' (2.1.100). York, exasperated by Richard's disinheritance of Bolingbroke, sagely informs him, "You pluck a thousand dangers on your head, / You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts'' (2.1.205–6). Then there are the twelve thousand fighting men reported by Salisbury inflated to twenty thousand by the king. There is Bagot's challenge to Aumerle, that "I heard you say that you had rather refuse / The offer of an hundred thousand crowns / Than Bullingbrook's return to England'' (4.1.15–17) and Aumerle's response that echoes Richard's own speech: "I have a thousand spirits in one breast, / To answer twenty thousand such as you'' (4.1.58–59). Aumerle seems almost to be parodying royal speech, though none can outdo even in that the royal tongue itself, as we see in Richard's deposition, where he

recollects how far he has fallen from when he "under his household roof / Did keep ten thousand men.'' (4.1.282–83) and compares himself to Jesus betrayed by Judas: "So Judas did to Christ; but He, in twelve, / Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand, none'' (4.1.170–71). Richard is also quite enamored of lengthy cataloging. We have already looked at his rundown of the death of kings. He is elsewhere even more additive in his attempt to capture language in its totality.

The most vivid examples occur before and after the deposition, when Richard reduces the mystery of his office to a series of fungible quantities. He does this first at Flint Castle:

> I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
> My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
> My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
> My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood,
> My sceptre for a palmer's walking-staff,
> My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
> And my large kingdom for a little grave. (3.3.147–153)

He looks to be far from his typically magisterial attitude in this speech. Behaving as if the "name of King'' were a piece of transferable property, or the kingship a job for which he is being made redundant, he lists the royal appurtenances and their more mundane equivalents for which he will exchange them on his way out the door. There is something ironic about his little presentation, however, something that is almost like a joke, one made at Bolingbroke's expense. For Richard, like a subversive satirist or the madman who speaks truth (once again, a stance brought to its height in *King Lear*), does not truly believe that royalty is merely a show of property. Or, to be more exact, he knows that a king must act as if it is not. The objects signified by the words mean nothing compared to the metonymic function of the words themselves: they all stand for "king'' even though none of them can make a king. As with the small possessions of the religious ascetic, their representational affinities count for less than the numinous realm they point to, the sanctioning discourse that language can never directly touch but only ever approximate. Bolingbroke, Richard implies, thinks the kingship is, in fact, property, like the property passed down from Gaunt, which he also claims as his. The danger resides in too cynically giving the lie to the rhetorically-constructed nature of the royal persona, too easily forgetting that the "king'' is made up of words, not objects, and words do not enter people's hearts quite as straightforwardly as goods can exchange hands. Richard's self-debasement is a revealing debasement of the royal office itself, a debasement that, from his

perspective, echoes Bolingbroke's transactional tactics. On such a level, there is little separating a large kingdom from a little grave.

Later, in the deposition scene itself, Richard disclaims the throne in similar terms, making the same sort of metaphysical mockery of the legalistic proceeding that Bolingbroke has orchestrated and presumes sufficient for trading places with the king:

> Now mark me how I will undo myself:
> I give this heavy weight from off my head,
> And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
> The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;
> With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
> With mine own hands I give away my crown,
> With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
> With mine own breath release all duteous oaths;
> All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
> My manors, rents, revenues I forgo;
> My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny;
> God pardon all oaths that are broke to me!
> God keep all vows unbroke are made to thee!
> Make me, that nothing have, with nothing griev'd,
> And thou with all pleas'd, that hast all achiev'd! (4.1.203–17)

There is again emphasized in this speech—with its repetitions, balanced clauses, and rhyming couplets—the constructedness of royal language, language that Bolingbroke mistakes for exchangeable objects and rewritable facts. In addition to giving up his crown and sceptre, Richard expands on his prior catalog of kingly attributes by adding such things as can hardly have been demanded by a legalistic proceeding. To his crown and sceptre he adds kingly sway, pomp and majesty. To his manors, rents, and revenues he piles on his balm and sacred state. Richard almost seems to be challenging Bolingbroke to minimize their function, to actually think himself superior to the world of words that Richard had fashioned as insulation for the royal prerogative. What he claimed before could not be done on Earth, Richard now does himself. But does he simply hand all of this over to Bolingbroke? It seems rather that he consigns these monarchical qualities to oblivion. "Make me nothing,'' he almost says, and in that ambiguous act of asking God to invert his relationship to the world, he also reveals to Bolingbroke the nothingness he has won for himself: the crown that is both heavy and empty. Indeed, the performative qualities of Richard's self-abnegation are exaggerated entirely for Bolingbroke's benefit. "Mark me,'' he says to his presumptuous usurper, and then practically pantomimes his abdication.

Questions are raised by this: do these words have the real force of what they express? Is the legal proceeding engineered by Bolingbroke simply another fiction that Richard exposes, an inferior fiction for being so obviously a fabrication meant for history, so that its readers will accept as unimpeachable fact a deposition devoid of ideological doubt or emotional resonance? What does it do to the fiction of the king's speech if the king uses it to negate his kingship? In this moment, a rupture is created in history, a rupture that makes all subsequent royal speech unstable and practically parodic of itself. We get some sense of this parody in Act 5, when the Duchess of York calls King Henry "a god on earth'' (5.3.136). A darker tone still permeates *Henry IV, Part One* and *Henry IV, Part Two*, in which the guilty king cannot sleep and Prince Hal "usurps'' him, too. By the time we get, chronologically speaking, to the *Henry VI* plays, the crown is nothing more than a token—until Richmond claims it for himself, with his own final (but not quite final) plea for historical rejuvenation.[19]

As a king, Richard certainly comes across as a feckless and orotund ruler who abuses his power, thus losing the support of his people, and is outmaneuvered by a more capable strategist, thus losing his kingdom. As a fully realized, Shakespearean character, however, he demonstrates an acute awareness of the sort of predetermined, historically moralistic narrative in which he acts. He understands that the nature of his power is poetic, that it relies entirely on his ability to impose upon the world the designs of his own imagination. In this regard, he is a poetic character—always trying to "make'' his world—trapped within a poem, a made thing. That he realizes the artificiality of historical discourses gives him much occasion for the solipsistic reflecting on them, and makes him often seem alienated from all the other characters around him. But like many prophetic figures, his knowledge does not, and cannot, save him. Bolingbroke, in contrast, thinks he can master history from within.

Whereas Richard brazenly verbalizes his reality into being, we are left in the dark as to Bolingbroke's motives and often his actions, too. He does, indeed, master Richard, but it is Richard who, surprisingly, turns out to be the most prescient character in the play and the one from whom Bolingbroke comes to learn the most. Like us along with him, Bolingbroke comes to realize the schizophrenic nature of being a king, of the necessity of trying to write what has already been written, of existing in a world of language that requires but thwarts ever getting a firm hold on it. I agree with Ronald R. MacDonald, who notes "Richard's distinct and unenviable role to enact and clarify certain paradoxes that do not stem from his idiosyncrasies, but are latent in the political order. He must live those paradoxes for all to see, and not the least of these is the fact that the more he insists on his power as the anointed king, the less real power

he wields.''[20] My only qualification would be that "real power'' is always out of reach of language and that Bolingbroke will discover this, too: it is not only Richard who tries to close the gap between words and world. What I perceive in such aspects of the play is a layer of rhetorical abstraction once removed from the level of historical allegory. There is the action of the plot, derived from history, and then there is the tenor of its treatment. Perhaps the greatest irony unspoken by the play is the irony that proleptically reaches back from *Richard III*, the history play Shakespeare wrote just prior to but also at the greatest remove from this one. Henry Richmond's call for an end to "bloody days'' looks differently, as we have seen, when immediately followed by all the bloody days that preceded them. In such ways does Shakespeare ironize our faith in historical progress and put into doubt that anyone can take hold of history's rudder and steer its course. What he dramatizes in *Richard II* is the king's inescapable need to pose as the master of his own narrative.

The king, who at first thinks himself history's master is instead mastered by it. He is certainly the master of the play's uniquely poetic idiom, and he delivers his mellifluous and often equivocating pentameters as if the poesis of his speech were tantamount to the poesis of his world—as if, that is, he were himself the progenitor of history itself, the source of its unfolding. As the denouement of the banishment scene in Act I, he enjoins Mowbray and Bolingbroke to swear never "to plot, contrive, or complot any ill / 'Gainst us, our state, our subjects, or our land'' (1.3.189–90). His piling of words upon words is characteristic here as elsewhere: plot, contrive, and complot are as synonymous with one another as are state, subjects, and land. And this injunction follows a lengthy sequence of other qualifications of their exiles, as if Richard could own their actions even beyond his jurisdiction, and an even lengthier scene during which the trial by combat is announced, called off, and then replaced with Richard's improvised sentences. One gets the feeling this was a pantomime planned in advance. At a stroke, Richard eliminates both potential enemies, sets himself up to arrogate the wealth of the more dangerous one, and establishes some claim to be merciful. Is he indecisive and fearful of confrontation or evincing a royal monopoly on the ontological power of speech? Words, in any case, are not enough, even in Richard's world created by words, since the doom he places on Bolingbroke portends his own. To the usual argument that Richard believes his destiny is foreordained by his birth, it might be suggested that his rhetoric is more strategic than naïve. He certainly acts as if he has a linguistic power beyond mortal capacity, as if his every speech were like a soliloquy addressed directly to God, but perhaps he is only performing this rhetorical posture deliberately.

It is not without good reason that criticism about Richard emphasizes the over-abundant, nearly delusional quality of his language. His rhetorical posturing and self-aggrandizing manner—qualities he manages to maintain even in abjection—are easy to blame for his downfall. The bad timing of his expedition to Ireland coupled with Bolingbroke's deft and narratively foreshortened manipulation of events are just as culpable, however. If his *hamartia* is his language, then it is not necessarily the style of that language per se that is his undoing but the irreconcilability of a "king's speech''—which seeks to impose on and integrate reality—with the multiplicity of speech acts that resist even Richard's attempts to contain by overwhelming them. Royal speech, Shakespeare is telling us, is, if not doomed to fail, one of history's illusory by-products. A king who seems to speak history, that is, who speaks from history, and on history's behalf, is engaged in fiction making, in crafting a poetry of power. This particular kind of fiction merely has the appearance of fact, of rising above all other language to serve as language's master discourse. Only in such circumstances can history appear to be authoritative. We are beguiled into believing it by the self-sanctioning authority of the "source,'' and also insofar as it structures our own reality. It is for this latter reason that the play *Richard II* is in its form an entirely poetic artifact, but one that makes a pretense of hiding its artificiality, like the Lacanian truth that takes the form of a fiction. If, as Ronald Levao suggests, Richard's error "has been to press his manipulation of reality too far,'' exposing his divine right as the "subjective willfulness'' of a petulant, indecisive improviser,[21] it is nevertheless inevitable, the play proposes, for kings to adopt this role of poet master of a poetically-constructed world.

Whatever we infer about Richard's "true'' feelings and motives, what we are given on the page is the only representation of himself that is appropriate, a public posture of power over language. The real argument is over its effectiveness, not whether or not he himself has any confidence in what he says. And when its effectiveness is challenged, his verbosity is no less fecund in grasping after new schemes of control. His imaginative activeness proliferates right up until the moment when his sphere of physical activity is reduced to a little world peopled only by thoughts, and even in death, as previously noted, he is full of declamations. Unfortunately for Richard, he does confront the reality—even if he does not quite or cannot acknowledge it—that one cannot so easily make a world out of words. His tale, after all, belongs among the *de casibus* and not the *res gestae*. Rather than bending to his ineffable will, history slips from Richard's grasp and into Bolingbroke's, who plays a different (and ultimately just as futile) game with language. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare will return to the theme of the king as history's fool and ultimately leave us disabused of any reliance we might have had on history's promise of either secular

or divine redemption. "Histories'' happen while "history'' itself, in its forward-moving, backward-gazing retrospectiveness, remains a pastness that is always one step ahead, in the future, a totality ever just beyond the horizon of our comprehension. The particular inquiry, as it were, always stands apart from the unknown truth of the past.

The irony of Richard's situation is that his history has and had already been written. Even if his audiences were not all intimately familiar with the details of English history, Shakespeare himself dramatized that events following Henry V's military triumph, and there are interesting literary effects of his choosing to write these plays, as it were, out of order. There would have been no surprises in store for Shakespeare's original audiences in terms of plot, for one thing. Interest in the play would have focused instead on its particular interpretation of events and characterizations to the extent they were, in fact, well known from chronicle histories. Had Shakespeare dramatized Richard merely as an inept and untenable ruler, he might have pandered to whatever prejudices about a distant past remained three centuries after his reign, but he would also have produced a far less absorbing play. What he does do is demonstrate that our ideas about history are indistinguishable from the form that structures them: they are nothing but words. History, that is, is the product of the same sort of "making'' as poetry. Where the two actually do differ, for which *Richard II* makes a compelling case, is in the degree to which this making of history can be mistaken for the real power of making evoked by poetry: the unbounded creations of the imagination do not, obviously, translate into reality even if the most powerful among us often think they can be made to do so. No king can write his own history as he goes along.

Crucially, the play's historical disposition comes across in the relationship between the two characters around which this formal play is formally organized. The confrontation between Richard and Bolingbroke dramatized by this play is very much a confrontation between incompatible styles of comportment. The verbose and grandiloquent king cannot but be contrasted to his canny and taciturn cousin. In the interview between Bolingbroke and King Richard that is at the heart of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Bolingbroke's calculated taciturnity contrasts strikingly, and famously, with the fulsome display of Richard's subtle and often convoluted rhetoric. Richard addresses his abdication with language that is as introspective and introverted as it is ambiguous—and it is so ambiguous that the printed text cannot in many places adequately capture its polysemous quality. Bolingbroke, on the other hand, responds to Richard with silences and perfunctory remarks. These are ambiguous in their own right, of course, if only for their parsimony of expression. The difference between these styles of ambiguity betrays a profound difference in the lin-

guistic philosophies of these characters: Richard's language is grammatically ambiguous. He fills the air with words and ideas, clever puns and perilous homophones. It is a positive ambiguity, an ambiguity of presence that Richard revels in, the presence in so much language of multiple, contradictory possibilities all, importantly, emanating from him—he is the king as creator, through language, of the possibility of meaning itself. Bolingbroke, by distinction, plays off what we might call a negative ambiguity or an ambiguity of absence: by saying little and keeping what he does say so compressed and controlled, he ends up with linguistic alibis against undesirable interpretations of what he does say while at the same time leaving others—and us—to supply meanings and motives for him, just as he so deftly relegates to others the execution of his will. We might imagine Bolingbroke deliberately positioning himself to retroactively adopt whichever of those meanings or motives he finds most advantageous in whatever his present circumstances, as if they had been the truth of the matter the entire time. His claim, at the end of *Henry IV, Part Two*, that he had no intention to ascend the throne, "But that necessity so bow'd the state / That I and greatness were compell'd to kiss'' we may or may not regard as disingenuous, but it is his tight-lipped bearing in *Richard II*, his withholding of language from us in this play that leaves open this interpretation of events to begin with.

Bolingbroke's practical, unforthcoming bearing is established in *Richard II* at the outset. Following his banishment, Gaunt chastises him for failing to respond to the Lord Marshal's generous offer to accompany him to Dover: "O, to what purpose dost thou hoard thy words, / That thou returnest no greeting to thy friends?'' Bolingbroke's response looks forward to Cordelia's own reticence in *King Lear*: "I have too few to take my leave of you, / When the tongue's office should be prodigal / To breathe the abundant dolor of the heart'' (1.3.253–57). There follows a rather Senecan stichomythia, recalling earlier Elizabethan drama, in which he tersely dismisses Gaunt's obtrusive moralizing. Where Gaunt tries to cheer him with well-wearable maxims—"there is no virtue like necessity'' (1.3.278)—and the consolation of philosophy, the word-hoarding Bolingbroke rejects the "bare imagination'' (1.3.297) of pretending your situation is not as bad as it is. In this, he contrasts quite severely with the world-creating power of thought that Richard will use to summon stones to his defense and, after that, invoke in his cell.

The differing styles of speech of Richard and Bolingbroke, as commentators have long noted, seem to befit their differing attitudes to royal power: its inviolable sanctity in the case of Richard, its unmitigated contingency in the case of Bolingbroke. The naive monarch who narcissistically refuses to disavow his divine right challenges and is defeated by the master tactician of modern, political reality: this is one of

the most common ways to read the play[22]—and is credible enough given its plot—but I want to investigate the possibility that there is more at stake in the tête-à-tête between Richard and Bolingbroke and in the verbal game that they play. What their encounter illustrates is not so much, I would argue, the supremacy in the modern political dispensation of Machiavellian cunning and pragmatism over medieval absolutism and ceremoniousness but the ineluctable compromise that power, specifically political power, must always make with language. If the desire to close the gap between language and reality is concomitant with the wielding of power itself, Shakespeare's *Richard II* suggests that the gap is never completely closable. Rather, there is a tension between the two, a tension that is always ready to explode as soon as a language of power becomes too far removed from the reality it purports to represent and as soon as those on whom the language impinges discover they are no longer invested in maintaining the illusion that it does so. Richard's tragic flaw might be his too self-indulgent belief in the self-representations his kingly speech fashions, but Bolingbroke's victory over him hardly puts an end to kingly self-representations. The cynical, politic world which Bolingbroke is so often held to inaugurate might have ironically required such representations even more and might have required that acquiescence to them, sincere or not, be policed to an even greater degree. As Henry IV, Bolingbroke finds himself uneasily having to occupy the same sort of role as Richard and to perform the same sort of negotiation between his royal speech and the world it attempts to structure.

The play is also an ironic statement about historical discourse. If characters in other plays seem to know they are in plays (if they aren't producing plays themselves), Richard seems uncomfortably aware of his role in a "fall of princes'' allegory, that he is trapped in a moral exemplum. What the play relates is his struggle to step out of that role, to determine himself, through language, his own purchase on a history that contains him. Whereas Bolingbroke often comes out ahead in comparisons of the two leaders, it is arguable that Richard better understands the nature of the kingship. For all his equivocating and bluster, Richard enacts to perfection the schizophrenic part a king must play. He behaves as if the world were his to command with words. He believes (or pretends to believe) that his rule is guaranteed by the historical process that made him king to begin with, even if that historical process is itself a fiction he is enjoined to promulgate for the sake of his authority. In this way, history bears a relation to divinity. They both serve as slippery terms that appear to be at the same time universal objects of appeal and yet entirely contingent on human subjectivity. In Richard's estimation, God and history ought to be on the same side: his. At least, he understands that he cannot reign without acting as if this is so, and the line between his belief and his pretense is vanishingly thin.

Bolingbroke demurs to play this game, thinking that shrewd maneuvers and linguistic withholding will spare him (and his successors, whose fates Shakespeare already had written) from the calamities that history teaches us to expect. There is a reason the play ends a tragedy, with a royal body on the stage—just as *Henry VI, Part One* begins with one—and not with Henry IV triumphant. Bolingbroke's achievement is ironically undermined, as we have seen, by Shakespeare in terms remarkably similar, if differently registered, to the victory of Richmond in *Richard III*. Chronological history might seem to look forward to the Tudors, but Shakespeare's unique way with endings means that in literary time, the end to bloody wars promised by the future Henry VII is followed immediately by the bloody wars's beginning. This circularity undoes, to some extent, myths of historical progress in general or teleological Tudorism in particular. Instead of universal history proceeding from the creation of the world to the latest victorious bloodletter, we get instead, in Shakespeare, history as a meaningless, repetitive ouroboros. As if history were not an abstract concept (or even impalpable phenomenon) but an office under royal command, Richard and Bolingbroke both demonstrate that the impulse to mold history out of our own imaginations is as unavoidable as our inability to do so. In its combining of linguistic fulsomeness with ritualized politics, *Richard II* dramatizes this fruitless search for historical mastery.

Bolingbroke receives his first lesson in performing the role and speaking the language of a king at the moment of his ascendency. In the abdication sequence, which we have already examined in part, Bolingbroke has Richard summoned to Westminster Hall to formally relinquish the crown. He wishes for, or consents to, a public deposition of Richard, he says, "that in common view / He may surrender; / so we shall proceed / Without suspicion'' (4.1.155–57). By acting "in common view,'' he expects to achieve a public sanction of his authority and also to make of himself a public figure whose actions are above "suspicion.'' To advance a public persona, in other words, is, for Bolingbroke, to provide cover for his private thoughts and hidden maneuvers. Unlike Richard, who seems to tell us everything, Bolingbroke remains restrained and obscure. Shakespeare enhances these characteristics, and perhaps tempts our interpretive scrutiny, by not writing into the play, or only alluding cryptically to, much of what Bolingbroke must be saying and must be doing to orchestrate his rise to power. Even the loaded remark that leads to the erstwhile king's murder is uttered offstage, as it were, dialogue reported at second hand lending itself, as Shakespeare no doubt knew, to the sort of deniability that Bolingbroke wants built-in to his royal language. And Bolingbroke's way of transmitting power through his language is indeed to carefully calibrate his speech, as if enough care could be taken with it that his darker purposes will remain hidden even as

they are realized. We may infer his motives, in other words, but his language makes it hard to pin them down definitively. In his commandment to bring the fallen Richard into his presence, "He may surrender'' is not quite "he must surrender''—subtly, subjunctively I would say, maintaining the illusion that Richard has chosen to abdicate of his own free will. He may do so if he wishes. And he also has permission to do it in public. "So we shall proceed'' is so compact, subtle, and bland an expression that it could easily escape notice altogether, except that it insinuates into the royal "we'' the collaboration of his fellow rebels; combines the simple fact of futurity, "shall,'' with a sense of serious intent; and the verb, "proceed,'' is so neutral and non-specific that in its very attempt to slip by it almost begs to be interrogated for some more precise meaning.

Shakespeare clearly characterizes Bolingbroke as cognizant of the fine, linguistic line he is treading in his adoption of a regal bearing. By having Richard brought in to make a spectacle of himself, Bolingbroke acknowledges that to be legitimately invested with royal power—to be perceived as legitimate—requires more than pedigree or military conquest. The prize of his inheritance he might have wrested by force from Richard's control, but the seizing of the kingship, if the pretense and symbolic effectiveness of political legitimacy itself are to be satisfied, demands some kind of display, some occasion of formal utterances. We may regard Bolingbroke as a self-interested propagandist who does not, or does not yet, believe in the sanctity of kingship, as Richard seems to, who merely exploits it in order to secure his office. But royal symbols were powerful enough at the time Shakespeare was writing that the abdication is not a scene we should take merely as the exposing of the artifices of monarchy on Shakespeare's part or an entirely cynical maneuver on Bolingbroke's. Bolingbroke understands the necessity of ceremony, of being witnessed being incorporated into the representational system of the English monarchy—of being transformed in people's minds from Bolingbroke into "Henry, of that name the fourth.'' But his understanding of what it means to speak as a king is only partial. He is clever about exploiting the dark corners of language to his advantage, but he has not yet experienced the extent to which a king's speech takes on a resonance that reverberates beyond the intentions of the person who physically occupies the throne. Part of what Shakespeare's play examines is the gap that opens up between the person who is king and the king-as-speaker, as if the voice of the king-as-speaker is somehow disembodied and superior to even the person of the king himself—not quite the same thing as the king's two bodies but not entirely unrelated, either. The success of a monarch, as *Richard II* and Shakespeare's subsequent history plays demonstrate, has much to do with how well this

gap is negotiated. In the poetically rich linguistic world of *Richard II* specifically, the king really does come to be a sort of poetic maker, whether intentionally or not.

Richard, the poet-maker-king par excellence, speaks, in contrast to Bolingbroke, with full confidence in the illocutionary purchase of his every word; even after his deposition, he cannot entirely bring himself to believe the contrary, that his word never could call to arms a glorious angel "for every man that Bullingbrook hath press'd'' (3.2.58). Even in prison, Richard still yearns to master his own reality with nothing left to him except his "still-breeding thoughts'' (5.5.8). At the deposition, Bolingbroke speaks a language of calculated intrigue—when he speaks at all. Richard, however, appears to mock his restraint and in so doing mock the notion that a king would not act as master of his own language and thereby master of the reality that language generates. Bolingbroke's terse statements only provoke him to this, and the effect of Bolingbroke's paucity of language is heightened for us as the readers of this scene by Richard's grandiloquence. When Bolingbroke says, "I thought you had been willing to resign,'' Richard does not take the bait. Instead, his response, "My crown I am, but still my griefs are mine. / You may my glories and my state depose, / But not my griefs; still am I king of those'' (4.1.190–93) is even more of a hedge. "My crown I am'' could just as well be inverted: "I am my crown.'' This is the paradox Richard finds himself in: the language that commands can command anything except its own dissolution. "You may my glories and my state depose'' turns the motive force of the abdication back on Bolingbroke: he is not resigning, Bolingbroke is deposing, and not necessarily his state, or kingdom, so much as his achievements and personal condition. He continues to regard himself the true king despite being in Bolingbroke's power. And with these sleights of language proves himself language's true master.

To some extent, Richard is teaching him what it is to possess a monopoly on linguistic authority. Easy though it is to dismiss Richard as hopelessly mired in his own imagination, there is much in the play to indicate that he does, in fact, know exactly what he is doing and knows exactly what the performative nature of kingship is, even if he clings to it beyond all hope for himself. Bolingbroke may never adopt the verbal panache of Richard, but he does come to learn, by necessity, the seriousness of royal speech: how it must create a world for people to inhabit and not simply stand aloof to strategize from the empyrean. Bolingbroke is vague in his pronouncements perhaps in order to let people betray themselves. Richard layers meaning atop meaning and ends up meaning everything at once, a king who thinks he is everything at once, a king of "twenty thousand names.'' He responds to Bolingbroke's craft and guile by trying to lure him into a maze of unanswerability. As the king, Richard naturally feels that he answers to nobody: hardly

has he learned, he says earlier, "to insinuate, flatter, bow, and bend my knee'' (4.1.165). And so his answers in their exchange give Bolingbroke everything he wants but also nothing. His famous response to the question Bolingbroke, still attempting to keep a handle on the situation, finally asks, "Are you contented to resign the crown?'' is only the apogee of his frustrated and frustrating linguistic acrobatics: "Ay, no, no, ay; for I must nothing be; / Therefore no no, for I resign to thee'' (4.1.200–2). As Leonard Barkin points out, *Richard II* avoids the kinds of decisive narrative action we see in other history plays. There are, instead of the duels and battles hinted at, various forms of dithering, equivocation, and delay. The signature moment of the play, the deposition scene, only conforms to this pattern by cleverly subverting what ought to be an emotionally charged act: "when the decisive moment actually arrives, it is almost comically anticlimactic.''[23] Richard, who cannot wrap his head (or tongue) around the possibility is pitted against Bolingbroke, who does everything he can to avoid falling into the king's verbal traps. The result is so deflating to what should be pretty lofty stakes—the monarchy itself—that what Richard ends up handing over seems less a crown than a linguistic carapace that Bolingbroke, for all his inscrutable cleverness, is not necessarily prepared to fill out.

The king may seem to be jesting when he puns, but his synecdoches cut deeper when one realizes that the ultimate synecdoche in this play is the relationship of the king to the "king.'' Barkin is right to point out Richard's tendency to treat the events of the play from a posture of "aesthetic detachment.'' This is, I would argue, the effect of Richard's presumption that he is the master of his language and that reality is determined by his words. And it is also the reason, theatrics aside, why the avoidance of "decisive action'' is built into the structure of the play. This is a play about linguistic control, not about battling armies. Bolingbroke's linguistic style confronts but also confirms Richard's. The volleys are words. The action is so much in the background, it has to be made trivial, even the most significant actions—even Richard's death, ultimately, and the newly crowned Henry IV's reaction to it, as he becomes newly wise to his role and thus contrives a crusade to Jerusalem. And we, of course, already know his ironic fate, too.

There is a telling metaphor at the exact center of the play. Bereft of friends, forced to resign the throne, and at his cousin Bolingbroke's mercy, Richard finds himself unable to bear the sight of his own face. Dramatically asking at the moment of his deposition for a looking-glass, he tries to apprehend his divided self within it: the image of the king he believed himself to be and the fallen creature now before him. Looking in the mirror, he gives his final public performance and parting lesson to Bolingbroke:

> O flatt'ring glass,
> Like to my followers in prosperity,
> Thou dost beguile me! Was this face the face
> That every day under his household roof
> Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face
> That like the sun, did make beholders wink?
> Is this the face which fac'd so many follies,
> That was at last out-fac'd by Bullingbrook?
> A brittle glory shineth in this face,
> As brittle as the glory is the face,
> [*Dashes the glass against the ground.*]
> For there it is, crack'd in an hundred shivers.
> Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport,
> How soon my sorrow hath destroy'd my face. (4.1.279–91)

The breaking of the mirror has provided critics a rich occasion for analysis. The mirror itself recalls the *Mirror for Magistrates*—in which Richard himself appears to narrate his fate—and the entire *speculum regis* genre of advice for princes. More patently, the mirror serves as a metaphor for deceiving images. Richard, who found himself deceived by his allies, sees now that his own image does not align with his expectations, that it too is deceitful. To go only a step further, he also recognizes the idolatry inherent in kingship itself. Only his insubstantial image—Kantorowicz's "body politic''—is king. His flesh and blood person, subject to the blows of sorrow, is merely the monarchy's temporary vehicle. Hence his subsequent play with the word "shadow'', as Bolingbroke, not yet himself a king, appears unmoved by Richard's histrionics. Noteworthy, as well, is that he uses the word "read'' when he receives the mirror. Refusing Northumberland's demand that he read aloud his crimes, he says instead that he will read the mirror, or read himself in the mirror. What he finds there, however, is deception, because his image has not changed. No deeper truth has emerged to inscribe his face with the lines betokening a changed state. The mirror's breaking can also be interpreted in numerous ways. By smashing the image of the king, Richard publicly demonstrates the fragility, the insubstantiality, of that image and how easily it can be shattered. He means this characteristically dramatic gesture as a lesson for Bolingbroke: "by breaking the mirror he enacts the suddenness with which glory and power may be shattered, leaving the man, the human truth, unchanged and unrevealed.''[24] Bolingbroke, who is himself quite unrevealed compared to Richard, has not yet come to realize the truth of Richard's self-abnegating display. But the shattered mirror designates more than the "moral'' that Richard intends by it. If it did not, it would be fair to describe the play, *Richard II*, as little more than a poetically overwrought rendering of traditional, Boethian philosophizing. The image in Richard's mirror

is also the image of history. On the surface, it looks human, but the surface is all we can see. Much like the play itself, we can only guess at the inner life of these characters by what they say. History, too, is a similar sort of extrapolation from limited evidence and lacking in the psychological complexity afforded by drama.

The singular mirror that Richard holds reflects back the false image of a unitary account of events. Where he had once believed his own thoughts capable of producing his reality, the mirror affords him perspective. Its shattering shows how that perspective is merely his own, and not one in any way enforced upon the world. The unitary image of kingship he imagined is thus fragmented into a hundred pieces, each reflecting back its own piecemeal, fragmentary truth. History in Shakespeare's Richard ends up looking very much like the "flatt'ring glass'' that the deposed king throws at Bolingbroke's feet—"crack'd in an hundred shivers''. For as many shards it splinters into, there are so many ways to see it. As Richard discovers to his sorrow, history is neither a scripted guarantee of a divinely-ordered cosmos nor a reflection of human will. It is, rather, an image that beguiles. Richard's revelation here is not that he has changed but that he has not changed. In outward appearance he is the same even if everything else about him has now become qualitatively different. The differences that exist but cannot be seen, we are meant to conclude, are as insubstantial as the image that appears in a mirror—and yet somehow more substantial. If his cares had furrowed wrinkles in his face or otherwise transformed his appearance, he could understand that he is different. But his image is all he is, and since he is, after all, a creature for us of language, the image in the mirror is really the speech that is reflected back to us by the play. There is no other, interior dimension for us to look into. The surface of the play produces an image as the surface of history produces an image, too, and neither are more than shadows. Richard makes a show of this for Bolingbroke's sake, though his cousin is as yet unsympathetic.

Moreover, Richard's punning on his image explicitly makes of it a piece of language: "Was this face the face / That every day under his household roof / Did keep ten thousand men? / Was this the face / That like the sun, did make beholders wink?'' He does not quite believe the reality of what he is "seeing'' any more than Bolingbroke believes that words themselves are more than shadows. Richard perceives himself to have been outmaneuvered by Bolingbroke but also "out-fac'd,'' that is defeated in the game of linguistic manipulation at Richard excels and even continues to excel in this very exchange. Such is his virtuosity, it is hard to believe that Richard actually believes what he is saying. The ironic subtext is, perhaps, extended by the metaphor's obvious allusion to Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. In that play, Faustus also

cannot quite believe what he is seeing. Having asked for everything from absolute knowledge to Helen of Troy herself, he is disappointed to learn nothing he does not already know and that the mysteries he seeks are no more than word games, illusions like Helen. There is, perhaps, not so great a division between the mage who sells his soul for empty knowledge and the usurper who sells his reputation for an empty crown. We know Shakespeare dwelled on this figure of recognition, because he repeats it in *King Lear*. As we will see in that play, Lear has much in common with the deposed Richard. Deposed himself in all but name, it is Cordelia who wonders at her father's "face.'' Whereas Richard is beguiled that nothing has changed, Cordelia is that so much has. The difference is that Richard's kingly name has been taken away but Lear's has not, and so much the worse for him; the difference is that Richard's undoing is a solipsistic spectacle of language, because he is the most knowing character in his play, whereas Lear's is intersubjective, because it proffers the carrot of redemption before violently snatching it away—and, again, so much the worse for him.

The closing events of *Richard II* show that Henry IV will have to be as linguistically astute a king as his predecessor. When a king's words flow through the world, after all, they create realities of their own accord, and that despite every effort to keep them under control. When Aumerle's treachery is revealed to his father the Duke of York, the entire family rushes to King Henry, the Duke to turn his son over for summary judgment, the Duchess to plead for mercy. It is the Duchess in this scene, who best articulates the new powers of speech that Bolingbroke has inherited:

> And if I were thy nurse, they tongue to teach,
> "Pardon'' should be the first word of thy speech.
> I never long'd to hear a word till now,
> Say "pardon,'' King, let pity teach thee how.
> The word is short, but not so short as sweet,
> No word like "pardon'' for kings' mouths so meet.'' (5.3.113–18)

When Henry finally relents, she insists he repeat the pardon twice as though exulting in the power of his royal word. "A god on earth thou art.'' (5.3.136) she exclaims in response to his benevolence. Divine right is clearly alive and well for at least some people. This scene is light-hearted enough the way it plays out, but it presages the betrayal of Northumberland—"thou ladder wherewithal / The mounting Bullingbrook ascends my throne,'' (5.1.55–56) as Richard address him—and his co-conspirators that will plague Henry to the end of his reign, at least in Shakespeare's version of events.

A darker instance of the king's speech escaping the king's control is Exton's murder of Richard. Exton reports to his comrades that Henry "wishtly look'd on me / As who should say, "I would thou wert the man / That would divorce this terror from my heart'''' (5.4.7–9). Like his namesake, Henry II, this King Henry wonders aloud that he has no friend to relieve him of his "living fear.'' But Exton reports this speech at second hand and only imputes to the king the desire that he should do the deed. This absence of Henry's direct command dramatizes a gap in the historical record. Even the dramatized Henry is sneaky enough to operate in the margins of the play, working his will from the other side of the page, as if the omission of his versified will could spare him responsibility for the death of a king. Killing Richard, however, would be too much for Henry—too much like killing himself. And he appears "on record'' only to abjure Exton's act and promise atonement for the slander it will bring him. The body, however, remains on the stage. Richard remains, before and after he is killed, like an undead version of his former self to haunt future reigns. The stain on historical memory is even sensed by Exton himself at the very moment of the murder, when he as much as admits the king's persisting divinity as he laments the shedding of a his blood: "As full of valure as of royal blood! / Both have I spill'd; O would the deed were good! / For now the devil that told me I did well / Says that this deed is chronicled in hell'' (5.5.113–16). Is this a deed chronicled in hell because from this act come all the horrible atrocities of history to come? Or is it because the play, for all its ironizing of kingly discourse, cannot quite disavow its special status entirely? The hell-chronicled deed, and with reference to the royal blood, takes on added resonance in *Henry V*, where the titular Henry of that play makes a show of self-pity in a Richardian, albeit hypocritical, fashion: "I Richard's body have interred new, / And on it have bestowed more contrite tears, / Than from it issued forced drops of blood'' (4.1.295–97). Of course, Henry's tears can no more wash away Richard's blood than Lady Macbeth can wash away Duncan's. The body remains on stage, even hinted at in Henry's own language: "I Richard's body.'' For a playwright with a demonstrated capacity to pun on the word "I'', and having done so quite famously during Richard's abdication scene, it would be curious if this word order were merely fortuitous. Perhaps Shakespeare is, in fact, making a point about historical memory. It is not the doctrine of the "king's two bodies'' that he is referring to but the history that every king carries with him of all the murdered kings that came before and the necessity of somehow assimilating that history so as to comfortably occupy this odd and historically untenable office. That Henry V's body will itself be displayed at the beginning of *Henry VI, Part One* is a reminder of how futile it is. History is as inexorable as it is, ultimately, unrepresentable.

Returning to the end of *Richard II*, we can hardly know if Shakespeare wants us to think that events turn out as Bolingbroke intends them. But the new king does start to sound a bit like the old king when he receives the news. Speaking in couplets, playing with the nuances of language, it is perhaps at this late moment in the play when Bolingbroke finds himself becoming, like Richard, captive to his own self-representation. He intends a voyage to the Holy Land to cleanse himself of the guilt he feels for Richard's death. As usual, we cannot be certain of his sincerity, though we can be sure of his need to appear sincere, and that, as a Shakespearean king, he remains beholden to the insuperable gap between the unreliable, unstable world in which he operates and the language of power that is intended to structure that world. Bolingbroke's manner of speech does not supersede Richard's. At most, it simply translates it into a different political idiom. What the confrontation between Bolingbroke and Richard ultimately achieves is not a transhistorical meditation on the uses and abuses of power, but for us, an indication that the nature of power and the operation of historical processes were understood by Shakespeare and his contemporaries in more sophisticated ways than they—outside of a textually-inquisitive, intellectual elite—are often given credit for. History is not always as simplistic as one side or another relating its version of events, and early modern readers—audiences, too, we may presume—who had many sides to choose from, were scrupulous and skeptical enough in the way they read that they are unlikely to have accepted any given discourse at face value. Shakespeare's *Richard II* might be a critique of the beautiful but hollow language of a king so obsessed with his symbolic function and so impressed with his own rhetorical bravura that he has forgotten that the king is only a symbol with which a royal body can only imperfectly combine and that language, even a king's language, however sanctified by institution and tradition, is not necessarily reality. But such a reading does not necessarily entail taking sides with Bolingbroke, either, if take seriously Richard's warnings about the impermanence of power and loyalty and his seeming articulation of the cyclical nature of history.

Shakespeare's history plays are not definitive representations of events but, perhaps, attempts to realize the promise that historical representation holds out: that each time the story is told, each new form it is told in, we get closer to something useful to present circumstances or else revealing of deeper, human truths. Each play is, in a way, another attempt to redeem history from itself, from the endless cycle of repetitive violence and its poetically-contrived justifications that it seems inevitably to fold back into. If, as I would argue, Shakespeare's engagement with the philosophy of history follows a trajectory from the poetic deconstruction of *Richard II* to the total negation of *King Lear*, we can identify some instructive

parallels between the two plays—both styled both "history'' and "tragedy.'' In one, we see a historical king struggling to overcome through the poetic speech of royalty the fiction that a poetic history has made of him. In the other, a fictional king is destroyed by the contradictions of kingly speech and ends up taking with him any faith we might have in historical progress, in a social order guaranteed by its narrative continuity. The aged King Lear, at his most abject, claims in a moment of bitter irony to be "every inch a king.'' His youthful alter ago, Richard, at his, asks, "How can you say to me I am a king?'' If it takes as much historical imagination to create a king as to keep one in power as to destroy one, these two plays are counterparts in exhausting the possibilities. The third term that lies between them, however, is *Coriolanus*. In that play, the idealized history of antiquity is dispersed among a multitude of voices, and the great actors of history shown to be scapegoats for the self-justifications of the present—the introverted Richard II and the abandoned King Lear have an unexpected relation to the historical, mythical, banished Caius Martius. All seeking their worlds elsewhere, these characters together delineated the fulsomeness of Shakespeare's historiographic art.

Notes

[1]All Shakespeare quotations are cited from William Shakespeare. *The Riverside Shakespeare.* 2nd ed. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

[2]John Speed. *The History of Great Britaine.* London, 1611. 608. Also reported by John Stow, the division of the river signifying the division of the kingdom.

[3]Richard's deposition is glossed by Holinshed as a special case worthy of attention (and heavy-handed moralization): "Thys ſurelye is a very notable example, and not vnworthye of all Princes to bee well wayed, and diligently marked, that this Henry Duke of Lancaſter ſhoulde be thus called to the kingdome, and haue the helpe and aſſiſtance (almoſt) of all the whole realme, which perchaunce neuer thereof thought or yet dreamed, and that king Richard ſhould thus be left deſolate, voide, and in deſpaire of all hope and comfort, in whom if there were anye offence, it ought rather to bee imputed to the frayletie of wanton youth, than to the malice of his hart: but ſuch is ye deceiuable iudgement of man, whiche not regarding thyngs preſent with due cõſideration, thinketh euer that things to come, ſhall haue good ſucceſſe, and a pleaſante delectable ende.'' Raphael Holinshed. The chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande. Vol. 2. London, 1577. 1107–108.

[4]My intention here and following is not to argue that history is poetry and poetry is history, as if distinctions do not matter and as if early modern writers had no sense of or opinions about their differences, but rather that their practical uses of the terms, as well as the overlaps in their perceived utility, means that neither is prior to the other. The very fact of their intellectual adjecency—unthinkable now—surely made any attempt to define one in terms of the other (even if in opposing terms) predicated on the overarching rhetorical system, the quintessential Renaissance archetext, in which they both partook. I bear in mind throughout Sir Philip Sidney's perhaps offhanded remark that "many times [the historian] must tell of events whereof he can yield no cause; or, if he do, it must be poetically'' (Sir Philip Sidney. A Defence of Poetry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966. 36). This is more often than not the case.

[5]A well-known and representative example is the "discovery'' of feudalism in the early modern period and the corresponding insight that human institutions are neither static nor natural but the product of ongoing contingency and negotiation. Such inquiries encouraged an intellectual climate that was moving from the rote transmission of knowledge toward curiosity about the underlying principles governing human conduct, an attitude that would have primed well-informed theatricial audiences for the critical attitudes toward cultural shibboleths that characterizes early modern historical drama: "Study of the feudal law was peculiarly calculated to cause men's minds to pass from reflexions on the forms of the law to inquiry into the social and economic realities which underlay them.'' (J. G. A. Pocock. The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 81)

[6]David Norbrook. "'A Liberal Tongue': Language and Rebellion in Richard II'' in Kirby Farrell, Ed. Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999. 121–34. 122–23.

[7]Christopher Fletcher. "Manhood and Politics in the Reign of Richard II.'' Past and Present 189 (2005): 3–39. 39.

[8]If the terms were not exactly used interchangeably, the debate over the relative merits of history and poetry, which goes back to Aristotle and was picked up by Renaissance scholars, indicates their close semantic relationship. The fact that it even was a debate, that history and poetry could be opposed, registers the profound distinction between intellectual life then and now. Nobody today would seriously argue that poetry is a superior discipline to history much less that it is a discipline, in any way

equivalent, at all. This, I think, is remarkable. See Donald R. Kelley. "The Theory of History'' in Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, et al. Eds. The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. 746–61.

[9]William Shakespeare. King Richard II. Ed. Charles R. Forker. Arden Shakespeare (Third Series). London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002. 30.

[10]Historical nostalgia of the variety I am describing was no trivial matter in early modern England. In fact, much of the cultural character of what we call "early modern England'' in order to set it apart from "medieval England'' is the result of debates about history—institutional, legal, monarchical—that were happening at the time. The Protestant Reformation, on the one hand, and the abolishment of the monarchy on the other, were both predicated on the "revival'' of what were perceived to be historically-supported truths that had somehow been lost or suppressed, as if historicity were a necessary prerequisite for challenging power and instantiating social change. Ironically, both of these revolutionary cultural shifts, each at either end of what is often studied as a coherent period, had to do with historically-informed interpretations of the royal office: practical, in the former case; philosophical, in the latter, though each dependent on opposite conclusions about the contradiction inherent in the nature of the king. The extent to which early modern political theology, especially as described by Ernst Kantorowicz, is informed by literary (and other) fictions is discussed by Victoria Kahn. "Political Theology and Fiction in The King's Two Bodies.'' Representations 106. (2009): 77–101. John Milton cites Holinshed in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates as providing a precedent for the trial of Charles I. Milton, a not unsympathetic reader of Shakespeare, may himself have read history through the filter of literature. When the deaths of kings are involved, we are longer speaking merely of "influence,'' though, as the historical enterprise in early modern England received additional stimulus from the printing and performance of dramatic literature (as testified by the strange career of John Haywood's history, perhaps influenced by Shakespeare's play, The first part of the life and raigne of King Henrie the IIII). Shakespeare's play clearly impinged on the historical thinking of the time, though the history it treated could end up used in a variety of ways. King James could find justification for divine right and constitutionalists that right's limitation. Both notions were historical fictions improvised in this period on the basis of the same patchwork of inconsistent, fragmentary, unreliable texts we have available to us now.

[11]Alan Liu. "The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism.'' ELH 56.4 (1989): 721–71. 733. For another early critique of the New Historicism, see also Jean E. Howard. "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies.'' English Literary Renaissance 16 (1986): 13–43.

[12]John Nichols, Ed. Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica. Vol. 1. London, 1780. 525. For a thorough overview and defense of the oft-questioned authenticity of Lambarde's conversation with Elizabeth, see Jason Scott-Warren. "Was Elizabeth I Richard II?: The Authenticity of Lambarde's 'Conversation.'" The Review of English Studies 64.264 (2013): 208–230. Some critics, however, are reluctant to accept that theater was as important a mode of discourse as many of their colleagues, especially New Historicists, would like to believe. Touching on Elizabeth's famous statement, in particular, see Leeds Barroll. "A New History for Shakespeare and His Time'' in Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Richard II. Kirby Farrell, Ed. New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999. 93–120.

[13]Sean Kelsey. "The Death of Charles I.'' The Historical Journal. 45.4 (2002): 727–54.

[14]For an excellent account of the "theatrical affects'' deployed in Richard II, particularly with regard to the bodily experience of hearing in performance its highly versified language, see Brian Walsh. "The Dramaturgy of Discomfort in Richard II'' in Richard II: New Critical Essays. Ed. Jeremy Lopez. Shakespeare Criticism Volume 25. New York: Routledge, 2012. 181–201.

[15]The significance of prophecy in historiography—and the skepticism to which Shakespeare subjects it—is explored at length by Line Cottegnies. With particular reference to the three Henry VI plays, Cottegnies discusses how Shakespeare's dramatic historiography "reflects contemporary anxiety towards prophecy, but also manifests a sceptical view of historical transcendence, foregrounding the conflict between individual agency and providential pattern. It also poses the question of interpretation as authorial irony can be perceived through the use of polysemous riddles.'' Line Cottegnies. "Lies Like Truth: Oracles and the Question of Interpretation in Shakespeare's Henry VI, Part 2'' in Cottegnies, et al, eds. Les Voix de Dieu: Littérature et prophétie en Angleterre et en France à l'âge baroque. Paris, France: Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2008. 21–34. 24. As I have been arguing, it is this ironic tenor that Shakespeare seems to bring to the entire question of making sense of human events, perhaps on the basis of prophecy's fallen edifice and at the expense of a historiographical didacticism that would deliver as the guide to moral or political action a history devoid of affective consequences.

[16]Marjorie Garber. "Descanting on Deformity: Richard III and the Shape of History'' in The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture. Ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. 86.

[17]Marjorie Garber. "'What's Past Is Prologue': Temporality and Prophecy in Shakespeare's History Plays'' in Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation. Ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski. Harvard English Studies 14. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. 301–31. 323.

[18]For an account of how traces of the "old faith'' persisted in Protestant England, see Arthur Marotti. "In Defence of Idolatry: Residual Catholic Culture and the Protestant Assault on the Sensuous in Early Modern England'' in Redrawing the Map of Early Modern English Catholicism. Ed. Lowell Gallagher. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 27–51.

[19]It is worth pointing out that Shakespeare, in depicting these events and translating them into dramatic verse, would have encountered discrepancies in his sources without having any clear metric by which to gauge their relative accuracy, though he may well have only looked to their theatrical transferability. The deposition scene itself, as Annabel Patterson points out, is inconsistently related by Holinshed and Hall. Whereas Holinshed ascribes Richard's forced abdication to an act of Parliament—which is actually typical of his historiographical practice—it is in Hall where we find "a highly emotional and metaphorical speech by Richard complaining that he has not been permitted time to grow up and mend his ways.'' Annabel Patterson. Reading Holinshed's Chronicles. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. 114–15. The choices Shakespeare made when depicting history were no by means dictated by his sources, but it is significant on its own that he would have encountered history as something requiring representational and interpretive choices to begin with.

[20]Ronald R. MacDonald. "Uneasy Lies: Language and History in Shakespeare's Lancastrian Tetralogy'' in Shakespeare and History. Ed. Stephen Orgel and Sean Keilen. New York: Garland, 1999. 58.

[21]Ronald Levao. Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions: Cusanus, Sidney, Shakespeare. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985. 314.

[22]For Bolingbroke as Machiavellian, see Irving Ribner. "Bolingbroke, a True Machiavellian'' in Richard II: Critical Essays. Ed. Jeanne T. Newlin. New York: Garland, 1984. 95–104. The classic study of Machiavelli's ideas as they pertain to Elizabethan drama is Edward Meyer. Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama. Weimar: Emil Felber, 1897. It is interesting to note that the archetypal Machivel in Shakespeare's histories is the more blatantly evil Richard III, a character who, like Iago and Edmund, not

only revels in his calculated malice but communicates it directly to the audience. The ascription of this negatively-regarded trait to Bolingbroke, who is more oriented toward politics than motiveless malignancy, is strange if our sympathies are in any way meant to align with him, and he is as tight-lipped about his motives in Richard II as if he does not have any.

[23]Leonard Barkin. "The Theatrical Consistency of Richard II.'' Shakespeare Quarterly 29.1 (1978): 5–19.

[24]Harold F. Folland. "King Richard's Pallid Victory.'' Shakespeare Quarterly 24:4 (1973): 398.

Chapter 3

He did it to please his mother

If Shakespeare's *Richard II* meditates on the mutability of historical discourse and the ironies inherent to narratives written about the past, *Coriolanus* takes a different route to the intersection of history and tragedy. In this later play, Shakespeare reframes history as not merely a discourse to be mastered but as a matter of public concern and consumption. It is the public, specifically, and its relationship to history and historical actors, that animates the action of the play and the political philosophy to which it speaks. From the ceremonious style of *Richard II*, a play that retains a vestige of tragedy's sacrificial undertone and early modern drama's liturgical ancestry, we move to the blunt frankness of the theater as a public forum, where history is transcribed into the public imagination. Shakespeare's latest Roman play treats history as in some sense a secular revelation: the disclosing of private affairs to public scrutiny. There is no history, we learn from *Coriolanus*, without a public and conversely no public without a history to articulate its collective identity. The Jacobean *Coriolanus* was better placed to engage with this spirit of publicness—and its consequences–than the Elizabethan tetralogy plays. Not only had theatrical interests shifted, but monarchical idolatry had become displaced enough for new social antagonisms and new ways of looking at them to emerge.

In *Richard II*, Shakespeare depicts a king who enacts his private tragedy as a public display. Formally rendering private experience in a public language, the play collapses the distinction between them. King Richard is represented as having a solitary introspectiveness that is indistinguishable from his outward persona. There is, as it were, no separation between his appearance and his substance. The poetic ornamentation of his speech works to project his inner life onto the outer world of the play, and this play consistently reminds us that all worlds—and all histories—are linguistically constituted and therefore manipulable and negotiable. While the word-hoarding Bolingbroke is dubiously tactical with his language, Richard makes no pretense of masking his feelings, beliefs, or intentions behind an inscrutable, kingly

mien. He behaves as one who occupies the singularly paradoxical role of king perhaps ought: he is, in the fullest possible sense, autopoietic, evincing the conviction that, like a poet makes verses, his words make the world. Put another way, he fully inhabits his role whereas Bolingbroke appears cynically detached from his. Given the versified form of the play *Richard II*, Richard the king could be forgiven for thinking his reality coextensive with his imagination: he is the play's cleverest versifier, even if the astuteness of his wordplay outstrips what his political situation, and nearly what language itself, can bear. No matter to whom he is speaking, even if to no one (and it is sometimes hard to distinguish), Richard leaves nothing unsaid, and what he says aloud to one or none is as good to him as a proclamation to all. He behaves as if even his soliloquies have an illocutionary effect, a meditative utterance no different from a royal edict. Maintaining no corner of hidden thoughts or private subjectivity, Richard thinks he speaks with history's authentic voice, a playwright-historian whose words are his deeds.

The king of twenty thousand names contrasts markedly to Caius Martius Coriolanus,[1] a character who at every opportunity disclaims his. Though usually classified as a tragedy or, vaguely, as a "political play," there is cause for looking at *Coriolanus* through a historical lens, as it reflects through its overt political content the way Shakespeare felt about history as a public commodity that imperfectly captures private lives. Unlike Richard, who revels in the poetic artifice of kingly self-representation, Martius wants nothing to do with collective processes of meaning-making, and *Coriolanus* theorizes the public differently. What brings Martius to a crisis in this play is his failure to grasp that a state cannot exist without a public to populate it—without other subjectivities that conflict with and complicate one's own—and a public is comprised of a heterogeneous citizenry. The heterogenous, however—the aberrant, unknown, unreliable other—disgusts him, is the target toward which his own simultaneously self- and other-denying language is aimed. If Richard's language is defined by multiplicity and the efflorescence of presence, Martius's is by its singularity and the parsimony of absence. As we will see, his resistance to public appropriation is inscribed into the play text itself.

When Martius is welcomed back to Rome following the conquest of Corioles, he is granted, by both Folio text and grateful citizenry, the eponymous agnomen he would prefer to repudiate (2.1.156ff).[2] His response is characteristic:

> No more of this, it does offend my heart.
> Pray now no more.
>
> (2.1.163–164)

If Richard acts as if he were himself the author of his own text, Martius wants to leap off the page entirely (and actually does at one point). His reputation that he acts "as if a man were author of himself" (5.3.36) is true to a point, but it might be more accurate to say that he wishes to "unauthor" himself—to be 'written' by no one and subject to no one's authorship, including his own. It is ironic that *Coriolanus* depicts exactly the sort of heroic individual on whose shoulders historiography has traditionally stood, but it is a purposeful irony. Representing Martius as wanting no part of historical discourse, Shakespeare creates for himself a dramatic/textual conundrum: a character who does not want to be written about and an actor who loathes to be on stage. These are the necessary conditions, however, for the play to test the stubborn resilience of a different kind of autopoietic individual against the irresistible desire-to-know of the public. That desire-to-know is a fragmentary force. It is, in fact, the modus operandi of Renaissance reading: all texts were subject to disintegration, recompilation, and refutation. Where there is a text, that is, there is interpretation, and once a text is disseminated, interpretations can proliferate far beyond what any author may have intended or subject may have desired. In *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare depicts this ineluctable subjection of private singularities to public mediation and the impossibility of ever escaping the multiplicity of interpretation: the many-headed reader, who seizes the body of the text and renders it on behalf of the body politic.

Whether this is a frightening image of our inability to protect our reputations or of the necessity of putting public interests ahead of private egos, *Coriolanus* demonstrates the consequences of resisting interpretive appropriation. What the play suggests is that in order for history to perform its work, the heroic or exemplary individual must be integrated into a greater, more comprehensive narrative, into the story of the people on whose behalf he acts. This assimilation of private person to public act implies a degree of selection but also, for the person involved, annihilation. Once the text outlives the person, the text essentially becomes the person. As an exemplary figure from the classical past himself, Martius likewise only has significance to the (early modern) present insofar as he stands for or against a certain kind of virtue. His life exists entirely within the bounds of the texts that remain to carry his memory—Plutarch, Livy—and his continued existence is predicated on his absorption into a historical imaginary. His fate has been for the story of his life to end up serving as an ideological token, to be passed around like currency. It is precisely to this debasing situation that Shakespeare's Martius objects. Preferring to keep his achievements out of circulation, he denies their exchange value with moral abstractions. He appears not to want his victories to mean anything at all beyond their physical enactment, as if allowing them to be accounted for in the historical record were a form of prostitution: eternal glory at the expense of the

depreciation of his name. In every instance in which his deeds are heralded, he is quick to nullify their importance. At the height of his achievement, he calls them "nothings" (2.2.75). His wounds, the measure by which the Romans judge their heroes, he entirely discounts, calling them

> Scratches with briars
> Scars to move laughter only
>
> (3.3.50–51)

even when they might have saved him from banishment. This combination of Martius's nation-defining heroism with his reluctance to have that heroism culturally encoded is the dilemma of the play. On the one hand, Martius is a military hero and savior of the state who both deserves and is obliged to endure official commemoration. On the other hand, he is directly hostile to any form of public circumscription of his deeds and to the suggestion that he accomplished them on behalf of "the people." By standing firm in contravention to himself, he contravenes against the society that made it possible for him to be who he his He errs in believing that his virtue is a private possession rather than a public good, that it signifies outside a public context.

Martius, unlike Richard, does not enact a desire to control his own historical publicness. To the contrary, he wants to escape his public role, escape "representative publicness," entirely. Richard's abnegation draws the rest of the world on after him. Martius's entails retreat into a private, inarticulate space on which the world, the public, does not impinge. In the English history plays, we see kings bodily interred into history. Martius, however, resists such bodily integration into history and also resists its performance: like few actual actors, he does not want to be seen, and he rejects our applause. Yet he is more "bodily" overdetermined than any of Shakespeare's English kings. He is, in a way, all body. His body even becomes a grisly stylus when as a "thing of blood" he is raised like a sword before the gates of Corioles. After his victory, it bears a chronicle of wounds that everyone except him wants to inscribe into the public record. But he does not want his wounds to be common property, to be symbolically transferred from his body to the body of the state. Rejecting the metaphor of the body politic trumpeted by Menenius, he prefers to restrict the legibility of his body and its wounds to the private domain dominated by his mother. As if the writings of a secret language shared only with her, he resists the appropriation of these signifying lacerations by the artificial, poetic body of the historical person publicly dubbed "Coriolanus." What he finds so repellent about the people is that they might have—through the voice granted to them, through their participation in the power of language—power over the language that constitutes him. He fears, that

is, an incursion into his language world, the sort of incursion he cannot fight off with weapons. Leonard Tennenhouse emphasizes the importance of this linguistic aspect of the play's dramatic set-up. The beginning of the play is really a new beginning for Rome: the founding of the Republic and the enfranchisement of the plebeians. The state in these circumstances is newly defined and so, according to Tennenhouse, "the actions which constitute public service, and the means by which power is exercised must also be newly defined." This new, more public faculty of language, a faculty, I would add, that also newly opens onto history, is what Martius distrusts. He is equally skeptical about giving the people a voice and allowing that voice to shape the future discourse of the city and himself. Unable to control this language, he fears the dissemination of his actions into speech that will grow beyond his capacity to control it: "His abhorrence of public speech and his distrust of words are functions of his obsessive quest for a personal integrity which can only be concretely realized in physical action. Language to him is a private faculty which at best serves to speak his anger" (Tennenhouse 223).

Shakespeare's dramatic historiography overall is concerned less with the recording of deeds than their assimilation into a language world of shared meanings. The "deeds" for which Martius is celebrated have no meaning outside the Roman public that sanctions them, delineates their normative value, and rewards them with the name that fixes his achievement within time, place, and language. To give them a public significance, however, is also to make their significance contestable. Thinking them mute facts that speak to no one, Martius at first refuses their reduction to language. He is loathe to make any part of himself available to the divergent opinions of the people. If the people are able to "read" his wounds, he believes, his wounds will become their possession. Of course, this is exactly what they want: it is their prerogative as the witnesses of state history to make his private deeds public. There is no choice, either, whether to enter into the public memory, because regardless of Martius's disdain for the rites of civic life, "there is no getting away from being named by others, and thus no getting away from engagement with their laws. And therefore, there is no getting out of being human, if that means to be zoon politikon" (Pfannebecker 124). Participating in politics, in the life of the city, is what Martius is supposed to want, however, and it is what his patrician circle prepares him for. Instead, horrified by the idea of such exposure, he evades public ownership of his body and the incorporation into a public history it would entail.

A rejector both of the people and the publicness of history, Martius will act in warfare as an instrument himself, but he cannot bear to be used as an instrument by others. He is as withholding of his public identity, provender to the Roman political dispensation, as he would prefer his state to be withhold-

ing of grain to feed the masses. What the play alleges, however, is that he does not have a choice: the irresistible commons will feed on him and grain, both. The consequences of his obstinacy are twofold: for the state, in that the founding hero of a society is irreconcilable to living in one; and for the founding hero himself, whose own history does not belong to him. The sort of heroism exhibited by Martius and celebrated by Rome is at once superhuman and inhuman, an exceptional nation-building force that can only operate when unbound by restrictions that make the normal functioning of nations possible. His vision for Rome, that it be constantly at war so as to forestall a reckoning with plebeian demands, is exemplary of Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception," the contradictory circumstance in which a nation's most defining laws and values can only be guaranteed by means of their permanent suspension. The temporary state of emergency creeps by degrees to become a permanent state of exception, when the nation discovers that it defines itself in the negative, as one always under an existential, and therefore exceptional, threat.[3] That Martius would prefer such a state is indicative of his distaste for politics and routine governance. His Rome would be frozen in time, without a public to articulate its identity or constitute its memory—a Rome, therefore, without a history. But Shakespeare's play also intimates that history does not entirely belong to the great men who animate it. The people, whom Martius both fights for and despises, ultimately come to possess the history he creates in spite of him. They lack for recognition individually, but as "the people," they are more important than any one person, including him. He belongs to history, to a specific and finite time. Just as his body and his wounds are totems of a temporally-bound present, the body of "the people," history's ultimate inheritor, extends beyond time, into a future that Martius cannot depopulate. And this is one source of his anger. He coyly attempts to keep his wounds hidden, to prevent the people from speaking their history through them, but he cannot escape the grasp of history so easily. Martius's place at the beginning of Roman history is predetermined. The irony of his own dramatic situation is absorbed into the way Shakespeare characterizes him. He cannot opt-out of his historical function any more than he can keep his wounds hidden and his body inviolate.

Martius is a unsympathetic antagonist for whom public display is anathema, but he is also an exemplary figure from the most venerated historiographical tradition of Shakespeare's time. Shakespeare characterizes in *Coriolanus* a celebrated historical actor, but the play also explores what it means for such an actor to be subsumed into history; it investigates the historical process, partly in the guise of a political process, and puts to the question who makes history and who gets to decide how history is made. Such an exercise in historical reconstruction and contemporary appropriation aligns the play with the larger

humanist project of the Renaissance, to re-conceive the boundaries of what is knowable in the present through a confrontation with knowledge recovered from the past. As Clifford Ronan points out, there is precedent for the use of drama in historical explication by the Romans themselves in the *fabulae praetextae*, or political stories. Ronan argues that "to write a Roman history play must have been a central humanist endeavor: a re-representing of the genre in which Rome itself re-presents its history" (Ronan 7). What Shakespeare accomplishes with *Coriolanus*, in particular, is the importation of this Roman idiom into English times and the English tongue. It is at once a nostalgic re-creation of what England imagined to be its cultural and imperial antecedent and a challenge to its historical sovereignty. And despite its appearance in an era of dramatic production that did not universally place a high value on historical accuracy for its own sake, *Coriolanus* is nevertheless an impressive attempt at verisimilitude. As put by Terence Spencer, noting the preciseness of detail with which Shakespeare depicts Rome in this play, "dozens of poetasters could write plays on Julius Caesar or on Cleopatra. Dozens did. But to write *Coriolanus* was one of the great feats of the historical imagination in Renaissance Europe" (Spencer 35). This is a remarkable endorsement for a play that is not typically regarded with very much fondness. By making Roman actors speak with English voices, the play proposes an extension of the English historical horizon even as far back as the *terminus a quo* that Rome in the time of Caius Martius Coriolanus represents. This is in keeping with the common perception among the early modern English that Roman history was one of the principal founts of their own—a direct line of descent passing back to Troy through the blood of Aeneas It was widely believed that Britain was Rome's, and ultimately Greece's, true cultural inheritor (London was "Troynovant" just as Rome was a new Troy). Shakespeare's dramatic art exploits this affective dimension to history by using the strangeness of the past to illuminate the dark corners of the present. But he does not necessarily do this as a cover for some sort of commentary on his own time, as Bart Westerweel argues, but uses "his sources in such a way that his audience would be convinced that they were watching a play representing an era and culture remote from their own but, at the same time, touching on events and themes, that had a 'local habitation and a name"' (Westerweel 203). *Coriolanus* is neither a naïve anachronism nor a self-conscious historical allegory. Like Shakespeare's other history plays, it is a poetic adaptation of historical materials. It continues Shakespeare's exploration of the idea of history as a poetic object, a manipulable medium through which he examines the process by which the past is rendered meaningful to the present. With the English history plays and even the earlier Roman plays, his focus was more on the knowing exhibitionism of his characters, of their ironic recognition of the inescapability of their historical situation.

More than a commentary on the Jacobean present by means of a thinly veiled classical setting, the play evinces a subtle reflectiveness on the process of historicization by which private actions become the substance of public memory. In addition, and as with so much historical writing in the early modern period, it operates in a realistic mode to convey as factual material derived from fictions. Caius Martius Coriolanus probably never existed, after all, though the authenticity of his story would hardly have been doubted, or relevant, at a time when historical truth was more generously defined.[4] Although not usually aligned with the English tetralogies as history plays in their own right, and even listed under the "tragedies" heading in the First Folio, Shakespeare's Roman plays arguably form their own historical tetralogy. Indeed, the Roman histories have much in common with the English histories, such as their derivation from tragedy, their multiplicity of voices and perspectives, and their moral ambiguity. Robert S. Miola writes about this diversity of topical material and the sense that English and Roman citizens alike lived "in a tense, conflicted present, shaped by the pressures of a mythic past and by those of a destined future" (Miola, "Shakespeare's Ancient Rome" 193). In the English histories, there is always a strong dramatic irony at work. The fundamental irony, of course, is that a poetic realization of history is entirely fictitious. It may be derived from accepted facts, but its composition–the arrangement and versification of those facts—is all invention and suggests there is a certain degree of inventiveness to history itself, to both the ways we remember and the ways we record it. A further irony of historical drama, one that links it to tragedy especially, is that it has a witness: the audience projected by the text even when the text is not serving a public occasion. But the dramatic irony of the history plays also serves as a meta-historical commentary, and this applies to both the English and Roman histories. The writing order of the Roman histories is comparable to that of the English histories. As with the latter, Shakespeare chronicles in the former the most "recent" episodes first. *Titus Andronicus*, set during the decline of the Roman Empire, is the earliest of these episodes and exhibits some of the historical circularity of the English plays by looking both forward, dramatically, and back, temporally, to *Coriolanus*:

> Arm, my lords! Rome never had more cause.
> The Goths have gathered head, and with a power
> Of high-resolved men, bent to the spoil,
> They hither march amain, under conduct
> Of Lucius, son to old Andronicus,
> Who threats, in course of this revenge, to do
> As much as ever Coriolanus did.
>
> (4.4.62–68)

Titus is another play about a stubborn general who declines public office, rejects the advice of those close to him, and ends up the sacrificial victim of the state he fought for.[5] His son Lucius, like Martius, is banished from Rome and then returns to revenge himself on the city, though unlike Martius is beloved by the common people and makes his peace with them. Both plays sit at the intersection of private passions and public, political violence. As in so many history plays, the affairs of the public are orchestrated by figures who cannot reconcile their private passions with their public offices. This is, indeed, one of the prevailing dilemmas of the dramatic-historical genre: what happens when private and public interests conflict.

The historical ironies of *Coriolanus* are subtly embedded in the disposition of its language. The frequency of certain charged terms, many of them unique to this play, along with several sets of telling antitheses indicate that what's at stake is very much the ownership of language and historical identity. In this sense, the language of the play is idiosyncratically "public," in that it is oriented toward public affairs but it is also language that the play positions as contestable. The granting of titles, the displaying of wounds, the giving of voices: so many words in *Coriolanus* come across as practically tangible, as if coextensive with the acts they represent, or as tokens to be traded around in the practical business of political negotiation. One can understand why Martius so objects to using them—his hatred of the people includes their language—and is so often exasperated by the way others do. In fact, literary critics frequently note that certain words appear more often in *Coriolanus* than in any other play: "country" (Knowles 150); "grain" (Westerweel 201); "power" (Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* 141); "Rome" and "Roman" (Chernaik 165); "voice(s)" (Kermode 250); "wounds" (Holland 47). One could add to this list "people," which occurs more than five times as frequently as its nearest rivals, *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*, and hardly at all elsewhere; "noble," its opposite, which occurs more often in *Coriolanus*, by far, than in any other play; and "citizen," which is noteworthy for even occurring at all. "Mother," an obvious contender, is eked out by *Hamlet* and *King John* and "pride," another one, by *Troilus and Cressida*. *Coriolanus* comes close to tying with the friendless *Timon of Athens* for "friend(s)" but sails past all the rest with "common," "enemy," "wars," and "work" (which appears even more often than the psychoanalytically-charged "wounds").[6] Power, wounds; country, people; friend, enemy; noble, common; wars, work: all words that indicate the concepts, several of them near-antitheses, which the play struggles to define. The vocabulary of Coriolanus is structured by them, and the political orientation of the play is reflected by such oppositions and in the contestable identities they evoke.

Power, and who should have it, is coordinate with its vulnerability. In order to hold office in Rome, its leaders must expose to the people the marks of mortality they earned on their behalf. Country is the referent for defining both the external enemy and for testing the true Romanness of the people; allegiance to Rome is not necessarily compatible with allegiance to class. Martius characteristically denies that the people truly are Romans, typically describing them with language that dehumanizes them entirely:

> Though in Rome littered; not Romans, as they are not,
> Though calved i'th' porch o'the' Capitol.
>
> (3.1.240–241)

Neither proper citizens, nor much more than beasts whose only function is to breed, the people to Martius are the binary opposite of both "country" and "noble." Mortality is at issue here, too, because a true Roman's life, as seems to be the case in this play, belongs to the state, and citizenship turns out to be less a voice in power than mute assent to the "old lie," *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*: Volumnia's claim that if she had a dozen sons "I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action" (1.3.23–25) is merely the sentimental analogue to Martius's more practical opinion of war, as

> means to vent
> Our musty superfluity.
>
> (1.1.220–221)

Indiscriminate breeding thus excuses the state's treatment of them as indiscriminate, ignoble chaff. Indeed, the "people," a term that history since Shakespeare has perhaps overdetermined, is at odds in *Coriolanus* with "country," the Leviathan that is more than the sum of its parts—or Menenius's body politic, insensible to its individual constituents wailing for bread. Certainly, the tribunes's claim that "the city is the people" is an alien concept to Martius's patrician sensibility and a violation of his pragmatic, martial ethics. But Martius does not recognize the people as a class: to him, they are

> woollen vassals, things created
> To buy and sell with groats, to show bare heads
> In congregations, to yawn, be still and wonder
> When one but of my ordinance stood up
> To speak of peace or war.
>
> (3.2.10–14)

They have, that is, no identity, motivation, or even culture of their own. While the text's representation of them is, on the hand, fluid (are they plebeians? citizens? just "the people"?), Martius bespeaks the darker

perspective that regards politics as, at best, a kind of husbandry. In his estimation, the people are not really people. They are only passive recipients of the cultural leavings from the tables of the mighty, exchangers of both small coins and small-minded gossip. The plebeians may conjecture about the city's supply of grain, about "what's done i'th'Capitol," and about "who thrives and who declines" (1.1.187–191), but that is the limit of their capacity. In his stentorian denunciation of them at the opening of the play, Martius frames the feckless irrationality of the plebeians in similar terms:

> What would you have, you curs,
> That like nor peace nor war? The one affrights you,
> The other makes you proud.
>
> (1.1.163–165)

He considers them infantile, even animalistic, and his lack of faith in their ability to reason about all that lies between peace and war makes his question more than rhetorical. He answers for them, because they cannot, in his estimation, answer at all. More to the point, one cannot predict their behavior, because they do not act in accordance with propriety. Whether peace or war "affrights" them or makes them proud, they are as equivocating as Martius's grammar is ambiguous. They are "curs" that would eat each other if the senate did not keep them under control. They are, in other words, as easy to put in awe as they are irresolute in their opinions. When he describes them as a "mutable, rank-scented meinie" (3.1.68), it is significant both because he expresses his fear of granting power to a heterogeneous, disputatious populace and because it is Shakespeare's only recorded use of the rather Spenserian epithet "mutable," an apt adjective for a crowd that is characterized, as we will see, as a close cousin of Spenser's own allegory of uncontrollable slander. The idea that such creatures be given a share in the determining of state affairs would obviously make no sense to someone of Martius's opinion. Like an unpredictable beast, the people do not think; they can only react.

"Peace" and "war" appear to cover the range of ideological positions available to Martius if not to the Romans, in general. From either extreme to the other, all discourse is contained, and none of it is available to the plebeians, whose own voices are only so many tokens to be offered mutely up when demanded. Despite the prevalence of the word "voices" in the play, and the onus put on a potential consul's winning of them, they are little more than interchangeable, inarticulate acclamations. Collectively, they have the power to ratify state decisions, but individually they can do nothing and say nothing, and there is very little they say in the play except to one another. Possessing no real value, they exist only to be

surrendered, just as the plebeians themselves exist only to be sent to the slaughter in war. Their "voices" serve only to signify their actual voicelessness. Interestingly, Martius also associates the people with custom, to him the frustratingly senseless traditions that hold even the powerful in thrall. In one of his few moments of solitary reflection, he wonders aloud why he must petition for the "needless vouches" of "Hob and Dick." We may like to imagine him channeling Pindar's oft-quoted line that "custom is king of all" when he laments that

> Custom calls me to't.
> What custom wills in all things, should we do't,
> The dust on antique time would lie unswept,
> And mountainous error be too highly heaped
> For truth to o'erpeer.
>
> (2.3.115–119)

With his rejection of error and resort to sententious couplets, Martius sounds here almost like a humanist. Even as he recites a familiar-sounding maxim—and it is hard, coming from him not to read it ironically—he nevertheless decides to ignore his own advice and proceed with what custom demands, which is to act as if matters of peace and war really do belong to public discourse. We are not surprised that he can only keep the act up for so long. What is particularly vexing about his condescending solicitation of the people, perhaps about his entire characterization, is his honesty, how accurate his view of politics appears to be. The patricians placate the plebeians, because they must, but their strategy is to offer them a form of representation that only mirrors existing relationships of domination. The tribunes they allow the people to elect understand as well as the aristocrats the imperative to manipulative the crowd. With Martius, they at least know what they are getting, but it is his inadequacy to conform to the public discourse that is only right because it does control the crowd that dooms him.

We can trace Martius's invective against the people and his aversion to public life to the private language style imposed on him by his mother. For a character as archetypically masculine as Martius—his family name even invokes the Roman god of war—the absence of any paternal figure for him is striking. His seeming disinterest in his own paternal role parallels this missing element in his back story. Instead of a father, Martius has a mother—a particularly masculine mother, perhaps, in that she rejects the insular security of the family in favor of the civic affairs generally reserved in the Roman (and early modern) world for men. But she is still a mother, and her molding of Martius's disposition derives equally from his "biological" birth and from their metaphorical near-marriage. The first words Volumnia speaks, in scene

1.3, provocatively close the gap between husband and son: "If my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour than in the embracements of his bed" (1.3.2–4). Later, as Martius is preparing to depart from Rome, he reminds his mother of this sentiment. Promising to "exceed the common" (4.1.32) in what he accomplishes, he uses grammatically similar language to chide her in the same way that Volumnia, at the beginning of the play, rebukes his wife:

> you were wont to say,
> If you had been the wife of Hercules,
> Six of his labours you'd have done and saved
> Your husband so much sweat.
>
> (4.1.16–19)

The repetition of conditional phrasing reinforces his reminder to his mother that they share a vocabulary, a common supply of apothegms, perhaps, but also the secret dialect of husbands and wives. The distinction between husband and son narrows further in the lines that follow:

> Farewell, my wife, my mother.
> I'll do well yet.
>
> (4.1.20–21)

Perfunctory in his salutation to his actual wife, who is everywhere in the play an afterthought, it is the adjacency and grammatical parallelism of "my wife, my mother" and the encapsulating internal rhyme of "yet" with "sweat" that indicates the extent to which Volumnia is closer to occupying this role and to closing with Martius a proprietary linguistic circle. Absent a father, Martius would seem to be entirely the creation of his mother, a work of ideal Roman sculpture for which she is solely responsible. The bond between mother and son is like that between artist and art, or poet and poem. Once the artwork is in the world, of course, it tends to take on a life and significances of its own. Martius is as confused that his mother does not approve of his actions in the marketplace as he is averse to exposing himself to public scrutiny. He cannot go beyond the singular text Volumnia has taught him, even when she would like him to adopt a certain amount of interpretive flexibility toward it. Martius, however, is not interested in this sort of ambiguity. In his resistance to political contingency, he acts as though he were identical to the text of Roman values that most people only pay lip service to. And his capacity to be so uncompromising is greater than the city's to live up to the Rome of his imagination. He even manages to frame his banishment from Rome as a banishment *of Rome*, as if the most Roman act would be to abandon—and then seek means

to destroy—a Rome that has become its own antithesis. His actions always reference an extreme self-possession, a knowing of himself that cannot permit being known by others and, divorced from a reciprocal social context in which identity is intersubjective, turns inward. One of the reasons Martius, as we will see, comes across as paradoxically prideful and self-abnegating at the same time is this stubborn self-reinforcement. At the core of his stubborn resistance to dialogue, there is, in fact, nothing: only the language his mother taught him and the text it continues to write, spiraling centripetally away from the outside world.

If the counterpoint to the language of politics and public identity in *Coriolanus* is the private linguistic domain of Martius and his mother, we should expect to find some evidence of this bifurcation in the text. As dialogic as the play's language is, public and private are not themselves terms that Shakespeare appears to be much interested in. They do not occur often in any of his plays, even though, as concepts if not political constructs, they determine the very substance of his poetic art. The public declamations and rhetorically rich language that are native to a genre meant to be performed before an audience are balanced by those idiosyncratically Shakespearean moments of reflection that we are meant to regard as internal thoughts, private though not in the sense of property. In *Coriolanus*, there are comparatively few soliloquies, but there is a sense of propriety about public versus private language. There is, of course, the public language of civic life: the negotiations, appeals, and honoraria with which the play is filled. Then there is the private language of the family, of sentimentality, certainly, and of social strategy, but also the private language that is concealed, inferred, or—as in Martius and Volumnia's final meeting—cannot be put into words. The word "private" itself often refers off the page, to an unwitnessed space. While the showing of wounds is supposed to be public, Martius offers a private audience instead, as if he does not want us, the public and his posterity, to see them, either:

> I have wounds
> to show you which shall be yours in private.
>
> (2.3.75–76)

There is also a sense in which private and public identities are distinct. One's private interests could indeed be at odds with the public welfare, and private affairs are often in Shakespeare's plays impugned as a corruption of what should be public processes. With Martius before the gates of Rome, this sense of private privilege is invoked by the emissaries who endeavor to treat with him. When Cominius reports on his attempt to dissuade him from attacking the city, he says,

> I offered to awaken his regard
> For's private friends. His answer to me was
> He could not stay to pick them in a pile
> Of noisome musty chaff.
>
> (5.1.23–26)

Since Martius's private interest is only in the language world he shares with his mother, he does not even entertain the insiderism of his own class. Where private friends normally might intervene in public diplomacy, Martius refuses to acknowledge the usual channels, a move that earns a compliment from Aufidius that almost seems back-handed. Martius, he says,

> Stopped your ears against
> The general suit of Rome, never admitted
> A private whisper, no, not with such friends
> That thought them sure of you.
>
> (5.3.5–8)

Martius is above the machinations of elite society, but he also betrays his inability to express loyalty to anyone. At this point in the play, he has abandoned all possibility of this sort of friendship, but his volte-face is only be the fulfillment of his characterization from the beginning. He has no friends in either sense of the word: as fellow aristocrats shaping society according to their whims or as intimate partners privy to his council Before the entrance of Volumnia and Virgilia that will lead to his undoing, Martius disclaims that he will hear entreaties "nor from the state nor private friends" (5.3.18). Neither public, "state" entreaties, will change his mind, nor the pleading of his peers. His mother will turn out to be the exception, because she occupies an entirely different realm of privacy for Martius.

"Private" often means that we, readers and audience, do not get to hear what is spoken, either. Or, we are not supposed to know. Once we do know, if a supposedly private utterance is delivered on stage, it is longer private. This is the view into history that historical drama offers: the publicity of private exchanges. When, for dramatic purposes, language is concealed, it is not as if characters are speaking to one another off the page. Gestures to extra-dramatic action are tantalizing, but only insofar as they foreshadow a public revelation to come. The withholding of information beyond the end of a play is as frustrating as the withholding from the public of what it wants to know: which is, in short, everything. The private, in other words, is threatening. It is anti-social, on the one hand, a realm of secrecy that works toward its own ends. This is the accusation leveled by the plebeians against the patricians, the fundamental tenet of the revolt that creates the *res publica*, the public entity, in the first place. On the other hand, the

private is sinister, an unexposed area of consciousness that can offer space for contemplation but just as often indicates the perfidy of hidden motives and bad faith.

In a drama, the private can take various forms, each a degree further removed from the theoretical public gaze until it is removed from the theatrical gaze, as well. We see both the strategy sessions of the aristocrats and the councils of the tribunes in *Coriolanus*. We even see in passing the colloquy of the plebeians, who possess their own private opinions about the significance of public language. What is private can also insinuate. Julius Caesar has a public excuse but also gives private reasons to Brutus for not going to the Senate; Antony wonders publicly about the private griefs between them after Brutus persuades him to go anyway. The private is frequently the reserve of the villain, too, who implicates us in his plot by revealing to us his plans or motives. Richard III, whose private speech makes us counterparts to his crimes—the machinations of a dangerous, private ambition—contrasts markedly to Richard II, who misrepresents his own private interest as identical with the public, until Bolingbroke reenters the scene with private interests of his own. And Bolingbroke, of course, introduces the private speech of no speech at all, or speech we do not witness. It is only with the necessary aid of historical retrospect that we can know what he is about. If Henry V regards the difference between kings and private men to be nothing but "ceremony," Richard II nevertheless suffers the consequences of eliding this distinction, even as Henry IV is perhaps not ceremonious enough. In these respects, Martius is not politic about what he says, where, and to whom. He is not exactly a Shakespearean villain in the usual sense, either, precisely because he does not keep any part of himself hidden. He may refuse to recognize the existence of a public at all, and he may prefer to retreat into the idiolect of his mother's devising, but to us he all surface and no depth. With no hidden motives to conceal and no subtle introspectiveness to reveal, he has only the fixed form of a stereotype. Impatient and self-assured, his language is entirely public in the dramatic sense, with no hidden reserve of complex subjectivity, while it is entirely private, even privative, in the way in which he uses it. He lets it bluster forth at the slightest provocation, having no stomach for long term plans and the slow unfolding of a deliberate plot. He is neither a would-be playwright, like Edmund, Iago, or Duke Vincentio, nor even a neurotic improviser, like Macbeth, Hamlet, or King Lear.

The public that is not merely the theatrical public of the playhouse but a category of social experience has its own significations. The word itself appears seldom in Shakespeare, but touches on a range of meanings where we do find it, from collective concern, accountability, and memory, to spectacle and shame. When not paired with some "good," "weal", or "benefit," the public is the space of civic delibera-

tion, commendation, and illocutionary occasion. It is also a venue of accusation, justice, and even farce. The only occurrences in *Coriolanus* are when the tribunes variously refer to the "public benefit," the "public weal," and "public power." The idea of a collective benefit is conventional enough, though here it is tinged with the resonance of class. "Public power" almost seems like an oxymoron in the Roman context, an amorphous, disjointed authority that opposes power's traditional, patrician seat. It is a strength in numbers that coalesces around the tribunes's exhortations: feckless, perhaps, in most circumstances but irresistible when it is able to be guided. Elsewhere in Shakespeare, we encounter "public streets" and "public haunts" where private people may go to debase themselves or else melt into the undifferentiated crowd. It is this sense of public more than any other than may indicate Shakespeare's own distaste for the crowd, however much that could be said to have translated over to his plays. A well-known argument about his Sonnet 111 supposes that it was one of a handful written early during the reign of James. In it, he quite possibly expresses his true feelings about the public and his disappointment that, despite his gifts, he must consort with social inferiors in order to make a living:

> O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
> The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
> That did not better for my life provide
> Than public means which public manners breeds.
>
> (*Sonnet 111* 1–4)

Although there is debate about the exact meaning of these lines, it is clear enough that the speaker thinks little of his "public means." While some critics have gone so far as to impute these lines to the poet's frustration that, while he may have performed at court, he was never a part of court society, it is enough to state here that the poem at least references a common assumption about the merits of anything qualified as public.[7] Without having to guess at Shakespeare's own opinion, it is evident from his language here and elsewhere that the public is not universally presumed to be a neutral social category, much less the most important social category. Having to engage with the vulgar public was an unfortunate necessity, avoided if possible, not embraced in service to some sort of activist dramatics. Although it may receive the largesse of the state as its benefit, that is, we do not often find writers referring to the people or the public as a legitimate political actor. More typically, the public has the detractive quality suggested by the negative parallelism in Sonnet 111. "Breeds" in this poem cuts two ways, alluding to both animalistic reproduction and indoctrination into polite society. Except "public manners" are implied to be the opposite

of good breeding. It is as disgraceful to be public as it is to be common, and the poem indicts the breeding of public manners, just as the plebeians in *Coriolanus* are accused by the patricians as being unproductive, yet ever reproducing, burdens on the true citizens of the Rome. It is possible that Shakespeare is only echoing a widespread sensibility that he does not share, but given the number of reverberations, evidence to the contrary is far more persuasive. It is in *Hamlet*, we should remember, where Shakespeare himself possibly invents the term "groundlings" to describe the better part of his own customers.

Where the people do act collectively, they are most often portrayed, following the traditional metaphor, as a body. The "public ear" is appealed to, the "public eye" witnesses, and the "public body" as a whole may be a metaphor particularly suited to Shakespeare's Roman plays, so much does the city itself act in them as a character in its own right. In *Coriolanus*, the body politic moves in its own course, separate from the individual people who comprise it, and we should not confuse the two. The public body, in this play, is like a beast that must be appeased, even if the plebeians as individuals come across as perfectly guileless. *Julius Caesar* arguably set the precedent for deploying the public as a sounding board for justifications and official record-keeping. And history hinges on it: after Brutus gives the official, public reasons for Caesar's death, Antony is granted leave to speak from the "public chair" on the same subject. A dramatic irony perhaps unintended by Shakespeare is the tableau that Antony dares to enact in the "public eye," thus proving to Octavian the irreconcilable importunity of Antony himself in *Antony and Cleopatra*:

> Contemning Rome, he has done all this, and more
> In Alexandria. Here's the manner of 't:
> I' th' market-place, on a tribunal silvered,
> Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold
> Were publicly enthroned: at the feet sat
> Caesarion, whom they call my father's son,
> And all the unlawful issue that their lust
> Since then hath made between them. Unto her
> He gave the stablishment of Egypt; made her
> Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia,
> Absolute queen.
>
> (*Antony and Cleopatra* 3.6.1–11)

It is only in public that socio-political relationships in these plays become instantiated. The ceremony of public investiture grants politics its value and politicians their legitimacy. Even if the public is only a passive witness or, as in *Coriolanus*, the guarantor of laws and traditions, it is nevertheless a kind of mirror in which the powerful need to see themselves reflected. It is also a public concern what the story of the

state and state actors is going to be. What its heroes performed on its behalf form the core of the founding myths that determine what it means to be a citizen and how best to be a Roman. The future of the state is thus imagined, and worried over, by its own past, and the past becomes for the present a justification for its self-fulfillment. The combination of dramatic past with theatrical present keep both temporal perspectives in dialogue and in tension. The irony of Cleopatra fretting about her portrayal on stage by a squeaking boy is not so different from the speculation twice entertained in *Coriolanus*, once by Aufidius and once by Volumnia, about "the interpretation of the time" (4.7.50 and 5.3.69)

In attempting to deduce the significance of the unique vocabulary of *Coriolanus*, we might speculate more broadly as to its political significance, as well. Politics, as this play confesses, provides a particularly suitable arena for dramatization, but is politics in this play merely content, or does *Coriolanus* demand of us a more sensitive account of its impingement on an area of life that seems transhistorical? The frequent recurrence of charged words has meant that *Coriolanus* uniquely lends itself to explicitly partisan readings. Moreover, *Coriolanus*'s long-standing reputation as strange and unlikeable—attributed variously to Shakespeare's declining poetic powers, increased resort to collaboration, pandering to changing audience tastes, or some combination thereof—has meant that the play seems to need not only explaining but some kind of accounting for as an otherwise odd member of the corpus. The bulk of critical interest in *Coriolanus* has concentrated on the political context in which it was written and which it has often been presumed to represent, and in the psychodynamics of Martius's relationship with his mother.[8] As little as we might like to be reductive either about Shakespeare's politics or his dramatization of interiority, the issues involved have always seemed so blatant, and, *a fortiori*, so patently relevant to major ideological discourses of our own time—Marxism, Fascism, Freudianism—it is almost impossible to write about *Coriolanus* without, as it were, choosing sides in the ongoing debate as to the play's political bias. But these kinds of teleologies inevitably cast our own prejudices back onto a text that predates the party politics and class consciousness that informs them. We may today be hardly able to brook the thought of a Shakespeare unsympathetic to the working man (or rude mechanical), but this play seems more a project in historical introspection—who were these people and what do their actions mean to us—than a piece of barely disguised propaganda. Indeed, prior to the recent turn in early modern literary criticism toward the New Historicism, readings of *Coriolanus* tended to focus more on the play's tragic, rather than political, qualities. To the extent that politics in the play was touched on at all, it was generally treated as one among many possible topics of dramatic content if not merely banal proof of Shakespeare's bourgeois

class snobbishness. William Hazlitt considered Shakespeare "to have had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question," representing both patricians and plebeians relatively evenly, warts and all (Hazlitt 15). In this, he is in agreement with Coleridge, who superciliously remarks in a marginal note on "the wonderful philosophic impartiality of Shakespeare's politics" (Coleridge, *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare* 177). A. C. Bradley, who in his lecture on the play thinks it "extremely hazardous to ascribe to him any political feelings at all, and ridiculous to pretend to certainty on the subject," regards the representation of the people as undoubtedly copied over from Plutarch, probably conventional, and in any case only the catalyst of the play's tragic design: they are the force with which Coriolanus unavoidably and hopelessly comes into conflict (Bradley 5). Annabel Patterson, whose own reading of the play does posit a hidden political agenda, nevertheless perceives *Coriolanus* as a challenge for critics today precisely because the political dimension is so hard for us to ignore. And given the emphasized role of history in literary studies in general, she finds that we must negotiate between the deterministic source criticism the play is felt to demand and a relativistic skepticism that threatens to evacuate it of political specificity entirely. This is partly a problem of disciplinary approach. Without recourse to history as the bedrock of all interpretive structures, suggests Patterson, and the literature profession's faith in historical explanation having been undercut by postmodern reasoning, we are left flailing between a smug assurance that all textual witnesses are ideologically compromised and an ever-vanishing nostalgia for the sureties of an objective method. While Patterson notes that these are extremes, "and the case of *Coriolanus* demands a peculiarly exacting poise between them" (Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* 122), we are still left by this sort of theoretical positioning with the uncomfortable choice between historical determinism and the slipperiness of internal evidence.

Nevertheless, it can seem irresponsible to either avoid the question entirely or ignore how much the text demands political appropriation. Indeed, there is potentially attractive material in *Coriolanus* for holders of any political position: partisans of either the right or the left, in the reductive terminology of today, who want to use the text as ideological justification; historical revisionists who claim Shakespeare tacitly supports the people; cynics who believe he is coldly representing a political reality in which no one is sympathetic; and ironists who believe he is simply lampooning the excesses of political life. Frequently, adaptations of the play for performance also resort to choosing a side explicitly, whether as an opportunity to promote a specific agenda or lest they appear mealy-mouthed. The Tory playwright Nahum Tate was already doing this as early as 1682, discerning in *Coriolanus* a political situation comparable to that of late

seventeenth century England and in Martius an analogue to James, the embattled Duke of York. Tate was not at all reluctant to be heavy-handed in his version of the play, to which he gave the not-so-subtle title *The Ingratitude of A Common-Wealth*. In his preface, he is unabashed: "Upon a close view of this Story, there appear'd in some Passages, no small Resemblance with the busie Faction of our own time. And I confess, I chose rather to set the Parallel nearer to Sight, than to throw it off at further Distance" (Tate 3). By placing "the Parallel nearer to Sight," Tate evidently meant delineating his character's stock functions so baldly as to permit little interpretive license. Whereas Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is able to leave us feeling the distaste inherent in all statecraft, and uneasiness about the imperfections of justice, Tate's play strikes at us with gratuitous, sensationalistic violence. In case a spectator had any doubts about Martius's victimhood, Tate invents a new character, Nigridius, who plots against him Iago-like, ultimately forcing Martius to witness the death of his wife and the dismemberment of his son before he dies himself. Whatever we may think of Tate's play as a literary work, and the reviews have not been stellar, we are much less in the dark about his own political inclinations than we are about Shakespeare's.[9] Where Shakespeare's text has the sort of writability that permits a dialogue about its political valence—in keeping with its ideologically equivocal, dialogic nature—Tate's forecloses ambiguity and gruesomely ends the conversation.

While interpretive ambiguity is fine for a reader of the text, however, it is a dilemma for theatrical producers who feel that the political content of *Coriolanus* demands a performative response with contemporary relevance. Tate's eager embrace of this dilemma is not without more recent analogues. Bertolt Brecht, whose adaptation of the play, *Coriolan*, is among the most noteworthy, embraced the dilemma in his own way.[10] Rather than nuancing his characterization of Martius, Brecht goes in the opposite direction from Tate, using him as a bludgeon to subvert what he believed to be the playgoing audience's tendency to over-identify with tragic heros. What he removes from his version are those mollifying and mitigating moments of psychological complexity that would put a strictly political interpretation of the play at variance with what appears to be Shakespeare's more subtle dramatic project. Martin Scofield, in his critique of this strategy, suggests that Brecht's modifications actually undermine his own intention: "In focusing more exclusively on the class struggle, Brecht has not only lost the full dimensions of the individual tragedy which he is presumably content to lose but also a political dimension. What is important to Brecht is the collective dilemma, the tragedy of a people that has a hero against it." (Scofield 335). As most critics have noted, Shakespeare makes the psychological basis of Martius's behavior explicit. The elaboration of psychological depth can be humanizing, but it can also hold out the possibility for rehabilitation

and reintegration into society, a conciliatory complexity that is not part of Brecht's mission. Without this extra dimension to Martius's characterization, specifically, according to Scofield, we lose the sense that politics begins with personal relationships, not with an abstract calculation about class divisions. Equally skeptical about Brecht's political equation was Günter Grass. Grass's own adaptation of Shakespeare's play, *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising*, is actually posed as a dramatization of Brecht making of *Coriolan*. It features a decidedly Brecht-like figure, ironically named "The Boss," who takes advantage of the real-life uprising in East Berlin in June 1953 to help him work out a staged uprising for his production of *Coriolanus*.[11] "The Boss," however, turns out to be just as uncompromising as Martius himself, which suggests that Grass's dramatic argument is the opposite of Brecht's: over-identification with "the people" is just as problematic as over-identification with a tragic hero. In his play, the tragic protagonist turns out to be the same sort of "heroic" individual whose inability to compromise is what makes him a hero in the first place (he is an artist with a vision) but also alienates him from the people on whose behalf he thinks he is working. If Grass's Boss, and by extension Brecht, is merely an opportunist, it is no great insight of Grass to have pointed out the contradictions in Brecht's attempt at literary appropriation or the incompatibility of the contrived political calculations of drama and actual, real life politics. As dramatic as politics may be, a theme of all these plays, politics does not have a plot. There is no narrative arc bending inexorably toward resolution. As Brecht understood, drama—tragedy specifically—has the potential to subvert political intent. But as Grass understood, speaking on the people's behalf can be just as totalitarian as silencing them. We can only recover something of that intent for *Coriolanus* if we attempt to gauge the predominant tone of its language, somehow incorporate the tragic denouement into a reading that succumbs to neither pity nor exultance, and do our best to step back from our own historical context. If we assume Shakespeare's sympathies were somewhere on a spectrum comprehensible to our own, we risk making him, too, into a Grassian opportunist. Most readings of *Coriolanus*, however, struggle with its treatment of politics, whether a political interpretation is practicable at such a remove and what happens to politics when it is historicized.

Although the binarism that defines the political scene in the Anglo-American world today is hardly analogous to that which obtained in early modern England, *Coriolanus* is, among all of Shakespeare's plays, the most ready-made for political appropriation. Cast into modern terms, the conflict between the patricians and the plebeians appears to be the Roman original of all subsequent class struggle in history. Indeed, to our democratic sensibility today, the complaints of the plebeians sound entirely justified. Shakespeare

represents them as having an abstract desire for an equitable distribution of wealth and an enlarged franchise, even as the concrete demands they express themselves are for the alleviation of immediate needs. He invites us to infer their qualities as a public by what the patricians say about them, how their own tribunes regard them, and only lastly by what they individually, and without individual identity, have to say for themselves. Their goals, if our inferences ascribe to them contemporary political motives (and not even motives more contemporary to Shakespeare's time than to that of the early Romans), are precisely the goals of the modern, liberal state. A more conservative reader, however, could just as easily interpret the play as an apology for enlightened oligarchy, patriotic militarism, and the cult of the heroic, self-sufficient individual. Such a reading is not necessarily anti-democratic, or does not have to be. The rub is how to translate the idea of the commonwealth into a constitutional basis for pragmatic action. The welfare of the people, and how to bring it about, invokes a spectrum of philosophically incompatible, if not quite contradictory, positions: the freedom that entails the responsibility to determine one's own destiny is as attractive as the freedom that enables sufficiency by provisioning surplus resources to the less fortunate. A debate along these lines, however, can easily overlook the far more primitive political situation of *Coriolanus*'s Rome. As if a sort of Hobbesian experiment, this earliest of urban populations figures out, before our attentive eyes, the necessity of articulating a body politic as well the consequences of that body having to contend with disaffected members. We see this disaffection at the outset with the people's revolt, but we also see it in Martius's intransigence. As a protagonist, Martius's stark portrayal cannot easily be redeemed by mitigating nuances. Depending on the reader's own political persuasion, his denunciations of the people mark him as a political reactionary of the most despised variety or as the heroic embodiment of martial virtue and libertarian autonomy. If one believes Shakespeare to be standing up for traditional, even conventional, beliefs, then Martius is indeed a tragic figure who falls prey to a fickle, ungrateful populace. If one sees Shakespeare as more radically subversive, however, then Martius's bombast is a self-indictment of aristocratic arrogance and excess. His role in the play would then be ironic as opposed to epic and his death a victory for the people rather than the inevitable fate of misplaced, romantic heroism.

It is also possible to stand aloft from politics and consider Martius as virtuous if only because he is so resolutely attached to his convictions. Pointing to the scene of his death and his scornful repudiation of Aufidius, R. B. Parker, in the introduction to the Oxford edition, admires his resoluteness, even if it is in service to personality traits we might otherwise find distasteful. According to Parker, "one cannot help but empathize with this last, defiant gesture, because Martius stands suddenly again for what he has always

represented at the deepest level of the play" (Parker 69). Along the same lines, but coming to the opposite conclusion, an unsympathetic interpretation of Martius might even characterize him as so excessive in his bombast and pomposity as to be risible. No less a theatrical authority (and advocate of the people) than George Bernard Shaw considered the play "the greatest of Shakespeare's comedies" because Martius so admirably represents an "instinctive temperament" (Shaw 509) and precisely because he remains so obdurately "true to himself." Shaw thinks of Martius, that is, as more a caricature of a stock cynic than a worthy adversary representative of any discernable political philosophy. Many critics have taken Martius seriously enough, however, to consider Shakespeare's depiction of the plebeians unjust, finding in him a conservative, even elitist, attitude which does not comport with modern assumptions about class conflict. The degree to which this makes us uncomfortable often determines the extent to which we are willing to ascribe these attitudes to the dramatist directly or else find a convenient way out. Looking back to the early seventeenth-century with the political perspective of today, it is possible to apologize for Shakespeare by adjusting the focus of interpretation. In so doing, we can find in him a liberal humanist who invites his audience "to contemplate an alternative political system" and a dramatic debate about the nature of representative government: "who shall speak for the commons" (Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* 127); or a Marxist demystifier, who—with the helpful aid of New Historicist suspicion—figures the "primal bargain" of representation, which would appear to be the plebeians's best hope, as not a revolution but instead "the containment of mutiny, the transformation of mutiny into an empty ritual" (Arnold 191–192). Or, by making history into an excuse altogether, we could blame the cultural context in which Shakespeare had to work. Earlier critics who did take up the political content of *Coriolanus* as more than a colorful background tended to go this route. C. C. Huffman argues that *Coriolanus* encodes a response to contemporary Jacobean politics, in which the absolutism of royal power contested with the humanist ideal of freedom. Since it was unviable, not least because he was a member of the King's Men, for Shakespeare to openly advocate democratic principles, he chose a Roman setting, according to Huffman, as a neutral venue for working out what was a classic problem in politics: extreme positions that will brook no compromise. In this formulation, it is the nature of politics to inevitably destroy the steadfastly virtuous. Though Huffman makes more of the play's politics than his predecessors, his approach ultimately makes *Coriolanus* seem more anodyne than we (or he) would like, a dramatic exercise in humanistic intellectualizing that advances no specific political agenda of its own and therefore tacitly supports the status quo "to the despair of generations of later audiences" (Huffman 222). Critiques predicated on sympathy for the proletarian plebeians

may or may not excuse Shakespeare's treatment of them, which is hardly sympathetic itself. Such readings of the play can at best figure it as a graceless mirror of elitist sentiment and at worst indict its author as a collaborator with oppressive authoritarianism. Alternatively, a radical reading of the play could resist Shakespeare's putative intention and celebrate exactly the plurality and multivocality of the people which Martius (possibly Shakespeare himself) finds so dangerous.

There is some evidence from historical research of *Coriolanus*'s unusual degree of accuracy in its political representations and treatment of contemporary events. Many recent historicist readings of *Coriolanus* have placed substantial stock in Mark Kishlansky's approving citation of the play as accurately representing in its Roman setting the procedures of Parliamentary selection in early modern England. The depiction of Martius's standing for office, notes Kishlansky, deviates entirely from what Shakespeare found in Plutarch and Livy:

> The episode of Coriolanus's consulship is entirely of Shakespeare's devising. Moreover, these scenes so accurately portray the process by which officeholders were selected in the early seventeenth century that one must conclude that Shakespeare had first-hand experience, either of wardmote selections to the London Common Council or of parliamentary selections themselves. It is rare to have the testimony of so acute an observer. Thus it is worth reflecting on the central tenets of selection as Shakespeare recreated them. (Kishlansky 5)

Just as Martius is soliciting the *assent*, not the *consent*, of the people for his accession to the consulship, based not on campaign promises but on the strength of past deeds, Parliamentary offices in Shakespeare's time would have been filled in advance as rewards for services rendered. The only role of the "electorate" would have been a rather meaningless ratification of what was a predetermined outcome. The failure of the people to grant their assent was regarded, as it is in *Coriolanus*, as a catastrophic failure of the system and not a regular part of electoral process. But this was already changing at the beginning of the seventeenth century. More and more, local Parliamentary selections were butting up against middle class disenchantment with the intractably absolutist king. As he puts it in his account of English political development, Kishlansky argues that

> assent would become choice, and the dire consequences of rejection would recede. For the first time election—that is, contests among candidates for majority decisions—would become an important element in the system by which men were chosen to Parliament. A process of social distinction would give way to one of political calculation, and along the way England would be brought as close to collapse as was *Coriolanus*'s Rome. (8–9)

The crux of *Coriolanus*, for Kishlansky, is the conflict between the upstart plebeians, who want a greater voice in political affairs, and the old order of patricians, who want to retain their traditional privileges; the increasing power of Parliament at odds with a king who preferred keeping his subjects subjugated is thus dramatized by Shakespeare as the classic political struggle of republican theory.

Since long before Kishlansky's supposition about the play's historical accuracy, critics have customarily identified *Coriolanus* with the anti-enclosure riots in the Midlands in 1607.[12] By dating the play to this event, we might also consider it marking a shift in Shakespeare's political dramaturgy. While it is plausible that the enclosure problem and the corn riots contributed "to an attitude of receptivity for such a play" (Stirling 127), there are a few problems with readings that go much beyond such vague correlations. One is that, however much the constituency of Parliament was gaining power in the early seventeenth century, there is little evidence that the common people per se were ever considered by either Parliamentarians or Royalists to be anything other than the ignorant mob Shakespeare depicts them as. An alternative political system may or may not have been in the offing, but it is being too hasty to conflate the nascent public sphere of urban elites with the "commons." Another problem is that such a reading, as flattering as it is to our own sensibilities, requires Shakespeare to have been himself a proto- (or crypto?) republican. If that were the case, we would have to ironize all of Martius's fulminating against the plebeians, which is not completely unappealing in its vitriolic intensity, and somehow account for both the genuinely labile nature of Shakespeare's citizenry as well as the duplicity of their representatives. Whether it proves the validity of his point of view or only the consistency of Shakespeare's dramatic depiction of them, they bear out Martius's accusations entirely. One might also point out that Martius is ultimately banished for his words, not his deeds, and by decree rather than any kind of genuine trial—hardly indicative of an emergent liberalism.[13] David George, rehearsing much of the evidence and historical work brought to bear on the dating and contextualization of *Coriolanus*, thinks that the play's politics may have been more of a marketing ploy than anything else. He corroborates the consensus position that Shakespeare directly references the Midlands Revolt but does not thereby impute to him, in doing so, a specific political motive. He argues instead that the inclusion of such topical allusions was "an artistic method of creating immediacy for his audience and of winning their involvement. Simply, they would not have understood references to ancient Roman customs and practices" (George 72) with the explanatory mechanism of contemporary analogies. Clifford Ronan acknowledges the political potential of Roman plays in particular but concludes that any specific agendas that might be imputed to them were likely dissipated amidst the heterogenous audiences

that witnessed their performances: "Like history writing proper, a drama of history advances partisanship less than it encourages relativism and tragic ambivalence" (Ronan 51). Without party platforms on which to base political appeals and given the upper-class bias of most plays, according to Ronan, it seems more sensible to regard dramatic crises that happen to be political as simply one among many varieties of dramatic content that, at best, channeled subversive energies that might otherwise have sought more destructive outlets than visits to the playhouse.

Returning to my primary topic, what the political content and all this critical politicizing of *Coriolanus* point to is, if not a disguised political agenda on the part of Shakespeare himself, the emergence in early modern England, as an accompaniment to a historical consciousness, of a concept of the public. However one might relate the events of the play to the events of the day or enforce on the text ideologies from centuries in its future, it is undeniable that the play opens out onto a field of action in which private citizens combine their voices in a public entity. The theory of the public that Shakespeare dramatizes is set at the very beginning of the play in opposition to the organic model of the state proposed by Menenius. Whereas the public is a collective construct of free citizens negotiating their private boundaries, the body politic illustrated by the famous "fable of the belly" is a political fiction that mystifies political process—the *arcanum imperii*[14] —and accommodates patrician prerogative behind the veil of a convenient parable. Menenius would like to catechize the crowd with his doctrine, a dogma that invokes abstract relationships that have little bearing on its immediate, practical demands. He appeals to them to blame "the gods, not the patricians" (1.1.68), as if the organization of Roman society were as eternal as the natural world and destined to continue on its course forever. This vision of society is essentially apolitical, with no space for debate and no latitude for change. Menenius may be anticipating the future continuance of Roman power, but his comparison of the state to the ineffability of heaven suggests that Rome exist in a permanent present. The plebeian demand for participation in power is a demand by the commons to realize the fullness of their subjectivity as historical agents. If history is made by people, not preordained by the heavens, *Coriolanus* presents us with the founding myth of "the people" asserting their control of it. Their insistence that "the people are the city" (3.1.200) counterposes Menenius's condescending paternalism as well as Martius's outright hostility. According to Menenius, who speaks as though he were a neutral arbiter in this debate, the maintenance of class relationships is essential to the survival of the state and its inhabitants:

> No public benefit which you receive
> But it proceeds or comes from them to you,
> And no way from yourselves.
>
> (1.1.147–149)

Though more indulgent than Martius's preference to suppress them, it is only a milder, more deceptive form of symbolic violence to exclude the plebeians from the genuinely public function they desire through mollifying propaganda.

What is most remarkable about Shakespeare's rendition of the fable of the belly, however, is that it singularly fails to convince. Like Martius's refusal to display his wounds in the marketplace, this too is a Shakespearean innovation that is not hinted at in his sources. The plebeians do not simply take Menenius at his word and disperse. Instead, they argue with him. They force him to defend his assertions. They demonstrate through their very disputatiousness what a public dissemination of ideas would look like, totally thwarting his assumption in his own historically-granted powers of persuasion—historically-granted because he himself "knows" the story of Menenius Agrippa as well as we do. One gets the sense that the plebeians have heard it before, too. As is so often the case, Shakespeare deviates from the traditional reading of this episode. Although humanist writers generally used Menenius's fable as a traditional example of the power of speech, *Coriolanus* comes at perhaps too late a date to take it seriously. Even Sir Philip Sidney, who is not exactly credulous about such matters, reports it as a "notorious" exemplum in his defense of poetry:

> Infinite proofs of the strange effects of this poetical invention might be alleged; only two shall serve, which are so often remembered as I think all men know them. The one of Menenius Agrippa, who, when the whole people of Rome had resolutely divided themselves from the senate, with apparent show of utter ruin, though he were (for that time) an excellent orator, came not among them upon trust of figurative speeches or cunning insinuations, and much less with far-fet maxims of philosophy, which (especially if they were Platonic) they must have learned geometry before they could well have conceived; but forsooth he behaves himself like a homely and familiar poet. He telleth them a tale, that there was a time when all the parts of the body made a mutinous conspiracy against the belly, which they thought devoured the fruits of each other's labour; they concluded they would let so unprofitable a spender starve. In the end, to be short (for the tale is notorious, and as notorious that it was a tale), with punishing the belly they plagued themselves. This applied by him wrought such effect in the people, as I never read that only words brought forth but then so sudden and so good an alteration; for upon reasonable conditions a perfect reconcilement ensued. (Sidney 41–42)

As it appears in Shakespeare, Menenius's famous tale is indeed rather like a poetic interpretation of history, but one that has passed through a number of filters before arriving in *Coriolanus*: it initially presented itself to Shakespeare as an example from the classics of the power of rhetoric; it is presented to the plebeians

in the play as a casuistic rationale; which includes its ironic presentation to Shakespeare's audience as a familiar example of the power of rhetoric; and finally, in its presentation in its original context, but anachronistically burdened by its subsequent career, it ends up a farce. Rather than occupying the role of sage elder, Menenius gains the reputation in this play of sententious fool. He is, however, exactly the sort who would glean conventional wisdom from history for application to the present moment, though he hardly manages himself to convince anyone of anything. Has Shakespeare, by the early seventeenth century, tired of such maxims? Or is it his own public that is no longer consoled by them and more entertained by a knowing subversion of them? The contrast between the imagery evoked by Menenius's fable and the political reality that presses against it sets the tone for the play, and there is, throughout it, much cynical rebuttal of this sort of language, by Martius especially. The intersection of political fictions with fictions of subjective autonomy in this play consistently demonstrate the inadequacy of both: "The facts of Roman life on both sides, including his own character, give Menenius' parable the lie. What we see is no organic body politic but a Rome torn by factional strife, Machiavelli's politics of the power struggle, reflected in the play's imagery of bodily fragmentation" (Parker 47). The "fable of the belly" is no more tenable in an actual society than man being author of himself. "Wholes" in the political model suggested by *Coriolanus*, whether composite social constructs or the self-consistent integrity of individuals are belied by the essential discontinuity of wills and identities that political life entails. Martius, who fundamentally denies this reality, speaks more truthfully than he realizes when he mockingly calls the people "fragments" (1.1.217), and less self-consciously than he is aware when he impugns their mutability: his own will have far more dire consequences. Menenius could not convince him with his fable, either, even if he considers himself Martius's own biographer,

> The book of his good acts whence men have read
> His fame unparalleled, haply amplified.
>
> (5.2.16–17)

Tested against political realities they seemed unable to account for, such classical platitudes were found wanting. James Holstun suggests that the play reflects a genuine break made in the Jacobean period from the more self-assured concepts of social order up until then predominant: "In this play, Shakespeare moved out of the Tudor conception of the body politic into the seventeenth-century critique of the body politic as an outmoded fiction" (Holstun 492). Similarly, Jonathan Dollimore sees the play as indicative of a new kind of historical understanding which, focusing on state power, social conflict, and the struggle

between true and false discourses, exposes the contradictions between traditional ideas and the present political circumstances that put them to the lie. For Dollimore, *Coriolanus* is a symptom of the decentering of the humanist subject in the early modern period, a result of the newly coherent class antagonisms that revealed the radically contingent nature of both identity and history.[15] Although Shakespeare evinces in *Coriolanus* much skepticism about traditional political fictions, he also tests the possibility of abandoning political fictions entirely and the consequences of trying to make such a futile escape. *Coriolanus*'s textually ironic skepticism toward its own status as a source of lessons from history is revealed most starkly when Martius is preparing to leave Rome and finds his mother forgetting the tough-minded wisdom she raised him to adopt:

> Nay, mother,
> Where is your ancient courage? You were used
> To say extremities was the trier of spirits;
> That common chances common men could bear;
> That when the sea was calm all boats alike
> Showed mastership in floating; fortune's blows,
> When most struck home, being gentle wounded craves
> A noble cunning. You were used to load me
> With precepts that would make invincible
> The heart that conned them.
>
> (4.1.1–11)

We have already seen how Martius references the linguistic world he shares with his mother, and how it makes itself felt in the language he uses. Here, he reminds her of what she taught him, and yet his nostalgia is mixed with detachment. Given his relatively unsophisticated bitterness throughout most of the play, it would be difficult to read these lines as entirely without irony. The vague universalism and grammatically clever construction of these apothegms come across as glib, even aggressive, when insensitively delivered by Martius to his mother. But they are part of the "text" of Roman culture that he tears up when he banishes the city. As with all the customs he disdains to follow, it is fitting that one who would be "author of himself" should have no need of *historia magistra vitae*.

Martius fears being reduced to the banality of these humanist sayings, of himself becoming a part of them. It would be tantamount, in his estimation, to being appropriated into public discourse, registering his life itself as a text in the common store of public history. He reviles, that is, exactly the situation in which he finds himself—written into a history play, exposed to common spectators, and vulnerable to the interpretive appetites of readers. His fate, to be literally torn apart—and then tritely commemorated—

is emblematic of this fear. His body is violated in the same way that texts are marked up, ripped, and recombined. Neither remains integral. A text, once public, undergoes constant transmutation, as pieces are removed and repurposed, original intent having little bearing on subsequent needs. If it is one of history's primary functions to make "public" its own processes, to render the opaque in the past both visible and usable to the present, the people want to do exactly this: bring the unseen, unspoken mechanisms of power and statecraft into an arena in which they can be scrutinized and either validated or repudiated. It is this public exposure, this surrendering to an uncontainable, hermeneutic gaze that Martius reviles. He fears becoming exactly what he already is: an exemplary personage fictionalized by historiography and then fed to the masses as gustatory edification. In a play so preoccupied with images of hunger, eating, and appetite, this is hardly an exaggeration. As the third citizen in the "selection" scene vividly explains:

> If he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them. So, if he tell us his noble deeds, we must must also tell him our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous, and for the multitude to be ingrateful were to make a monster of the multitude, of the which we, being members, should bring ourselves to be monstrous members. (2.3.5–12)

This is a visceral and even disgusting image for what is meant to be a mundane political process, but it effectively evokes the horror that Martius feels about having his "nothings monstered" (2.2.75) by the "many-headed" perception of the public. To let the plebeians put their "tongues into those wounds and speak for them" would put his wounds into public circulation, rather like a book that is passed from reader to reader, each one scribbling a different commentary in the margins. They would no longer be marks written in a silent language legible only to Martius and his mother but would be made to signify, be given voice, on behalf of the state. They would be brought, that is, into history. Martius, however, prefers to remain in a private, unarticulated world of his own. He regards his body as his private property, not a vehicle of the state, and his deeds as private actions. When he finally "banishes" Rome, he imagines himself the master of his own destiny. He thinks "there is a world elsewhere" (3.3.134) beyond the reach of the public and the grasp of its historical imagination. His banishment of Rome is analogous to his denial of his name, to his refusal to let his wounds speak, and most of all to his inability to speak a civil language.

Martius's reputation for stubborn inarticulacy is a personality trait about which Plutarch gives a clue but is elaborated by Shakespeare into a defining characteristic. In Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch "he had an eloquent tongue" (Bullough 5:543) and in Philemon Holland's Livy he is a judicious participant in civil affairs, "right politicke of advise, active besides" (5:498). While his sources for the play

agree in describing him as a well-spoken if irascible person, Shakespeare's Martius "continually demonstrates his inadequacy as an orator and, in so doing, his inability to fulfill the primary social and civic duty of a Roman citizen" (Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* 185). Unlike the Martius he gleaned from his sources, Shakespeare's cannot observe public forms or speak a public language. This does not mean that he does not possess his own sort of eloquence, however. Instead of depicting him as a particularly hot-headed political disputant, Shakespeare follows the suggestions in Livy and Plutarch as to Martius's verbal capacity in order to fill out his psychological composition along a different dimension. He is withholding, but not silent, and the more he talks, the more he seems to be holding himself back. In contrast to Cordelia, who cannot heave her heart into her mouth (*King Lear* 1.1.91–92), and Bolingbroke, who is unable to breathe out "the abundant dolour" of his (*Richard II* 1.3.256), Martius has no problem bridging the gap:

> His heart's his mouth.
> What his breast forges that his tongue must vent.
>
> (3.1.259–260)

Paul A. Cantor notes the relevancy to *Coriolanus* of Aristotle's idea that man is a political animal and that, without a city, a person is either a beast or a god: "Growth into true humanity requires the city because because it is contingent upon speech, which can only be developed through human association" (Cantor 101). But Martius's inarticulacy is also reflected in the lack of depth with which he is characterized. Unlike most of Shakespeare's protagonists, he is not given over to very much introspectiveness. As Maurice Charney reminds us, "Coriolanus has only thirty-six lines of soliloquy: the same number as *As You Like It* and the fewest in the Shakespeare canon. This does not prove anything by itself, but it keeps us aware of the lack of inwardness in the play, and the fact that Coriolanus is the least articulate of Shakespeare's tragic heroes." (Charney 79). He neither wants to speak nor be spoken about, as if he rejects the world of words completely. James Kuzner relates his aspersion of public identity directly to his martial obsession. Engagement in warfare, for Martius, represents the exact opposite of engagement with the public. Instead of having to self-identity, he chooses to self-abnegate: "Battle turns the corporeal self inside out; it does what the public square does not, makes of him surfaces without depths, a being no longer clearly or only Martius (as he is then called) but undifferentiated" (Kuzner 190). Being all surface also means being entirely in the present. Martius has no use for the past and no concern for the future: he exists only to act in the here and now. His denial of any kind of diachronic identity for himself reaches its head when Cominius

reports his encounter with him outside the gates of Rome, the erstwhile hero returned as a threatening conquerer:

> 'Coriolanus'
> He would not answer to, forbade all names.
> He was a kind of nothing, titleless.
>
> (5.1.11–13)

His linguistic ineptitude notwithstanding, Martius has something of Richard II in him, a solipsistic character who thinks he can will through words his own world into being. Whereas Richard is absorbed in the generative powers of his imagination, however, Martius uses his language like a weapon. They both illustrate a particularly Shakespearean drive to create worlds out of language, to fill the gaps between ideas and reality with words. Martius's tactic is not to proliferate meaning but to attack it. His banishment of Rome and search for a "world elsewhere" exemplifies his determination to brutalize the world into a shape that fits his nature and silence all the voices that threaten to fragment it. Finding this impracticable, his only resort in the end is to seek the death of the outside world, the political death of Rome, and ultimately the death of his own, arrant subjectivity. But his death drive toward historical erasure is no more effective than Richard's self-chronicling.

As reared by Volumnia, Martius's public self is the creation of his private life, but he prefers to remain private to the point of denying the public entirely and even attempting to destroy it. Volumnia herself, sent to make peace with him, has to warn Martius that his history hangs in the balance whether he succeeds in conquering Rome or not:

> Thou knowst, great son,
> The end of war's uncertain; but this certain,
> That if thou conquer Rome, the benefit
> Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name
> Whose repetition will be dogged with curses,
> Whose chronicle thus writ: 'The man was noble,
> But with his last attempt he wiped it out,
> Destroyed his country, and his name remains
> To th'ensuing age abhorred.'
>
> (5.3.140–148)

His name, as she explains, is not his own. History made him Coriolanus but can unmake him, too. No name is not a choice. Future ages will have their way with every word that makes up who he is. This is one of the most historically ironic moments in the play. We witness this exchange as part of a history in which the

composition of that history is discussed. Martius's reputation is already determined, if not by Shakespeare himself in the process of dramatizing him then by the historically-aware auditors and readers of his play, who have now to make up their own minds as to how the chronicle is "writ." Self-authorship is not available to Martius, because he is authored by history already, and autonomy from history is impossible. This is one aspect of the tragic composition of his character, his paradoxical drive to become socially unbound and textually unlimited: "Only by severing his relationship to nature and abstracting himself from all claims of kinship, will he become absolutely autonomous" (Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom* 110). Or so he thinks. Autonomy of this kind, however, does not exist. There is no organic state, as insincerely or naively posited by Menenius, to separate himself from. And there is no extra-social realm to which Martius may retreat. Extra-textual might be a better word for it, as this is a textual point, not a phenomenological one. There is no practicable division between public and private selves in a text, only verbal reaching toward one, and this a paradox that is integral to Shakespeare's project. Although Martius thinks it outside his integral identity to traffic with the people in the forum, he is even then already acting out the text that has already been written for him. When he has performed his obligation satisfactorily, he puts off the robe of humility and reassumes his former mien, "knowing myself again" (2.3.145). His conversation with the people, however, shows they know him well enough, too. He is already, as a text—written over with battle scars—their possession whether he reveals them or not. When he later threatens to destroy the city, it is this inescapable intersubjectivity that he really wants to annihilate: "In pursuit of a totally autonomous self which is privately grounded in the public language of the state," he confronts the contradiction that his private self can only ever emerge from public discourse (Tennenhouse 229). He thinks that by destroying Rome, he will also destroy his public self; his inability to do so bespeaks the dependency on that public self that his private self retains.

As much as Martius tries to avoid incorporating himself into public discourse, he also resists being made a subject of discourse by others. As I have been arguing, a central theme of the play is exactly the interaction between private self and public representation but also the inherently public quality of historical writing. It is a conceit of the play that its primary character does not want to act and a conceit of Shakespeare's engagement with history that this character, though entirely textual, does not want to be written about or remembered. To Martius's frustration, he is almost constantly being "historicized" by everyone else. This chronicling always occurs either in his absence or else with his explicit disapproval. We encounter these scenes of history in the making as though the public fiction of "Coriolanus," the poeticized

history that will bear Martius's legacy, is being written before us. Particularly galling to Martius is that his deeds are celebrated as if he were consciously serving a public purpose, rather than acting as the instrument of a spontaneous, destructive compulsion. Killing his enemies is not so far for him from killing language itself. When he rushes into the city of Corioles alone, he is all but given up for dead by his compatriots. Titus Lartius offers the first of what will turn out to be a series of eulogies for him:

> O, noble fellow,
> Who sensibly out-dares his senseless sword
> And, when it bows, stand'st up! Thou art left, Martius.
> A carbuncle entire, as big as thou art,
> Were not so rich a jewel. Thou wast a soldier
> Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and terrible
> Only in strokes, but with thy grim looks and
> The thunder-like percussion of thy sounds
> Thou mad'st thine enemies shake, as if the world
> Were feverous and did tremble.
>
> (1.4.57–65)

Hardly has the play begun and Lartius already sets its pattern. Martius has not yet adopted his eponymous surname but, presumed dead in his moment of triumph, he achieves here his apotheosis: more daring than his inanimate sword, more valuable to the state than a man-sized jewel, and the very image of the ideal Roman warrior according to Cato the Censor, the upholder of timeless Roman virtues who had not yet even been born. Lartius makes of Martius an exemplum, a model of behavior so superhuman it is practically inhuman. Martius's response to this, when he miraculously re-enters the scene, is typical: "Sir, praise me not" (1.5.16). His objection is greater still when Cominius, his general, informs him that his honor does not belong to him but to the state. Rejecting Martius's pleas to leave his heroics uncelebrated, Cominius makes it clear, in his good-natured rebuke, that the public is author of everyone:

> You shall not be
> The grave of your deserving; Rome must know
> The value of her own. 'Twere a concealment
> Worse than a theft, no less than a traducement,
> To hide your doings and to silence that
> Which, to the spire and top of praises vouched,
> Would seem but modest. Therefore, I beseech you—
> In sign of what you are, not to reward
> What you have done—before our army hear me.
>
> (1.9.19–27)

Cominius explains to Martius that his valor is a commodity and must be priced as such, so that his comparative value as an asset, as a "sign" of Roman identity, will be understood by the Roman public. So great is the need for Martius's achievement to be advertised and thus inscribed into Roman history, in fact, that Cominius regards it as treasonous to think otherwise. There is no virtue, after all, without models of virtuous behavior, and Cominius is trafficking in what was for the early modern period one of the most valuable sources of models. Martius, naturally, will hear none of it:

> I have some wounds upon me, and they smart
> To hear themselves remembered.
>
> (1.9.28–29)

But memory is entirely the point. If his wounds are not given textual form, worries Cominius, they will mean nothing, and they will do nothing. History, however, requires that they perform. The state, in fact, requires them to be the public text of a history that will serve to establish the very Roman identity that at the beginning of Roman history did not yet exist but that Shakespeare's latter-day "Romans" already take for granted. If Cominius regards Martius's wounds as traces inscribed on the body politic, however, Martius prefers that they stand mute, or invisible: writing without meaning or legibility. Unable to appreciate Cominius's point—he is practically speaking a foreign language—Martius considers approbation flattery, not a tool of state, and rejects the acclaim of his peers as "acclamations hyperbolical" (1.9.50), which is, perhaps, true enough about a heroic Roman who probably never existed and whose life is therefore entirely hyperbole. But Cominius will be appeased here no more than the citizens of Rome will be later, when Martius refuses to make his wounds legible to them. He argues that Martius does too much damage to himself, as if impugning his own reputation is tantamount to suicide—he says he will bind him in manacles, if he must, until he will listen to reason. Though he appears to accept the title "Coriolanus" cordially enough, the first thing he says after the assembled soldiers shout his new name is rather telling about his true regard for such ceremony: "I will go wash" (1.9.66). And when he is welcomed back to Rome as a conquering hero with further shouts of his new name, he is equally reticent to acknowledge it:

> No more of this, it does offend my heart.
> Pray now no more.
>
> (2.1.163–164)

The most significant moment of eulogizing of Martius, of course, is the official ceremony at which Cominius relates his deeds in public. The speech does little to propel the plot forward: it seems to exist

only so Martius can walk out on it, so he can refuse "to hear my nothings monstered" (2.2.75). This is not simply false modesty, I would argue. Though the sense of "monstered", a likely Shakespearean coinage, might include "demonstrated," it also evokes the image of the many-headed multitude Martius so despises. And as he departs, Menenius addresses them directly as "multiplying spawn" of which a thousand are worth "one good one" (2.2.76–77). This is an unusual scene. Martius acts as though not hearing Cominius's speech, the public transcription of his service, will somehow nullify it. As he will later refuse to display his wounds and allow them to be given a voice, he cannot brook hearing them be given voice in his presence. And so he literally walks off the page. If he could, one imagines he would walk out of history, too. It is ironic that Cominius claims to lack the voice needed on this occasion, that

> the deeds of Coriolanus
> Should not be uttered feebly.
>
> (2.2.80–81)

This is ironic, because Martius does not want them uttered at all and feebly is exactly how he himself will proclaim his merits himself in the marketplace. Manfred Pfister argues that Martius's "self is primarily a public self, a self enacted in public, constantly aware of the image it is projecting and the effect it is having on the other, and even the disregard for his impact on others, his famous 'noble carelessness', is a carefully studied mise-en-scene" (Pfister 42). This, I think, is only accurate in the sense that Martius is a public property in spite of himself. That his behavior is calculated, and not impulsive, grants him far more self-consciousness than the text allows. He is not merely "acting out" impulsiveness, either, not as a deliberate strategy, at any rate. That is, Martius's self *is* a public self, but this is the very reality that he resists. Volumnia might have taught Martius how to act the Roman, but for him it is not acting. On the battlefield, in his rivalry with Aufidius, he finds the sort of authentic experience he mistakes for reality, and this is the source of his distrust for the paltering speech of the public forum and the insincerity required for survival in political life. In fact, the eulogizing of Martius finally ends only when the play does, in the most ironic mode, of all, with his once and future nemesis Aufidius declaring that "he shall have a noble memory" (5.6.155). Of what, we might ask, will his noble memory be comprised? Does such an enemy of the "common," those who will inherit it, deserve to be remembered as "noble"? The most "noble" remembrance he might receive could only be the exact sort of antiseptic eulogy he despises. But this is why he deigns to be remembered at all and why he distrusts the multifariousness of the public. As for the people themselves, his distrust of them is perhaps justified by the mockery that Brutus and Sicinius make of his

family history in order to persuade them to rescind their support of his nomination to the consulship. In what is itself a scene of rhetorical persuasion, the tribunes persuade the plebeians to pretend they had been convinced against their better judgments by the tribunes's own epideictic cant about Martius's lineage and accomplishments:

> Say we read lectures to you,
> How youngly he began to serve his country,
> How long continued, and what stock he springs of,
> The noble house o'th'Martians, from whence came
> That Ancus Martius, Numa's daughter's son,
> Who after great Hostilius here was king,
> Of the same house Publius and Quintus were,
> That our best water brought by conduits hither;
> And Censorinus that was so surnamed,
> And nobly named so, twice being censor,
> Was his grest ancestor.
>
> (2.3.232–242)

The tribunes thus manage to pit Martius's "own desert" (2.3.64) against him, demonstrating both the public context of identity and reputation and—his greatest fear—how little bearing such facts and deeds have on them when twisted by false interpretation or put in service of an ulterior agenda. Subject to the inconsistent voices of the people, Martius's "history" can only ever be the product of political manipulation, contingent circumstance, and popular capriciousness. That he is unable to reconcile his speech with the speech of others is what makes of this perhaps banal fact a tragic situation. We should not, therefore, be surprised by how much he bridles at the way others use language, responding with exasperation to the plebeians's claims about senatorial policies—"They say!" (1.1.185); to the tribunes's presumptuous commands—"'Shall'?" (3.1.92); to the way the nobles think he should acquit himself with the people—"'mildly"' (3.3.146); to the multiple accusations of treason made against him—"How? 'Traitor'?" (3.3.66) and "'Traitor'? How now?" (5.6.87); and to Aufidius's sudden insults at the end of the play—"'Martius'?" (5.6.89) and "'Boy'!" (5.6.117). These verbal echoes reflect not only his shock at how language is being used against him—an ironic position for such a weaponizer of language to be in—but also his incomprehension of the way public language functions. The mutability and negotiation that animate public discourse is incompatible with someone like Martius, who wants to keep his words even as he speaks them. In a way, he wants to speak without being heard or, rather, wants his words to take the shapes of action and not

assume new shapes in the mouths of others. He can hardly even bring himself to speak the formulas of public ceremony and mocks the suggestion that he utter platitudes "in wholesome manner" to the people:

> What must I say?
> 'I pray, sir'? Plague upon't, I cannot bring
> My tongue to such a pace. 'Look, sir, my wounds!
> I got them in my country's service, when
> Some certain of your brethren roared and ran
> From th'noise of our own drums.'
>
> (2.3.48–53)

Public speech to him is all insincerity, and he scoffs at its empty pretension. It is also to him a kind of contamination, the mingling of a false "Coriolanus" with the true Martius. The citizens come to offer him their "own voices" with their "own tongues," to join with him in a public discourse that would combine their assent with his magnanimity, but he prefers to keep his tongue sealed behind clenched teeth. One has to imagine an incredulous exclamation point after practically everything he says.

As all of this eulogizing, and his reaction to it, demonstrates, the formation of Martius's identity is consistently represented as in the hands of others. In spite of his own temperament and protestations to the contrary, he is actually quite a passive character. Outside of a military context, his bluster bespeaks his essentially powerless condition. Unlike other Shakespearean tragic heroes, Martius is not a figure of authority. He is not even the highest ranked general in the Roman army. As much as he thunders his hatred of the plebeians, he is unable to act on it. His position is essentially one of frustration. Beholden to the law and to a social structure he can hardly tolerate, he is neither sanctioned to vent his anger in any meaningful action nor does he take the initiative to deliberately violate law or custom. He is proud but also petulant. All he can do is fulminate against the commons and hope for new wars to grant him release from the social norms that hold him in check. His entrance scene, in which he famously assaults us with his argument against democracy is utter bombast, more Gorgias than Plato and less persuasive. By the time he arrives to meet Menenius in mid-appeasement, the demands of the people have already been met and their tribunes appointed. His language is not a preamble to action but the snipings of impotent rage:

> Would the nobility lay aside their ruth
> And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry
> With thousands of these quartered slaves as high
> As I could pitch my lance.
>
> (1.1.192–195)

Not only is this a blatant example of what Janet Adelman refers to as Martius's "phallic exhibitionism" (Adelman 132), it is also indicative of his manipulable and instrumental nature: he would if he could but he is not allowed. Likewise, in his finest hour at the battle of Corioles, he is not at the front of the action but must wait for news of Cominius's parley with the enemy. And when the people turn on him, he pointlessly claims that "on fair ground I could beat forty of them" (3.1.244). Menenius's corroboration that he, too, could tackle two of their best only drives home how utterly powerless Martius is and untenable his rage. He is as impotent as an old man long past his fighting years and entirely without an object (including Aufidius) adequate to his anger. As Cominius usefully points out to both of them,

> Manhood is called foolery when it stands
> Against a falling fabric.
>
> (3.1.248–249)

The most salient indication of Martius's passivity is his relationship with his mother. The product of her careful rearing, Martius is fundamentally incapable of imagining an autonomous identity for himself, however much he tries. His self-authorship is itself a maternally derived construct. If his way of "writing" his reputation is to be wounded in battle, and to reserve the display of those wounds explicitly for his mother's gaze, it is a self-authorship of a profoundly nihilistic variety. At the same time that he renounces his signifying in society he also repudiates the claim to autonomy it is meant to manifest: his "wound-writing" is a form of invention by means of subtraction, denying his pretension to self-authorship while mortifying his flesh. To believe, in other words, that one's identity has a solid foundation that is in no way subject to the shaping mechanisms of upbringing or social interaction is to deny identity itself, to subtract from it until there is nothing left. Martius is compelled, by this sort of subjective death drive, to strip away everything from his own identity that is in any way contrived, or artificial, or dependent on others: to make of identity, in its structure and consistency, an insubstantial, unreadable void. His rationale, if we suppose that he has one, is if it does not exist in language, it cannot be spoken of. Coppélia Kahn points out how Martius's "self-canceling" (Kahn 152) identity is built on a series of such negations, that he defines himself against precisely the sort of artificial nature that formed him "if both the warrior's ferocity and the politician's 'insinuating nods' are the man's part, and he learns them both from a woman who thereby serves as his cultural father" (155). Volumnia, in contrast to her son, regards the wounds positively, as additive: the emoluments of his soldier's office, earned in service to the state and exchangeable in the political marketplace for higher office. She counts them up like currency and ascribes to them a value

that can only exist in a social context. Her attitude toward Martius's wounds resembles her attitude to his reputation. If wounds can be converted into the dissimulation of reputation, then the dissimulation of political performance can be converted into power—as long as Martius can smooth "his rougher accents" (3.3.54) into "gentle words" (3.2.60). She appeals to him to set aside his warrior's temperament and assume a more flexible aspect, to think, as she does, that his wounds were not earned for their own sake but for the purpose of social action:

> I prithee now, my son,
> Go to them, with this bonnet in thy hand,
> And thus far having stretched it—here be with them—
> Thy knee bussing the stones—for in such business
> Action is eloquence and the eyes of th'ignorant
> More learned than the ears.
>
> (3.2.73–78)

This is rather too much for Martius, for whom action is action, not eloquence, and it would also seem to contradict Volumnia's otherwise martial fixations elsewhere. Interestingly, Volumnia's strategy represents the people as, perhaps, less canny about appearances than they may be. In the remarkable conversation between the officers at the Capitol, Shakespeare suggests that the people understand politics very well indeed. One of the officers even praises Martius for being honest to a fault about his awareness of the people's fickle disposition and dismisses as irrelevant to his achievements his course personality: "He hath deserved worthily of his country, and his ascent is not by such easy degrees as those who, having been supple and courteous to the people, bonneted, without any further deed to have them at all into their estimation and report" (2.2.23–27). At least some of the people would be unmoved by a politician appearing, bonnet in hand, to solicit their support. What all this theorizing about political posturing points up is a play concerned with the fashioning of appearances but also the impossibility of ever reigning in that fashioning and disciplining it to a singular purpose. Volumnia, in her paradoxical role as both the maternal artist of Martius's identity and the "cultural father" who represents essential truth, wants to orchestrate Martius's reputation. She wants him, that is, to be a model of unassailable Roman virtues but at the same time to contradict those virtues by letting himself be manipulated so that he can learn how to manipulate others. The tribunes, of course, have their own ideas about manipulating him, and the end result is that the last person to have any power over Martius's public identity is Martius himself.

Martius's passivity, or what we might term his aggressive-passiveness, is congruent with his role as a product of the historical imagination he would rather not be a part of. If the play demonstrates that history's grasp is inescapable, its tragic inflection is Martius's defiance of what it dramatizes, in a variation of the fatalistic tragic mode, as inexorable fact. He is not the product of his own autonomous spontaneity any more than he has any ability to control how others perceive him and construct representations of him that have political force. Even before we meet him in the play, the essential truth of the malleability of historical reputations is contained in a casual remark by one of the rioting citizens in the first scene in response to another's defense of Martius's patriotic service: "he did it to please his mother" (1.1.35). This is, of course, his literary reputation, as well, but we should bear in mind that it is a reputation constructed in the play, and constructed in advance, and also constructed within a dramatic examination of the very process of its constructedness. What is left is passed along to us to accept or deny as citizen-readers ourselves. Though it seems a throwaway remark, it hits too close to the mark, and foreshadows too much about the play's plot, to dismiss entirely. While it is true that Martius wishes to please his mother, it is really the mother as imaginary linguistic origin that seduces him, the author of the text to which he constantly returns. As if fulfilling a prewritten outcome, it is also the text that gets him killed.

One further question worth addressing is what relationship Martius's self-abnegating rejection of self-representation has to his vitriolic hatred of the people. What, that is, do they represent to him outside any pat system of class antagonism we might perceive in the play as a whole? Why does he hate them? A clue is given in the first scene, discussed in part above, when the plebeians's demand that the patricians "yield us but the superfluity" (1.1.15) is echoed later in the same scene by Martius, on hearing the news that Volscians are again in arms:

> I am glad on't.
> Then we shall ha' means to vent
> Our musty superfluity.
>
> (1.1.220–221)

For someone so otherwise obsessed with fighting, it is surely as significant that this is his first reaction, even before any mention of his delight in battle, as it is that he uses the same word, "superfluity," to describe the people's relationship to the city that the people used to describe the patricians's exploitation of it. They are, to him, excessive, unnecessary, a surplus. Their wavering opinions represent a surplus of interpretive possibility, too, an uncontainable abundance of voices that Martius's discipline cannot hope to muster. At

every turn, Martius's hatred of the people is predicated on this unpredictability and unreliability. They are unpredictable and unreliable as members of the polity but also as the bearers of his legacy. They have, for him, too many voices, all crying out at once, and to purposes that are too often crossed. In their diversity, they represent the heterogeneity of interpretation, the defining quality of historical reception itself, which threatens his private impetus to remain self-contained and unread. To expose his wounds to public scrutiny, as it were, would be to give them a false signification. They would be no longer his bodily property but the common property of Rome and all future generations who might desire to put their tongues into them, as well. Faced with this prospect, he would rather his wounds remain unread and unreadable and, as for his reputation, he makes his feelings on that subject as explicit as we might expect:

> Think upon me? Hang 'em!
> I would they would forget me, like the virtues
> Which our divines lose by 'em.
>
> (2.3.56–58)

If to know is to possess, he is less interested in what the people think about him or what influence he has over them than he is that they not know him at all. If the people are worried that Martius

> would depopulate the city, and
> Be every man himself.
>
> (3.1.266–267)

Martius would prefer only knowing himself to the exclusion of anyone else knowing him or having a purchase on his identity at all. Not even the nobles can draw him from his single-minded epistemology. They desperately want him to know what he is doing when he provokes the people into banishing him. With a familiar Ricardian pun, however, Martius responds, "I'll know no further" (3.3.86), expressing both the limit he has placed on his understanding and a stubborn insistence (i.e. "I'll know 'no' further") about the extent to which he will pursue negation. Banishing the city from his consciousness, a variety of the pre-mirror stage fallacy of "if I can't see you, you can't see me," he vows to remain in exile "what is like me formerly" (4.1.53), a nameless, illegible singularity outside the boundaries of historical perception. If the people to him are like a threatening monster, from this moment he seems akin to a monster himself, "like a lonely dragon" (4.1.30). Cityless, and therefore even less human than the plebeians, he reverts to the most debased animalistic state of all. The psychological dimension to banishment is clearly something that interested Shakespeare. Martius's "I banish you" (3.3.122) is not far from Gaunt's advice to Bolingbroke,

> Think not the King did banish thee
> But thou the King.
>
> (*Richard II* 1.3.279–280)

and Kent's mental accommodation to his own dismissal by Lear: "Freedom lives hence and banishment is here" (*King Lear* 1.1.182). In *Coriolanus*, however, and paradoxically, the social negation of banishment has a positive, empowering property for Martius. Denying his citizenship, like denying his name, is a means to prevent others from knowing him, just as refusing to reveal his wounds—"I will not seal your knowledge with showing them" (2.3.106)—is a withholding of his body from epistemological assimilation by the many. As Cynthia Marshall puts it, "the question of exposing his wounds is less one of compliance to ceremony or conformity to public expectation than of allowed knowledge, of the extent to which his wounds cease to be his own and become more generally available—whether, as he puts it, they 'shall be yours"' (Marshall 102).

Threatened by a superfluity of individual voices all with the power to read his wounds and decide what they mean, Martius's only recourse is to retreat into a solipsistic idiocy. He may spit and bluster about using his sword to "make a quarry" of the plebeians as individuals, but what he fears is the people in the abstract, the unkillable image of their undifferentiated, compounded beastliness. In depicting the people, Shakespeare adopts a familiar Renaissance metaphor. They are consistently reckoned, even by themselves, as "a many-headed multitude" (2.3.15); "the mutable, rank-scented meinie" (3.1.68); "Hydra" (3.1.94); "the multitudinous tongue" (3.1.157); a "common cry of curs" (3.3.119); and the tribunes of the people, "the tongues o'th'common mouth" (3.1.22). The image of the people as a many-headed monster was deployed with great frequency in the early modern period and is ubiquitous across all genres of writing. Despite critical attempts to locate Shakespeare's soft spot for the common man, there does not seem to be anyone contemporary with him who writes with very much sympathy for this monstrous, metaphorical aggregate. Even the arguments putatively presented on the people's behalf, such as we find in Book V of Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, are presented only for the sake of refuting them.[16] And in Book VI of that work, the slanderous power of the mob is captured in that most unusual of Spenserian creations: the Blatant Beast. Like the multitude in *Coriolanus*, the Blatant Beast is many-tongued, unpredictable, and speaks through wounds. As the object of *The Faerie Queene*'s final quest, it uniquely evades permanent capture, too, and seems to persist as much outside the boundaries of the poetic work as outside the boundaries of any effective law. Its brief appearance at the end of Book V exemplifies the futility of trying to curb its

libelous intent or capture it within the margins of a text. Just as Martius cannot pretend the historical imagination of the people does not exist, the Blatant Beast ravages the public text whether Artegall, the hero knight of justice chases it or not: "Unaligned, highly generalized, the creature and its rages are at this point placed beyond the interest, as well as beyond the apparent control, of the patron of Law and Justice: Artegall actively tries not to regard it, holding Talus back from attack, and the thing is left behind as the hero returns to Gloriana's court" (Gross 105). The beast, as a representation of the many-headed multitude, undoes Spenser's work from the inside, just as the people in *Coriolanus* are the undoing of Martius's own extra-textual reputation. The metaphor of the many-headed beast evokes less a politically subjected underclass than the uncontainable social energy of a pluralistic population. Sympathy for such a bedeviller, no more than sympathy for the proliferation of anonymous verse libels in the period, was not forthcoming from the poets.[17] The Parliamentarians in the 1640s, Christopher Hill points out, were willing to at least manipulate the beast to serve its own ends, but it is doubtful that anyone would have countenanced such an outrage in prior decades.[18] Unfortunately for our own democratic sensibilities, Shakespeare was not likely to have been an exception. Indeed, the multitude in *Coriolanus* is as formulaic is any other: inconstant, mercurial, and easily cowed into submission. The point of introducing the mob into his dramatic design was probably less to inspire audience identification with it than to pose, at best neutrally, the problem that Martius faces. As a public figure, he is subject to public whims and public scrutiny. His history will be written outside of his control, read and interpreted by the multitudinous readers of early modern Europe by whom he would prefer to be forgotten. Shakespeare's fellow dramatists, whatever their politics, were no more sympathetic to the many-headed beast, either. This should not be surprising since playwrights often regarded themselves among its principal victims.

A clear intellectual current runs through much of the dramatic and non-dramatic literature treating the subject. Thomas Middleton has the Arthurian figure Vortiger excoriate the beast in his own historical romance, *The Mayor of Quinborough*:

> Will that wide throated Beast, the multitude,
> Never leave bellowing? Courtiers are ill
> Advised when they first make such Monsters.
> How neer was I to a Scepter and a Crown?
> Were casting glory, till this forked Rabble
> With their infectious Acclamations
> Poyson'd my Fortunes for Constantines sons.
>
> (Middleton 5–6)

Thomas Dekker is likewise hostile in both drama and prose, his frequency of attack more than can be chalked up to unserious ideas and unsympathetic characterizations. Moreover, the language he uses to describe the beast resembles that of Shakespeare's in *Coriolanus*. For example, in *The pleasant comedie of old Fortunatus*:

> I scorn'd to crowd among the muddie throng
> Of the rancke multitude, whose thickned breath,
> Like to condensed Fogs doe choake that beautie,
> Which els would dwell in every kingdomes chéeke.
> (Dekker, *The pleasant comedie of old Fortunatus* sig. E1v)

In *The pleasant comedie of patient Grisill*:

> These two are they, at whose birthes envies tongue,
> Darted envenom'd stings, these are the fruite
> Of this most vertuous tree, that multitude,
> That many headed beastes.
> (Dekker, *The pleasant comedie of patient Grisill* sig. L1r)

In *Lusts dominion*:

> I have perfum'd the rankness of their breath,
> And by the magick of true eloquence,
> Transform'd this many headed Cerberus,
> This py'd Camelion, this beast multitude,
> Whose power consists in number, pride in threats;
> Yet melt like snow when Majestie shines forth
> This heap of fools, who crowding in huge swarms,
> Stood at our Court gates like a heap of dung,
> Reeking and shouting out contagious breath
> of power to poison all the elements.
> (Dekker, *Lusts dominion, or, The lascivious queen a tragedie* sig. E3r)

And in his pamphlet, *The Belman of London*:

> Who would not rather sit at the foote of a hill tending a flock of sheepe, then at the helme of Authoritie controuling the stubborn and unruly multitude? Better it is in the solitarie woods, and in the wilde fieldes, to be a man among beastes then in the midest of a peopled Citie, to be a beast among men. In the homely village art thou more safe, then in a fortified Castle: the stings of Envy, or the Bullets of Treason, are never shot through those thin walles: Sound healths are drunke out of the wholsome woodden dish, when the cup of golde boyles over with poyson. (Dekker, *The Belman of London* sig. B3r)

Samuel Daniel extends the trope into an epic simile:

> Like when some mastiffe whelpe disposd to play,
> A whole confused heard of beests doth chase,
> Which with one vile consent runne all away,
> If any hardier then the rest in place.
> But turne the head that idle feare to stay,
> Backe strait the daunted chacer turnes his face:
> And all the rest with bold example led,
> As fast runne on him as before they fled.
> So with this bold opposer rushes on
> This many headed monster multitude.
>
> (Daniel 464–465)

And Michael Drayton also employs it in a historical tragedy:

> This monster now, this many-headed beast,
> The people, more unconstant then the wind,
> Who in my life, my life did so detest,
> Now in my death, are of another mind:
> And with the fountains from their teareful eyes,
> Doe honor to my latest obsequies.
>
> (Drayton sig. K2v)

Political theorists of the time were no less indisposed toward the multitude, which they regarded as a genuine threat to the peace and security of the state. Sir William Corne-Waleys, sounding much like a cooler-headed Coriolanus himself, warns against popularity as a basis for reputation:

> For with danger they stand that stand not upon themselues—his [the popular man's] foundation is the many headed multitude, a foundation both in respect of their number and nature uncertaine, and consequently dangerous, for who knowes not the divers formes of mens imaginations, as different almost as their faces, which showes them easily seperated, & their forces being strong, no longer then whiles together incorporated, being so subiect to be severed, nay they going against nature, if holding a continued union, what can issue from this confidence, but danger? their natures, but by the pleasure of nature and their education is left ignorant, which impotencie leaves a wavering disposition easily seduced, and as easily reformed, apt to beleeve a fayre tale, and as apt to beleeve weake reasons, strong: spent in contradiction, this makes them inconstant, for their discourse not used to retaine things, makes them like any thing, because they are destitute of the use of comparison. (Corne-Waleys R5r–R5v)

The dramatist and translator Anthony Munday, writing anonymously against the Catholic League's attempt to overthrow Henry III in France, mentions Coriolanus by name as a victim of popular caprice in times of crisis:

> In such civill divisions, the mishaps are so great, that without consideration of good turnes and benefites received, or the vertuous actions of excellent men: the people so furiously cast themselves

> upon them, as they cease not to pursue them, even to death or banishment. As it happened in Athens to Themistocles, Aristides, Demosthenes, and Phocion: in Rome, to Coriolanus, Camillus, Scipio Affricanus, Cicero and others…
>
> And in the ende, by unbridled libertie, in many places and Citties where the Rebels are, you shall beholde not any *Democratia*, or populer estate, wel & pollitiquely governed by the Lawes, but rather a most miserable *Olocratia*, an insolent domination of the multitude, or rather a many headed *Anarchia*, the oppression whereof is most horrible and pernitious. For you knowe that the people either serve humbly, or commaunde imperiously, and tasting a little of the bayte of libertie, exemption of taskes, subsidies and charges: in furie they reject and throwe off the yoke of obedience to the King, Superiours and Magistrates, themselves weilding and managing the highest authoritie.
>
> Then pretending an equalitie, they practise nothing els but seditions, mallice, robberies, spoyles, insolencies, and destructions: whereupon Plato thus spake very notably. *The whole Common-wealth shall decay and perrish, when it is to be governed by Brasse or yron, that is to say, by foolish men, such as are borne rather to serve and obey, then to rule and commaunde.* (Munday and L. T. A. sig. Q1v–Q2r)

Given the intense interest of Protestant England in the French wars of religion, it is clear that fear of the many-headed monster was no joke to Shakespeare and his contemporaries.[19] Machiavelli, in his commentary on Livy, also cites the example of Coriolanus. In his case, the mob must be contained at all costs, and Martius turns out to have in his political theory the same sacrificial status that many critics ascribe to him in Shakespeare.[20] The story of Coriolanus demonstrates for him the utility of offering "an outlet by which the masses can discharge the anger they have formed against a single citizen," without which, mob violence could destroy the republic:

> And as to corroborating this opinion with examples, I think this of Coriolanus is enough from the ancients. Each one may observe from it how much ill for the Roman republic would have resulted if he had been killed by a mob, because thereby injury would have been done by individuals to individuals. Such injury produces fear; fear seeks for defense; for defense partisans are obtained; from partisans rise parties in states; from parties their ruin. But since the affair was managed by one who had authority over it, all those ills were avoided that might have arisen if it had been managed with private power. (Machiavelli 212–213)

The opinion that the people represent a potential threat to the state was shared by Machiavellians and anti-Machiavellians alike. The Jesuit thinker Giovanni Botero, alarmed by the popularity of Machiavelli, published *Della ragion di stato* in response in 1589. But he nevertheless agrees with Machiavelli on the necessity of keeping a curb on the commoners and suggests using the sort of political fictions employed by Menenius or else purging the superfluity with wars, as recommended by Martius:

> Just as a doctor can relieve the disordered humours of the human body by diverting them elsewhere with cauterizing and blood-letting, so a wise prince can placate an enraged people by leading it to war against an external enemy, or by some other means which will turn it from its original evil

> intention. As Horace says, the populace is bellua multorum capitum, and when it is troublesome it must be taken now by one of these heads and now by another; it requires most careful management, and the hand, the rod, the curb and the halter may all be needed in turn. The great need here is for a fertile imagination, capable of thinking up expedients to inspire in the populace feelings in turn of pleasure, fear, suspicion and hope, so that they can be held in check and then reduced to obedience: those men are best fitted for this work who possess the affection of the rebels as well as the gifts of sagacity and eloquence. Agrippa pacified the people of Rome by telling them the famous fable of the human body and its members. (Botero 112–113)

Sir Thomas Browne also agrees, arguing about the multitude that "their reason cannot rectifie them, and therefore hopelesly continuing in mistakes, they live and dye in their absurdities; passing their dayes in perverted apprehensions, and conceptions of the world, derogatory unto God, and the wisdome of his creation" (Browne 14). Browne says the people are better led by example than precept, proverbs than logical demonstrations. He also says they are concerned only with surface meanings, what is most immediately apparent and that, unable to attain the "second intention of the words, they are faine to omit their superconsequencies, coherencies, figures, or tropologies, and are not sometime perswaded by fire beyond their literalities" (16). Menenius would be quick to agree. Both he and Browne recognize, as Shakespeare dramatizes, the dangerous capacity of the crowd to convert hastily adopted opinions into ill-conceived violence:

> Their individuall imperfections being great, they are moreover enlarged by their aggregation, and being erroneous in their single numbers, once hudled together, they will be errour it selfe; for being a confusion of knaves and fooles, and a farraginous concurrence of all conditions, tempers, sex, and ages, it is but naturall if their determinations be monstrous, and many wayes inconsistent with truth. (17)

That many of the plebeians in *Coriolanus* the play do have "tongues" of their own perhaps suggests that Shakespeare does indeed have a more complex notion of the multitude than most of his contemporaries. As we saw with Menenius's fable of the belly, the sort of political fictions recommended by these commentators are subjected in *Coriolanus* to withering skepticism. If putting his most famous speech about the necessity of "degree" in social order in the mouth of the wily Ulysses is a subtle way of undermining it,[21] the fictitiousness of "the body politic" is, as E. A. J. Honigmann argues, brought right out into the open by Menenius's interaction with its actual, speaking members: "The fable begins to break down as soon as the body's members are humanised beyond the conventional Aesopian minimum (attributing mere speech to animals and so on), for it then comes close to conceding that social roles are interchangeable, that one can

do the work of another" (Honigmann 179). Adelman goes even further. She makes a compelling case that we, as spectators, are incorporated by Martius into the many-headed multitude he despises:

> Coriolanus seems to find our love as irrelevant, as positively demeaning, as theirs; in refusing to show the people his wounds, he is at the same time refusing to show them to us. In refusing to show himself to us, in considering us a many-headed multitude to whose applause he is wholly indifferent, Coriolanus denies us our proper role as spectators to his tragedy. (Adelman 144)

But the exposure of these fables for what they are does not mean Shakespeare is on the side of the people. If anything, it means the necessity of restraining the interpretive activity of the people is both necessary and impossible at the same time. The tension between the state's reliance on political fictions and the people's reluctance to believe them can never be fully dissipated. Martius, who refuses to play this game, ends up inscribed into an entirely different sort of story than the one he perhaps envisioned for himself. Our spectatorship at a vast historical remove figures exactly the sort of retrospective interpretive multiplicity he rejects. We may feel in league with the people, because they are, in some sense, our surrogates, but Martius is victimized by a power from which no one is safe: the free-floating power of multiple imaginations all shaping history according to their own best ends.

Martius ends up absorbed into Roman legend as a founding hero but one whose anti-social tendencies threatened the social stability his legendary exploits guaranteed. Rome could not have existed without him, but it also could not have continued to exist with him. The imaginary Rome of English antiquarian nostalgia was summoned into being by this sort of historical contradiction. But the ideal is always recovered from the contingencies that threaten it. Early modern history was often shaped by the poetic desire of the present to recover an idealized past and realize the ideal again in the future. But history also requires the sacrifice of private selves to the public narrative, and history provides no safeguards against the multiplicity of public voices. Reading history, inasmuch as performing history, is the act of revitalizing all the dead flesh that made the circumstances of its reading possible. As *Coriolanus* shows, all history is to some degree a history of wounding, of subtracting from the present for the sake of the future. Such a play reanimates the wounded bodies whose negation made history a positive possibility. The death of Caius Martius Coriolanus, who thought he could remain so autonomous as to remove himself from history entirely, ironically strikes a hopeful note for the future at the beginning of Roman memory of the past. We are here in the literary terrain of *King Lear*, another play set at the dawn of historical memory. While Lear's death presages the disintegration of a society that depends on the royal succession, on a history that

must continue because it is pre-written, but cannot because it has been ruptured, Martius is sent to the slaughter as the fulfillment of a destiny, Rome's destiny, that he chooses to take no part in. Lear thinks he can see his kingdom in his mind's eye. He believes that nothing can escape his gaze, that, contrary to the common phrase, his map is the territory. Martius, the quintessential Roman, defines himself by projecting his imagination outside Rome as a historical exile who carries his society with him. Roman history will go on, however, in spite of him, and Martius, who wants to go unmarked by history is marked anyway. Lear, on the other hand, can only exist in society if he is marked as king. Unlike the fulsomely social world of *Coriolanus* with its teeming hordes of citizen-historians, Lear wanders in a landscape that seems to have no society at all, as if it has been retroactively cleansed of anyone who could grant him the social significance he craves and that Martius, for whom it is available, spurns. Also unlike *Coriolanus*, which has all of Roman history ahead of it, *King Lear* abruptly negates the British history that properly lies before it.

The final word on the status of history at the end of *Coriolanus* is perhaps as banal as it is deflating of Martius's tragic denouement. With the Volscian senators gathered over the corpse of their erstwhile commander, agog at what has befallen, one of them makes what is perhaps the most insipid, indecorous, and yet apropos remark in all of Shakespeare: "Let's make the best of it" (5.6.148). There could be no better articulation than this anticlimactic shrug of history's inevitable recourse to poetry, to the affectively-charged fiction, always straining toward some kind of truth-greater-than-facts, that history was in the early modern period. Intriguingly, the sentiment is echoed by Günter Grass, whose Brechtian "Boss," confronted by the tragic reality of his own historical circumstances, voices a resignation that would not be unfamiliar to Shakespeare himself: "Nun gut. Vielleicht fallen bei all dem Elend Gedichte ab"—"Well, maybe some poems will hatch from all this misery" (Grass, "Die Plebejer" 428; *The Plebeians* 110).

Notes

[1]For the sake of consistency, I will refer to "Martius" when discussing Shakespeare's character specifically and to "Coriolanus" when discussing the play and in all other contexts. Quotations, however, remain unaltered.

[2]Although editorial tradition has generally changed Martius's speech prefix after 1.9.66, where he is first addressed as "Martius Caius Coriolanus," the First Folio—also the first printed edition of the play—waits until his return in triumph to Rome.

[3]See Giorgio Agamben. *State of Exception*. Trans. Kevin Attell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.

[4]On the historicity of Martius, see Kytzler and Salmon. Martius's story was first declared a fiction by Theodor Mommsen, who, found it to partake more of the poetic than the historical: "Wer in diesen Erzählungen nach einem sogenannten geschichtlichen Kern sucht, wird allerdings die Nuss taub finden; aber von der Grösse und dem Schwung der Zeit zeugt die Gewalt und der Adel dieser Dichtungen, insbesondere derjenigen von Coriolanus, die nicht erst Shakespeare geschaffen hat" (Mommsen 26). "Whoever searches for a so-called historical kernel in these tales will indeed find the nut to be deaf; but the force and the nobility of this literature attest to the grandeur and the momentum of the time, especially those of Coriolanus, which Shakespeare was not the first to create."

[5]Geoffrey Bullough thinks Shakespeare based much of *Titus Andronicus*, including Titus's refusal to be named emperor and his son Lucius's exile and return, on Plutarch's "Life of Coriolanus" (Bullough 6:24).

[6]To obtain these results, I matched a selection of the most semantically meaningful top hits in a concordance of *Coriolanus* against the "Open Source Shakespeare" online concordance of the complete works.

[7]On the subject of the sonnet, its usefulness as biographical evidence, and the possibility that it was part of a poetic dialogue in the early seventeenth century, see MacDonald P. Jackson. "Shakespeare's Sonnet cxi and John Davies of Hereford's "Microcosmos" (1603)". The Modern Language Review 102.1, 2007: 1–10. Print.

[8]For an overview of recent criticism, see Lee Bliss. "What Hath a Quarter-century of *Coriolanus* Criticism Wrought?" *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* 2 (2002): 63–75. Print.

[9]For an overview of the Coriolanus tradition and Tate's place in it, including a critical edition of his adaptation, see Ruth McGugan. *Nahum Tate and the Coriolanus Tradition in English Drama With a Critical Edition of Tate's The Ingratitude of a Common-Wealth*. New York: Garland, 1987. Coincidentally, the three Shakespeare plays adapted by Tate, *Richard II*, *Coriolanus*, and *King Lear*, are also the three with which the present study is concerned.

[10]For the original text, see Bertolt Brecht. "Coriolan". *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 3. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967. 2396–2497. Print.; and Bertolt Brecht. "Coriolanus". *Collected Plays*. Ed. Ralph Manheim & John Willett. Trans. Ralph Manheim. Vol. 9. New York: Random House, 1972. 57–146. Print.

[11]Günter Grass. "Die Plebejer Proben Den Aufstand." *Werke*. Göttinger Ausg. Vol. 2. Göttingen: Steidl, 2007. 357–429. Print; Günter Grass. *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising: A German Tragedy*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966. Print.

[12]For the connection of the Midlands Revolt, as well as other contemporaneous uprisings, to *Coriolanus*, see Holland 69–70. For the original argument, see also E. C. Pettet "*Coriolanus* and the Midlands Insurrection of 1607". Shakespeare Survey 3 (1950): 34–42. Print. If Shakespeare was as interested in the anti-enclosure riots as critics have long maintained, however, it is worth pointing out that 1) "it is not clear whether the rising corn prices, which reached their height in 1608, were sufficiently felt in the

midland counties during the early part of 1607 to form one of the immediate causes of the revolt" (Gay 213) and 2) in the play itself, the rising of the plebeians occupies hardly more space than the length of the first scene—unlike in Jacobean England, the plebeians actually get what they want—after which the dramatic focus re-centers onto Martius, the war with the Volscians, and the political machinations of the tribunes. This is possibly a case in which a dated supposition has, through overuse, become received wisdom. According to Steve Hindle, however, "depopulation and dearth were, it seems, intimately linked in plebeian consciousness" (Hindle 27). Hindle also sees the play as valuable a source for historians as does Kishlansky: "Whatever the play may or may not reveal about Shakespeare's own attitudes, his familiarity with the idioms associated with the political economy of grain supply suggest that *Coriolanus* is no less valuable a source than the digger broadside, King James's proclamations, Wilkinson's Sermon or Bacon's essay for historians seeking to understand the dynamics of popular protest in the early seventeenth century. The play not only echoes and rehearses the discourses associated with the Midland Rising, but also explores the parameters of what it was possible to think about hunger, about paternalism, about protest and about punishment in Jacobean England" (47–48). Hindle's case rests almost entirely on the first scene of the play, as arguments must that make of the entire play a commentary on popular rebellion. Hindle's point, however, is not that the play is subversive of the contemporary political establishment but a rejoinder to both popular discontent and official corruption in favor of good governance: "Indeed, it is arguable that 1.1 of *Coriolanus* imagines not insurrection itself but the prevention of insurrection by the timely redress of grievances, a policy subsequently endorsed by Francis Bacon and conspicuous by its absence from the counsels of James I in 1607, at least until the crown's hand had been forced by civil commotion" (49).

[13] Andrew Hadfield, who has done the most work on the question of Shakespeare and republicanism, can only conclude murkily that Shakespeare was definitely interested in politics. Though hardly a solution to the problem of his personal views—and it is an open question whether we can or should ever find one–this is still a bold statement in contrast to critics of long ago, who generally regarded him an apolitical author. See Andrew Hadfield. *Shakespeare and Republicanism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Print.

[14] The source of the expression *arcana imperii* is Tacitus, *Annals* 2:36. The histories of Tacitus were increasingly popular at the end of the sixteenth century for their realistic portrayal of power politics and imperial dissimulation. For an extensive treatment of this subject, see Peter Samuel Donaldson. *Machiavelli and Mystery of State.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Print. 111–140. For an interesting discussion of the concept's relevance to early modern English culture, particularly to magic, automata, and other wondrous devices that operated according to analogous principles of obfuscation, see Jessica Wolfe. *Humanism, Machinery, and Renaissance Literature.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print. 63–68.

[15] Jonathan Dollimore. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries.* Brighton: Harvester, 1984. Print. 218–230.

[16] This is the episode of the leveling giant, *The Faerie Queene* 5.2.51–52. All Spenser citations are from Edmund Spenser. *The Faerie Queene.* Rev. 2nd ed. Ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, & Toshiyuki Suzuki. Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2007. Print. Longman Annotated English Poets. During the Civil War, a Royalist pamphleteer actually reprinted it as anti-Leveller propaganda, demonstrating the power of such literary images on the political landscape of the time. For text and commentary, see John N. King. "The Faerie Leveller: A 1648 Royalist Reading of The Faerie Queene, V.ii.29–54." Huntington Library Quarterly: A Journal for the History and Interpretation of English and American Civilization 48.3 (1985): 297–308. Print.

[17]For an overview of the recent rediscovery of the Stuart verse libel, see Alastair Bellany. "Railing Rhymes Revisited: Libels, Scandals, and Early Stuart Politics." History Compass 5.4 (2007): 1136–1179. Print.

[18]Christopher Hill. *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England.* Rev. ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991. Print.

[19]For the Catholic League's subversive activities, which only ceased with the Protestant Henry IV's conversion to Catholicism, see Mack Holt. *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 121–152.

[20]According to Brockbank, for example, *Coriolanus* has a sacrificial design that marks the end of the time when *virtus* could accommodate valiantness: "He dies for a city that has made too much of the cult of the warrior but failed to recognize the nature of its dependence upon that cult. His death is deserved as a climax and consummation of a life which exhausts the possibilities of a mode of virtue, and as a punishment because such a life cannot be reconciled with the larger and more vulnerable claims of human community; that community itself is purged, chastened, shamed, and renewed" (66). But see also Nicole E. Miller, who claims that the sacrifice is never fully absorbed into the symbolic system of the city:

> Those who read Coriolanus's death as sacrificial—either effective or failed—posit him as something like Hegel's 'world-historical individual,' whose demise brings about a new order. In this reading, grace assumes concrete, political form. Yet, I would argue, in the end we are not to be allowed this palliative: what *Coriolanus* represents, finally, remains a suspended grace, a token withheld, a sign never fully either inscribed or understood, even as we are called upon to "assist" in his remembrance. (Miller 297)

[21] *Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.85ff.

Chapter 4

The question of Cordelia and her father

The final four lines of *King Lear* are a testament to the narcissism of small textual differences. Assigned to Albany in the First Quarto and Edgar in the First Folio, it has been left to Shakespeare's editors and critics to judge which attribution is more authentic, or—if attesting aesthetic consistency rather than authorial intent—more sensible. In the eighteenth century, the editorial consensus granted the lines to Albany; his higher rank recommended him as the more decorous choice against the authority of the Folio, often dismissed in these early deliberations as an unreliable, players' redaction: "This Speech, from the Authority of the Old 4to is rightly plac'd to Albany: in the Edition by the Players it is given to Edgar, by whom, I doubt not, it was of Custom spoken. And the Case was this: He who play'd Edgar, being a more favourite Actor, than he who personated Albany; in Spight of Decorum, it was thought proper he should have the last Word" (**Theobald**). Modern editions, however—those that do not explicitly favor the Quarto or else print both the Quarto and Folio texts separately—prefer Edgar, whether for consistency of characterization or out of fidelity to the Folio. The reasons generally cited in support of Edgar rest on a variety of assumptions: for example, that Edgar has been offered the kingdom by Albany and therefore ought to speak last; that Edgar was the name of a real English king; that Edgar overall is a more important character in the play or develops in such a way as to make this culmination logical. William H. Matchett, in considering this textual variant, even goes so far as to suggest that "there would be a motive, however mistaken, for someone to change the speech heading, unable to believe that Shakespeare would so far abandon convention as to let anyone other than the highest ranking remnant have the last word" (**Matchett**).

The problems of speech assignment in the play are part of a much larger debate about the status of the *King Lear* text. For the past few decades, considerable controversy has attended the "two text" problem of *Lear*. The critical question is whether the Folio text represents an authentic final version of the play as revised by Shakespeare himself or if the two extant texts, Quarto and Folio, ought to be considered two,

separate plays. As with many other early modern dramatic texts existing in multiple versions, conflations that partake of the "best" of all available material are the norm. The scholars who produce them are forced to issue verdicts where editorial finesse is insufficient or a choice among irreconcilable alternatives unavoidable. Of course, difficult choices are unnecessary if we treat the Quarto and Folio plays as distinct and complete unto themselves, in which case Albany and Edgar may each conclude their own respective plays uncontroversially. Indeed, there are advocates for this position who argue that the differing ways in which Edgar and Albany are developed as characters in the Quarto and Folio texts support their differing conclusions.[1] Opponents of the two texts approach acknowledge the problem presented by the differences between Quarto and Folio (and point out that it is not a new problem) but remain unconvinced that we must treat the two editions as two, distinct plays. There is, after all, no unassailable evidence that Shakespeare participated in a determined process of revision and that, therefore, we should not try to reach an editorial compromise. Attempts to "teach the debate," as it were, have recourse to some impressive and impassioned scholarship,[2] but the argument that *King Lear* exists in two, unique versions may ultimately seem of small consequence to students of the play not specifically engaged with textual problems. Most of the differences, it could be argued, are not so great as to bedevil attempts at literary analysis. But they are not altogether inconsequential, either. Although the preponderance of scholarly opinion appears to have marshaled against the two texts theory in recent years, the differences between Quarto and Folio *Lear* do pose interesting challenges to close readers of certain moments of the play where the discrepancy—in this case, whether the play's closing remarks properly belong to Albany or Edgar—can seem fraught with interpretive consequences. Those consequences remain hidden if the textual problem is ignored. Philip C. McGuire explores the interpretive possibilities raised by both versions: "*King Lear* ends differently in each playtext, and what is lost by presenting one ending or the other as definitive is the awareness that each way of concluding the play poses alternatives that, although different, have their own coherence and integrity" (**PhilipMcGuire**). Arriving at a "correct" reading is not necessarily required, then, as part of a critical analysis. The very existence of irreconcilable alternatives ought to signal the uncertainty about conclusions—and, as we will see, historical continuity—that *King Lear* brings to the fore. Whether Shakespeare himself revised his playtext (and whether that would put to rest any controversy about meaning), we are left with a work that requires our intervention as readers and spectators on multiple levels, a work that reflects its decidedly inconclusive content in its own, textually-indecisive form.

Shakespeare's King Lear, after the fashion of its titular monarch, has undergone a tortuous progress through the halls of criticism. More than any other play, Lear has been a sounding board for the dramaturgical sensibilities of its subsequent adapters. Though many critics have endorsed it as Shakespeare's definitive tragic masterpiece, they have also found in it much to stir their incredulity, indignation, and horror. Lear, in many estimations, is a nearly perfect piece of dramatic poetry that is nevertheless almost impossible to perform. As with most early modern plays, we know next to nothing about King Lear's contemporary reception (it seems not, however, to have been a popular component of the theatrical repertoire). Only later, after the Restoration, does the opinion of posterity begin its steady compilation. A complete rewriting of the play on behalf of the morally fastidious temper of the neoclassical age was followed by shifts in taste that approved in turn its emotional vitality, its depiction of the journey toward self-awareness and redemption, and even its irrational cruelty. For nearly half its performance history, it was seen only in the revised version of Nahum Tate, who modernized Shakespeare's archaic language, cut out the part of the Fool, and swept from the stage the pile of corpses that "makes many Tragedies conclude with unseasonable Jests,"*7* an alteration that even won Samuel Johnson's grudging approval. In 1788, a yet more restrained interpretation was produced by the actor John Philip Kemble, who further cleansed the language and, in keeping with his puritanical tendencies, found even some of Tate's interpolations too saucy for the stage. It was not until 1838 that Shakespeare's Lear, at the urging of William Charles Macready, who objected to "all the disgusting trash of Tate," was restored to the theater in its original form.*8* If eighteenth-century audiences preferred Tate's decorous denouement of virtue rewarded and the Romantics, revisiting the original text, emphasized the reflection in nature of the characters' passionate self-creation, the postwar sensibility in the twentieth century sympathized with the play's apocalyptic and even absurdist undertones: the idiotic crudeness of human life, the self-assured order of a society weighed on the scales of experience and found wanting. Peter Brook's 1962 production, later turned into a film, is the most often cited example. Brook's spare and devastating staging was inspired by the work of his collaborator, Jan Kott, who declared that "King Lear is a play about the disintegration of the world," a far cry from A. C. Bradley's more optimistic supposition, earlier in the century, that "the business of 'the gods' with [Lear] was neither to torment him, nor to teach him a 'noble anger,' but to lead him to attain through apparently hopeless failure the very end and aim of life."*9* Perhaps only the most sophisticated literary works of the most perdurable relevance can convincingly evoke, for different readers at different times, significations as contrary as nihilistic submission to "hopeless failure" and our indomitable ability

to overcome it. Diverse reactions to a single text are diversified further when the single text is shown to be manifold. As noted above, renewed emphasis has been laid in recent years on the significant textual differences between the play's two principal versions and the extent to which they provide for irreconcilable readings. Several important characters, from the First Quarto to the First Folio, have their lines augmented, reduced, or even reassigned. In all, there are about 300 lines in the Quarto that do not appear in the Folio and about 110 in the Folio that are likewise not in the Quarto—a disparity unmatched by any other of Shakespeare's plays.*10* In more than one instance, the alterations bear significantly on the tone of specific scenes and the salient qualities of certain characterizations. A strong case has been made more than once that the two versions of King Lear should be treated as two distinct plays.*11* Beginning with Alexander Pope's edition of 1725, however, editors have endeavored to preserve the most "Shakespearean" material from both Quarto and Folio in conflated editions that have, in turn, supplied raw material to critics. There were good reasons for this practice. Pope himself, in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare's complete works, provides the most elegant defense of the (even then) much-maligned interventions of editors. Since we lack an authoritative edition produced under Shakespeare's own supervision, Pope argued for the necessity of composing the closest possible alternative through a discreet comparison of all the surviving versions. In so doing, he identified many of the issues with which textual scholars and historians of the book still contend: If we give into this opinion, how many low and vicious parts and passages might no longer reflect upon this great Genius, but appear unworthily charged upon him? And even in those which are really his, how many faults may have been unjustly laid to his account from arbitrary Additions, Expunctions, Transpositions of scenes and lines, confusion of Characters and Persons, wrong application of Speeches, corruptions of innumerable Passages by the Ignorance, and wrong Corrections of 'em again by the Impertinence, of his first Editors? From one or other of these considerations, I am verily persuaded, that the greatest and the grossest part of what are thought his errors would vanish, and leave his character in a light very different from that disadvantageous one, in which it now appears to us.*12* If Pope is right, and it is incumbent upon a scrupulous editor to correct wrong applications of speeches, there must be some difference between a Lear that ends with Albany and a Lear that ends with Edgar. One or the other must be correct and what is correct must have been Shakespeare's intention—a bit of editorial logic that always seems both circular and irrefutable at the same time. Having to make such a choice, however, inevitably distracts us from what it means to have the choice at all. Rather than choosing the best reading, that is, we might instead reflect on the significance of the problem itself: why it exists and

whether it bears significantly on the play and our reception of it beyond possibly being a printing error. How much of a difference, then, does it make whether Albany or Edgar is given the closing speech? A brace of sententious couplets can hardly supply an adequate peroration to a play as abject and tragically profound as Lear. And there is arguably very little a formal summation could even accomplish given what it must follow. In other Shakespearean tragedies, the concluding speech is variously an occasion for the restoration of order and the vindication of authority, a memorialization that effects the reintegration of a society, or the dispensing of rewards and punishments in a tidy transaction of poetic justice. In all these cases, the play ends but gestures toward an imaginary future, a temporality which guarantees the didactic purchase or historical relevance of the moral and political conclusions it reaches. In King Lear, by contrast, none of these situations obtain. Albany/Edgar may portentously adjure the remaining characters to "Speake what we feele, not what we ought to say", but we can imagine nothing that might actually be said in response to what has just happened and no further action, given the play's disruption of historical continuity, that could take place. And this disruption of historical continuity is what makes King Lear so unique among Shakespeare's tragedies and so devastating in its dramatic consequences: any guarantee that Lear and Cordelia will not have died in vain is undercut by the total negation of all subsequent history. There is, quite literally, nowhere for the narrative to go, no "afterward" into which we might project our imaginations and the very existence of which—the promise that human life will continue despite tragedy—ordinarily serves to mollify the shock and horror that tragedy can elicit. When Lear and Cordelia die, we are forced to confront and imagine for ourselves not simply the poetic consequences "internal" to the play, the necessity that Albany or Edgar somehow carry on with the rulership of the kingdom, but the extra-narrative consequences of rewriting what was believed at the time by many to be history. King Lear is not merely a revision or dramatization of a popular story, after all, but a complete, counterfactual revitalization. Among Shakespeare's historical and historically-oriented plays, it is perhaps the most potent example of a work in which the historical is thrown into relief against predominantly literary concerns, rather than the other way around. In Lear, the plot does not operate against a determinate, historical background, that is, but serves to challenge the determining aspect of history itself. The play effects this, ultimately, by modeling for its audience what it means to come to the realization that history might not be an adequate guide to conduct in the present or contain the promise of human salvation in the future. The means by which this modeling is accomplished happens to be, in its own way, quite modest. In prior versions of the Lear story, the king repents his folly, is reunited with his daughter, and dies a happy death.

Whatever disasters later befall her, they are none of his concern. In Shakespeare's, however, the king confronted with the bare fact of his own humanity is still forced to watch his daughter die before we, and the rump of characters left alive at the play's end, are forced to watch him die. Lear protests his daughter's execution by slaying her executioner—too late. Albany, Edgar, and Kent protest Lear's passing by fecklessly imagining that all might still be well if Lear resumes the kingship and then, when he is gone, by searching for some moral to the tale. We might protest, in our turn, that this is no way to end a story, with an abuse of history. And so what is essentially a domestic tragedy dilates to become consequential, in the play, for an entire kingdom and then, outside the play, for the conception of history itself. In a way, King Lear redefines tragedy. Though part of a literary tradition of tales of fallen kings, what is tragic about Lear is how the falls of kings can become inconsequential even to kings themselves when confronted with personal, domestic loss and how that loss can be as catastrophic as any world-shaking calamity. Shakespeare, in this play, goes some distance toward equalizing these two levels, polar opposites, by presenting them simultaneously, as impinging on one another—or even elevates the personal at the expense of the historical and political. With the dead Cordelia in his arms and the fate of the kingdom at stake, Lear can barely acknowledge the "more important" issues pressing upon him. If there is some credence to the notion that early modern subjects began to think of themselves as self-motivated individuals, we should certainly expect to find in their literature such a new definition of tragedy as this: tragedy that cuts as unkindly in the private as in the public sphere. By operating in both at once, Shakespeare finds a way to make national history serve an intimate, literary project. This is quite a radical position for a play to have taken: chronologies of events both religious and patriotic loomed large in the early modern mentality. To call into question their legitimacy was practically a challenge to the foundation of the dominant culture. But it is also to acknowledge the significance of daily life, its greater significance, in fact, to issues that can come across as fabulous or abstract, particularly to an increasingly diversified, decreasingly aristocratic theater-going public. Of course, our own lives go on after reading or watching a performance of King Lear, but that does not mean Shakespeare did not suppose in his writing the possibility that it might not and offer that supposition as an intellectual exercise, as a challenge for his readers and audiences. The challenge, actually, is in rising to meet such a demand, which requires a reading of the play that is less concerned with ultimate meanings—is it hopeless or redemptive?—than with how Shakespeare triangulates character, plot, and historical substrate in order to communicate specific ideas to his own specific audience. It would be far easier to subsume the tragic in Lear into a tidy and familiar ideological struc-

ture. In remarks positing tragedy as a more human rendering of apocalypse, Frank Kermode recognizes the human responsibility that lies at the heart of Shakespeare's conception of tragedy in King Lear but but ignores the historical problem the play presents in order to elevate its ending—and ending itself—into a representative abstraction. In King Lear, according to Kermode: Tragedy assumes the figurations of apocalypse, of death and judgment, heaven and hell; but the world goes forward in the hands of exhausted survivors. Edgar haplessly assumes the dignity; only the king's natural body is at rest. This is the tragedy of sempiternity; apocalypse is translated out of time into the aevum. The world may, as Gloucester supposes, exhibit all the symptoms of decay and change, all the terrors of an approaching end, but when the end comes it is not an end, and both suffering and the need for patience are perpetual. We discover a new aspect of our quasi-immortality; without the notion of aevum, and the doctrine of kingship as a duality, existing in it and in time, such tragedy would not be possible.*13* Kermode is perceptive about the tenor of tragedy for a Revelations-minded audience. Eternity, however, and "the doctrine of kingship as a duality" are among the familiar concepts the play challenges. Rather than exhausted survivors going forward into any kind of future whatsoever, what if there were no future except what we supply for ourselves? If the storyline of the Lear episode is assumed to follow what was, in early modern England, a well known chain of events ultimately derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae, Shakespeare's version upends it entirely. Rather than justify such a salient authorial choice or seek an aesthetic consistency within the narrative as it is given, I would argue that Shakespeare's radical alteration of the Lear story, his evisceration of historical continuity, bears considerably on not only how we should read the play but also on Shakespeare's attitude toward history itself. That attitude is certainly hard to pin down given his varied takes on historical material, and we must be cautious about ascribing ideological intent to poetic choices. But the choice to end King Lear as it does evinces a skepticism about history as either the source of useful lessons or an invisible force directing worldly events to some calculated end. The play seems to give us the decision about what to do when human action results in catastrophe. The text cannot even decide who should speak its closing lines, a fitting circumstance of indecision, intentional or not, for a play that concludes so indecisively.*14* The choice between Albany and Edgar would appear then to be arbitrary at best, a matter of personal interpretive discretion, if not completely irrelevant. But it is the fact that there is a choice that is important: how to go forward into a non-existent future is a question posed alongside who is to usher us into it. And what about those final lines, so brief a coda to so lengthy a play? Franco Moretti, in contemplating the nature of tragedy itself, finds the "chilling stupidity" of the closing

lines of Lear apposite to the circumstances in which they are delivered: The speech of Edgar is the most extraordinary—and appropriate—of anticlimaxes. Its blind mediocrity indicates the chasm that has opened up between facts and words, or more accurately, between referents and signifieds. The close of King Lear makes clear that no one is any longer capable of giving meaning to the tragic process; no speech is equal to it, and there precisely lies the tragedy.*15* In a footnote to his own discussion of King Lear, on the other hand, Terry Eagleton refers to this assessment as one of Moretti's "rare blindspots" and regards the lines as indicative of an inexorable reality that lies at the core of human experience. To Eagleton, the closing speech is "no trite tag, denoting as it does that organic unity of body and language, that shaping of signs by the senses, of which Cordelia is representative." He goes on to point out that the play dramatizes an abstract truth about the relationship of language to experience: The play has also demonstrated that to speak what one feels is no easy business. For if it is structural to human nature to surpass itself, and if language is the very index and medium of this, then there would seem a contradiction at the very core of the linguistic animal which makes it 'natural' for signs to come adrift from things, consciousness to overstep physical bonds, values to get out of hand and norms to be destructively overridden. It is not, after all, simply a matter of reconciling fixed opposites: it is a matter of regulating what would seem an ineradicable contradiction in the material structure of the human creature. King Lear is a tragedy because it stares this contradiction full in the face, aware that no poetic symbolism is adequate to resolve it.*16* The difference between these two positions is subtle. Either the tragic heart of King Lear is in its identification as tragic the inadequacy of speech to rationalize the chaos of existence; or, it is the function of tragedy as a genre to confront this inadequacy, attempt to resolve it, and inevitably, spectacularly fail. Both Moretti and Eagleton have described, in the abstract, crucial aspects of "the tragic" as a concept and their relevance to what goes on in King Lear. And both come near the mark in identifying tragedy as arising from flawed, human action, from the contradictions in human nature. But such arguments tend to ignore the narrative details of the play itself, as if poetic texture were irrelevant to the contours of a smooth idea: Lear is tragic because tragedy consists in our inability to face up to tragedy, as the characters at the end of this play cannot find an adequate way in which to express the profundity of their trauma. But is such a critical conclusion adequate to the text? The peroratory bromides served up by Albany/Edgar are easy to read as rhetorically empty analogs to Lear's inarticulate howls and exclamatory O's. Language does appear to break down. This failure of language to harmonize with experience, however, is a problem not inherent to the text of King Lear but a problem dramatized by King Lear. Shakespeare, hardly ever at a loss for

words to represent anything, has represented here what the struggle to fit words to events looks like—a struggle we might be able to identify with but not a struggle the text of the play fails to live up to itself. Any sort of discourse is surely inadequate to any kind of truth or reality, but it is not the inadequacy of language that is the problem in this play; it is only, perhaps, the inadequacy of present language. Where words fail, our only recourse is more words: a perpetual filling of the void that thrusts toward a future, never to come, in which we might finally have enough of them. Speech does not fail. It simply goes on, searching, modifying, never falling silent simply because it is no better than silence. The silence at the end of King Lear is not so much representative of the failure of language than the start of a lacuna we must fill ourselves, that the play requires us to fill ourselves. Quite apart from this sort of linguistic/philosophical analysis, however, is the rhetorical texture of the speech—the fact that it is delivered as a pair of couplets in the fashion of a sententious epigram. In her extended study of such moments of poetic closure, Barbara Herrnstein Smith refers to the affective qualities of epigrammatic conclusions: "In speaking of an utterance, poem, or couplet as 'epigrammatic,' we refer not only to a kind of verbal structure but to an attitude toward experience, a kind of moral temper suggested by that very structure. The epigram seems to offer itself as a last word, an ultimately appropriate comment, a definitive statement."*17* An effective conclusion along these lines, according to Smith, will come across as if it were inevitable, as if an entire poem, seen retroactively, were heading in its direction. Smith labels this predetermined quality of epigrammatic conclusions "hyperdetermination." In the case of Lear, however, the closing epigram is not "hyperdetermined" in the way Smith describes—it is not as if everything in the play logically leads up to it—and its sententiousness is at least somewhat deflated by its context. But Smith's insights can help us come to terms with its peculiar effectiveness. Rather than providing a satisfactory, moral summing up of the play, Albany/Edgar can only gesture toward doing so. The final four lines do not achieve a hyperdetermination; they only possess the form of it. They are spoken as if the personally devastating, historically disjunctive climax of the play could be overcome using traditional, rhetorical means. In the process, those means themselves are exploded—but not in any way to expose the insufficiency of language or the artificiality of rhetoric (these would be givens as much then as now). Some sort of epigrammatic closure is exactly what we expect, and is what we get, but Shakespeare so overburdens the attempt at closure itself that the couplets have the opposite of their intended, or we might say conventional, effect. That is, rather than neatly bridging the gap between the irrational tragic situation of the play and the moralizing sensibility of the early modern reader or spectator, they open it even wider. In this way, Shakespeare uses the qualities

of the epigrammatic conclusion that Smith describes against it, creating a poetic short circuit that stuns our complacency at just the moment when it would normally be assuaged. One might say the lines create a figure of a figure: the rhetorical appearance of a rhetorical device that not only says more than it says but points in one direction only to reach out further in the other. The gentle music of rhyming couplets, that might otherwise lull us, instead stirs our alertness even more. The dead march that follows is not so much the sonic echo of a defeated world resigned to carry on, as it appears, but a signal to the audience that, in the breech Shakespeare creates between the legendary past and the present that had long used it as a foundation, it will have to find closure on its own. In fact, the play obviates adequate response as one of its principal dramatic strategies. Its envoi hardly evokes the grand, ritualistic speeches that wrap up so many other plays, except insofar as it undercuts them, and strikes instead a tone of embarrassed, strained solemnity. If there is little indication that Albany/Edgar's speech reinstates a shattered social order, it may be useful to instead consider the audience as the object of address. The boundary between players and spectators in the early modern English theater—like that between texts and readers—was a notably permeable one, after all.*18* Dramatic illustration of this always-potential permeability is not necessarily limited to soliloquy, metatheatrics, and the comedic aside. In this case, the effect achieved by an elegiac appeal to nobody echoes in sentiment the relentlessly repeated "nothing" that so explicitly distributes nullifications of identity and linguistic efficacy throughout the play. It is Cordelia, however, who initially—or, perhaps, finally—teaches us that speaking what we feel means literally saying nothing when what we are enjoined to speak is framed by a superincumbent rhetoric. In such contexts, and if feeling is unutterable, such contexts may be all there are: a mute affirmation of our self-possession is all that remains of emotional authenticity and is the only way to communicate the ineffable content of "what we feele" outside rhetorical constraint when our "love's more ponderous" than our tongues. Albany/Edgar's empty exhortation is no less constraining, though made in perhaps no less good faith, than Lear's injunction for his daughters to protest their love for him at the beginning of the play. The only difference, and it is the crucial one, is that this final appeal, made as if it is the only available course of action, is spoken into the darkness at the limits of the stage, the edges of recorded history. And response is suspended between the ideal, bracketed world of theatrical time and the mundane world of the audience that demands, with its own form of everyday rhetorical constraint, that we only ever speak what we ought to say. There are no justifications to be made for actions taken or not taken. No one could make any sense, moral or otherwise, of what has happened. And, despite the inclusiveness of the speech's "we," it is not clear who, beyond a playgoing audience, is

meant to witness it. Even the fate of Kent, the closest thing to a surrogate for the audience in the play at this point, is uncertain.*19* Among Shakespeare's tragedies, King Lear perhaps depends the most on its audience—a contemporary audience, in particular—to make sense for itself of what has happened and why.*20* This is not least a challenge for readers and editors of the play today, who have textual choices to make that further complicate how we consider its reception. The discrepancy between the two texts of King Lear, between one ending and the other, is a kind of textual-material analogue for the evacuating of historical meaning that occurs at the end of the play. We have no ideal Lear text just as we have no ideal ending. King Lear, in its conclusion, breaks free from the constraints of historical inevitability by interrupting the established chronology of England's history. With both texts before us, we are presented with a choice as to who should speak the final lines. With either one, performed or not, we are given the responsibility of somehow resolving the historical impossibility of the ending with the very history out of which the play is excerpted. The choice between Albany and Edgar would appear to be something of a red herring, not because it does not matter in ways internal to the text, but because it distracts critical thought, so often focused on editorial idealizations, from the way the play circumvents the very issue that choosing between them seems to resolve and which the play itself, in its interrogation of historical contingency, leaves open. As readers of early modern plays, we might prefer a single text to interpret, but a critical practice focused on best texts will always be thwarted by the circumstances impinging on theatrical production. Alterations were the norm, not the exception, whether for reasons of casting, venue, censorship, or even the creative whimsy of the author. All plays exist in multiple versions, even if we do not have them. Entire histories of revision and performance are, after all, obscure to us. Increasing the number of "texts" of King Lear either from one conflated or preferred edition between the two available still does not capture the multiplicity of possible variants. If the smallest discrepancies between copies of a single edition cannot satisfactorily be rectified, even the most rigorous textual theorizing cannot hope to resolve larger ambiguities such as interpolations, differently-assigned lines, omissions, and the like. The suppositions built on suppositions that would be required to arrive at a convincingly ideal edition unfortunately result in a greater, not a lesser, distance between our experience of the play and its original form—that because the original form was part of a fluid process of composition, performance, revision, and both authorized and unauthorized publication. At no point does a single best text emerge nor is it clear a playwright of the period operated according to modern principals of textual editing. No doubt, they operated more in the world of occasion and contingency that still characterizes the theater. Rather than looking for Shake-

speare's genius at work behind every line, it might be more fruitful to consider the "text" of King Lear first of all as an open-ended theatrical mash-up involving an entire theatrical community and including audiences instead of a singular product of a singular creative mind and second of all as an element of a broader continuum of texts dealing with the Lear story. The textual ambiguities of the multiple versions of King Lear are reflective of the play's historical dislocation. As is well known, Shakespeare's telling of the Lear story is its only instance of significant departure from the traditional account, in which Cordelia prevails and Lear is restored to his throne. While he clearly drew specific details from multiple sources—including Geoffrey of Monmouth, Holinshed, and possibly Spenser and the authors of the Mirror for Magistrates—his radically different ending is unique. Though many excellent studies exist that enumerate Shakespeare's debts to and divergences from his sources, the reason he altered the facts of history, as they were then believed to be, has not been sufficiently explored. Critics may surmise whether it should be Edgar or Albany who more properly assumes the mantle of rulership, but Shakespeare gives no clear indication—nor any clear indication in the text that either they or anyone else does, theatrical tradition that the final lines go to the new authority figure notwithstanding. Since the deaths of Lear and Cordelia, not to mention Regan and Goneril, foreclose the presumed succession, it may be viable to suppose that nobody succeeds to the throne, that Shakespeare's Lear is cut off from history. What would be the consequences of this reading? And why would it have even mattered to Shakespeare's contemporaries that his fairy-tale from ancient Britain diverges so much from the standard historical account? In an extended essay that elaborates on "the plurality of the modalities of belief," the French historian Paul Veyne attempted some years ago to explain how highly learned people from antiquity to the birth of modern historical science could dismiss the more fanciful elements of the Greek myths while still crediting their ultimate historicity. The appointment of King Minos to the judiciary of the underworld might not have been taken as literally true by either the ancients or their Renaissance successors, but there was at least a general belief that Minos himself existed. Why, Veyne asks, did intelligent people, though they might be fully prepared to discredit any number of spurious texts or fabulous legends, nevertheless continue to pass on as authoritative so many traditions that could be vouchsafed by neither hard evidence nor common sense? He ascribes the perdurance of such credulity to an epistemological distinction—between things known from experience and things known only from books—lacking in the premodern consciousness. In studying an old text, he argues, the scholars of the past assumed it to possess "the depth and consistency of reality itself" and operated as if "deepening one's understanding of the text will be the same as deepening one's understanding

of reality."*21* Until the moderns won their quarrel with the ancients, that is, and the deferential translatio of traditional authorities was displaced by a more skeptical historical method, readers lived in their books, or rather through them: they could identify their contradictions, solecisms, and infelicities adeptly enough and even express doubt about the veracity of what lay before them, but they regarded old texts as necessarily bearing some element of truth, however obscure. Sometime in the seventeenth century, the ground shifted. The respect accorded ancient authorities dissipated and with it the unquestioning belief in the historical basis of myths. But the historical problem posed by myths remained: "People no longer asked, 'What truth does myth have? For it contains some truth, since nothing cannot speak of nothing.' Now they asked, 'What meaning or function does myth have? For one cannot speak or imagine for nothing.'"*22* The question of myth's standing as testimony to history, that is, changed into an anthropological dilemma about the role myth played within a given culture's worldview, a worldview inferior to the more enlightened recognition of both historical difference and empirical analysis—or so the modern perspective would have it. By writing about the modalities of belief, however, Veyne did not intend to emphasize how blind past societies were to the fundamental facts of reality we now take for granted but to suggest how normal it is for an intellectual culture to operate according to contradictory beliefs, to believe something in one respect but also not believe it in another. It was possible, in other words, for premodern subjects to believe in the truth-value of a myth without necessarily believing in its literal facticity just as it is possible today to "believe in" the provisional conclusions of scientific inquiry while fully expecting them to be swept away by new evidence and better theories in the future. Multiple modalities of belief are not only characteristic of intellectual life in general but particularly pertinent to our understanding of some of the more curious convictions of premodern subjects. Although occasioned by the myths of ancient Greece, Veyne's proposal can help explain the unusual persistence of a similar mythopoetic structure in early modern England: the Brutus legend. According to this account, first promulgated by the twelfth century Welsh cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth in his Historia Regum Britanniae, the British people are descended from the great-grandson of Aeneas, a Trojan named Brutus (hence the name of Britain). From Brutus issued all of the British kings down through Arthur, for whom Geoffrey is a principle source, and Cadwallader, the last of the kings to predate more dependable historical sources. Despite skepticism about the reliability of Geoffrey's text stretching back all the way to his contemporaries, the myths he devised (and which he claimed to have himself translated from a lost Welsh original) retained both a widespread popularity and historical credibility well into the seventeenth century. Indeed, his chronicle fit neatly into a Renaissance tradition of forged

documents and invented ancestries, the Antiquitatum Variarum of Giovanni Nanni (or Annius of Viterbo), which also stood up against criticism for quite a long time, being the most famous. It was surely flattering for the English monarchs, particularly the Welsh Tudors, to pretend they derived from the stock of Trojan princes and for the people of London to style themselves citizens of "Troynovant." But it is also curious that even the very learned, many of whom expressed reservations about it, were reluctant to dismiss the Brutus myth outright. Too popular to challenge directly, they granted it the same general pass given then by all historiographers to accounts of the past that might be useful for the indoctrination of virtuous conduct or the demonstration of efficacious examples even if they were factually dubious. The story clearly had a value that transcended what attached to mere fables or romance. The idea that Brutus and his successors were a part of history and not merely wishful antiquarianism perhaps connected the English people to an otherwise obscure and irrecoverable past. Even if all the details of these royal lives as recounted in so many sources in so many different ways were not necessarily plausible to them, they could nevertheless believe they had to have some basis in fact. The remoteness and inscrutability of their origins might else have cut them off from the common historical narrative of the Western world, in which fact blended freely with fancy and every city and nation wanted a part. That early modern polities took seriously their derivation from the exploits of Homeric myth is certainly an indication of people living in their books, but it also exemplifies the plasticity at the time of the idea of "history" and the uses to which history could be put when it was unbounded by a subservience to mere accuracy. Like the Greeks with their myths, the early modern English could simultaneously discount or accept as fabulous much of the narrative content of their own foundation tales while nevertheless believing that they contained some truth, some value, some bearing on their own lives and times. They were, after all, recorded in books that few had any reason, motive, or competency to doubt. This double-mindedness the English had about their heroic past opened up a unique space for the imaginative writers of the period to work in. Since so many of the details were lacking for the distant centuries during which the legendary monarchs reigned, a historically-minded author could freely invent within the quite accommodating outlines of the legendary frame. A gap in a myth always furnishes ready supply for further myth making. In addition, the affective attachment to national history that was especially strong in the Elizabethan age became a resource to be exploited. The stakes for storytelling are entirely different, their impact far more personal for readers and audiences, when the story that is being told dovetails in some way, however remotely, with "real life." As with so much fantasy and science fiction writing in more recent times, additional purchase on readers's interest is gained when an imaginary past,

future, or alternative present adopts an etiological function. In the case of England and its relationship to its antiquity, the kings of bygone ages became fodder for many sorts of literary improvisation: speculative chronologies, advice books for princes, moralized fables, dramatic reimaginings, commentaries on contemporary political situations, and more. The possibility that these poetic interpretations bore some kernel of truth made them all the more compelling—and convincing. Among these imaginary monarchs, there are several whose fictional reigns became matter for the playwrights of the early modern theater, including Shakespeare. Veyne's insights about different modalities of belief may provide an approach to one of the most bedeviling questions about Shakespeare's King Lear: why did he change the ending? We have already examined some of the effects the ending had and the consequences for the historical continuity the play presupposes and then disrupts but not yet why he might have changed it at all. Although he was not the first dramatist to lay claim to the tale, Shakespeare is responsible for making the story of King Lear (spelled "Leir" by most of his predecessors) nearly as well-known as that of his more illustrious descendant King Arthur. In every era, what has confronted readers and audiences of his version of the play most acutely is that ending, an ending so improbable, unexpected, and painful that it demands attention from any attempt to resolve the play, as a text, into an aesthetic unity. What is troubling about the ending of King Lear is not simply the distress of an old man who is stripped of his dignity, driven to insanity, and forced to watch his own daughter die. What also dies with Lear and Cordelia is, chronologically speaking, England's future. According to the chronicle accounts of the story, Cordelia should, in fact, have recovered Lear's throne and outlived him. Her nephews would ultimately rise against her, but Shakespeare obviates even that possibility by killing off Goneril and Regan, too. This was no minor legend he had altered, either. By the turn of the seventeenth century, the Lear story, which was part of Geoffrey's Historia, had appeared in more than 50 versions,*23* including an earlier play that kept the happier ending intact. Later in the century, Nahum Tate's adaptation of Shakespeare's play to Restoration sensibilities reintroduced these concluding felicities and even contrived a romance between Cordelia and Edgar—for a century and a half, this was the only Lear that audiences ever saw performed. Shakespeare's anomalous exception to this tradition changes the course of the legendary events which many in early modern England still held sacrosanct. The Trojan origins of the British people and the idea of London as "Troynovant" were powerful symbols for both a nobility that had become obsessed with symbols,*24* especially those evoking the grandeur of ancient heredity, and an increasingly more confident nation that was ever seeking to distinguish itself from Europe and indeed from the rest of the world.*25* We do not,

however, usually count King Lear among Shakespeare's history plays properly speaking: it was written later than the others (when history plays in general were out of vogue), its setting is the distant rather than the relatively recent past, and it is not even categorized as a "history" in the First Folio. Nevertheless, Whereas in Richard II, in many ways a precursor to Lear, Shakespeare demonstrates the consequences of speaking from the position of history, in King Lear, he challenges the usefulness of history as an explanatory mechanism and suggests the futility of depending on history as a source of right outcomes or useful examples. But the way he uses history in this play would not be possible, would not have had quite the same resonance, if the Lear story were not credibly embedded in the historical consciousness of the English people at the time he was writing. In fact, the distant antiquity of Britain was perhaps of greater interest at no other time than when Shakespeare was writing, but also under the greatest threat from factually punctilious quarters. But it took a long time indeed for the legends of which King Lear formed a part to be extricated from both the popular imagination and learned discourse. One can hardly identify with certainty the deathblow, despite withering assaults against them, as they kept being revived. For a century or more, they inhabited a sort of grey area of credibility, neither completely believed nor entirely abandoned. In fact, among the historically-minded of the time, a debate raged between proponents and detractors of the ancient history, each side with some claim to scholarly authoritativeness. While no definitive distinction existed before the seventeenth century between more or less historically-accurate sources, the textual critics of the time had already begun to cast a jaundiced eye on the more dubious documents. As in other areas of culture, however, there was a great deal of overlap between the high and the low in early modern letters. Popular legends mingled freely with learned treatises in Latin, the latter often adducing evidence to support the historicity of the former. As far as most people were concerned, Geoffrey of Monmouth was a reliable transcriber of authentic accounts, and the British were long-established, noble descendants of the Trojans. Richard Harvey wrote an entire treatise defending the Trojan inheritance,*26* and even King James referred to "the heritage of the succession and Monarchie, which hath bene a kingdome, to which I am in descent, 300. yeeres before Christ."*27* Those who needed James's ancient lineage spelled out for them in detail could consult the exhaustively-titled treatise prepared by the parson George Owen Harry, The genealogy of the high and mighty monarch, James, by the grace of God, king of great Brittayne, &c. with his lineall descent from Noah, by diuers direct lynes to Brutus, first inhabiter of this ile of Brittayne; and from him to Cadwalader; the last king of the Brittish bloud; and from thence, sundry wayes to his maiesty: wherein is playnly shewed his rightfull title, by lawfull descent from the said Cadwalader, as

well to the kingdome of Brittayne, as to the principalities of Northwales and Southwales: together with a briefe cronologie of the memorable acts of the famous men touched in this genealogy, and what time they were. Where also is handled the worthy descent of his maiesties ancestour Owen Tudyr, and his affinity with most of the greatest princes of Christendome: with many other matters worthy of note. Polydore Vergil, surveying the historical records which mention Britain as well as taking recourse to his own reason, concludes that Britain and its surrounding isles, being in constant communication with mainland Europe, must reasonably be assumed to have been inhabited since the earliest times, like all other lands after the Flood. Nevertheless, he rehearses the Brutus story concocted by Geoffrey only for the sake of completeness. He himself, finding no corroboration for the legend elsewhere, is skeptical: "But yet nether Livie, nether Dionisius Halicarnaseus, who writt diligentlie of the Romane antiquities, nor divers other writers, did ever once make rehersall of this Brutus, neither could that bee notified bie the cronicles of the Brittons, sithe that longe agoe thei loste all the bookes of their monuments."*28* William Camden, the greatest of the Elizabethan chroniclers, is similarly reluctant to dismiss the legend—perhaps protesting too much that he does not wish to do so—and ultimately gives it over to the discretion of his readers to determine its veracity: For mine owne part, it is not my intent, I assure you, to discredit and confute that story which goes of him [Brutus], for the upholding wherof, (I call Truth to record) I have from time to time streined to the heighth, all that little wit of mine. For that were, to strive with the streame and currant of time; and to struggle against an opinion commonly and long since received. How then may I, a man of so meane parts, and small reckoning, be so bold, as to sit in examination of a matter so important, and thereof definitively to determine? Well, I referre the matter full and whole to the Senate of Antiquarians, for to be decided. Let every man, for me, judge as it pleaseth him; and of what opinion soever the Reader shall be of, verily I will not make it a point much material.*29* The Scottish historian George Buchanan, however, has no qualms whatsoever about eviscerating the whole fad for imagined histories (and uses a metaphor familiar to Shakespeareans to do so): Among all the tribes of the British, there was such a lack of writers that before the arrival of the Romans there, everything laid completely engulfed by the desolate gloom of silence, and we are not able to learn the deeds performed in that place even by the Romans other than from the Greek and Latin histories: and about these things which preceded their arrival, rather their conjectures should be believed than our inventions. For truly the things our writers have revealed, each one concerning the origin of his own clan, are so absurd I would not have supposed they needed to be disproven more thoroughly, unless there were people who are delighted by those fictions as though serious matters and

magnificently pleased with themselves to be embellished with the feathers of others.*30* Even John Milton found cause enough to include in The History of Britain, one of his latest works, a complete recounting of the legendary kings first reported by Geoffrey of Monmouth and the exploits conventionally attributed to them. He was certainly writing against the current. By the late seventeenth century, academic historians had made great strides in textual criticism and philology. Many of the fictions and forgeries that had for so long stood authoritative they discredited, and through the application of their accumulated learning combined with fresh skepticism about the validity of received authority, they had begun to bring order to the confusion of fabulous legends and authentic records that chronicled Britain's past. In particular, a consensus was forming about the unreliability of all accounts of British history prior to the coming of the Romans that were unsubstantiated by the Romans's own historians. Milton was not altogether ignorant of these developments, but his doubts were mollified by the poetic inclination that would ensure the literary survival of these legends even as graver scholars stripped from the factitious all facticity. His excuse for the further perpetuation of this apocryphal material, though he was writing when it was reaching the limit of its shelf-life as history, shares an ecumenical flavor with the quasi-humanist compilers of the previous century, the first stumblers through the thicket of conflicting sources: What ever might be the reason, this we find, that of British affairs, from the first peopling of the Iland to the coming of Julius Caesar, nothing certain, either by Tradition, History, or Ancient Fame hath hitherto bin left us. That which we have of oldest seeming, hath by the greater part of judicious Antiquaries bin long rejected for a modern Fable. Nevertheless there being others besides the first suppos'd Author, men not unread, nor unlerned in Antiquitie, who admitt that for approved story, which the former explode for fiction, and seeing that oft-times relations heertofore accounted fabulous have bin after found to contain in them many footsteps, and reliques of somthing true, as what we read in Poets of the Flood, and Giants little beleev'd, till undoubted witnesses taught us, that all was not fain'd; I have therfore determin'd to bestow the telling over ev'n of these reputed Tales; be it for nothing else but in favour of our English Poets, and Rhetoricians, who by thir Art will know, how to use them judiciously.*31* Milton's humble gesture to the authority of his learned predecessors is customary enough but gains in interest by the subsequent qualification that, even if the earlier accounts are fabrications, they might still be of some use to poets—traffickers in another kind of truth. Here, Milton's attitude to history is congruent with the older humanist one: a story may be useful whether or not it is true, its value laying more in its utility than its accuracy. A generation of political convulsions that led to doubt about the relevance of history to contemporary concerns and schol-

arly development in the discovery, criticism, and dissemination of new texts and methods,*32* however, had made the humanist aspiration to the advisement of princely conduct obsolete*33* and refashioned the myth-spinning of Geoffrey and his ilk into a source of national identity and the sentimental medievalism of strictly imaginative writing—a trend that would reach its full-flowering in the historical romances of a later generation of authors. In offering to supply matter for poets, Milton might have been thinking of his own erstwhile plan to write an Arthurian epic or else to the "sage and serious Poet Spencer" who did do so and managed to generate exempla of moral truth more palatable in his estimation than the bitter pills of moral philosophy. He might also have been assigning to the poet's exclusive privilege a moral agency in the representation of history above and beyond service to a prince, continuing his project of, according to Richard Helgerson, moving the poet "into the place formerly reserved for the ruler, appropriating as he does so the ancient forms that once stood for imperial power."*34* Shakespeare begins this work himself by making out of Elizabethan historiography, a plank of imperial power in many respects, a dramatic mythology comprehensible to a broader audience, an audience we might tentatively regard as a public. Discarded as matter for serious historiography or plausible genealogy, the ancient legends could still find employment in the articulation and aggrandizement of the English people's self-consciousness—as, by dint of their ancient veneer, one of its preeminent expressions. To this end, the ponderous chronicles overlapped with the more poetic appropriations of historical material, though both would provide source material to Shakespeare for King Lear.*35* The most intriguing, pre-Shakespearean version of the Lear story specifically must be the one appended by John Higgins to his 1587 redaction of The Mirour for Magistrates.*36* In previous editions, Cordelia's fate was more or less a footnote to Lear's. She has a part to play in his story—the dutiful daughter who returns from an undeserved exile to restore her father to his throne—but is quickly dispatched once Lear has died. Higgins, however, inverts this arrangement. His poem folds Lear's story into Cordelia's, which she tells in the first-person from her own point of view. This is in keeping with the narrative style of the Mirror for Magistrates series: downfallen princes admonish readers directly to, as the author's induction puts, "marke the causes why those Princes fell." But it is a remarkable innovation to have made Cordelia the central, tragic figure in the well-known legend of King Lear and his three daughters. There is some sense to this, of course. Since the Mirror is a collection of "tragedies" about the falls of princes, Lear's triumph and redemption do not fit the wheel of fortune profile, but Cordelia's unfortunate fate does. This foregrounding of Cordelia in a text meant to serve as a vade mecum of self-reflection for the ruling class points toward the expanded dramatic purpose her character

acquires in Shakespeare's play. As in Higgins, the tragic linchpin of King Lear is not, per se, the untimely death of the king himself or even, I would argue, his protracted suffering. Lear does not survive to rule his kingdom once again, but he is nevertheless offered the throne by Albany. This is no small difference, but in historical terms, it could be argued that it does not entirely matter what happens to Lear at this point. As long as Cordelia succeeds and the established line of kings may continue, we might not marvel at this, the sort of liberty Shakespeare is known to take in all of his history plays, legendary or not. While Lear's end is certainly pitiful and his decline painful to observe, the play is tragic, properly speaking, only for the sake of Cordelia. This is a contentious point to make, but it is Cordelia's precipitous downfall, not Lear's, that drives the closing scene of the play, her inglorious death that mortally breaks Lear's heart, and her failure to succeed that interrupts the continuity of British history. In her own, final words, she demonstrates her awareness of this fact, that she knows exactly where she is in the tragic tradition and exactly the role she has inherited from the Mirror for Magistrates: We are not the first Who with best meaning have incurr'd the worst. For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down, Myself could else out-frown false Fortune's frown. (King Lear, 5.3.3-6) This is remarkably self-conscious language—meta-tragical, it might be called—and a remarkable moment of sympathetic exchange between Cordelia and Lear. "For thee," Cordelia says to Lear, she has done everything, has shown to what extent her love is more ponderous than her tongue: it is more ponderous, because her fall is predicated on his. Were it not for Lear, she could "out-frown" Fortune and overcome with stoic resolve her defeat. Were it not for Lear, she would not even consider herself cast down. She is defeated, cast down in that respect, but her meaning of "cast down" has here an added affectiveness. These lines bear even greater epigrammatic potency than the last lines of Albany/Edgar. And they are similarly conclusive, as Cordelia is about to fall silent for the remainder of the play. Her triple rhyme within a double couplet accented by a quadruple alliteration verges dangerously close to an excess of sonic effects, but there is also the faintest echo in this overly poetic sequence of the Mirror for Magistrates's rhyme royal. In that text, as has been observed, Lear's story is folded into Cordelia's, who had prior to that been the loyal, youngest daughter in his. Shakespeare has managed to deploy his materials in such a way as to virtually have it both ways. The succession depends on Cordelia's survival, and Lear places all his hopes in her, hopes, like the succession itself, that are shattered by Edmund's cynical maneuvering. But Cordelia claims that her defeat is not so much dynastic as personal, familial, as the defeat of someone who wished not to advance herself but another. That the other is aged and infirm suggests that Cordelia is not simply, in this admission, professing the dependence of her identity and status on his. She

demonstrates the dignity of self-possession in explaining what she perceives to be the true nature of her defeat, not a military but an emotional one, and, more importantly, in taking possession of the narrative itself. She recognizes the tragic mold of their situation—they were not the first and will not presumably be the last to suffer the whims of fortune—but undercuts, in her pity for Lear, the interpolating of her fall into the series of admonitory examples that informed an increasingly moribund style of historical praxis. The force of her final lines carries through to the end of the play, and we cannot forget them. In fact, Cordelia's silence after Lear's exhortation that they go off to prison like birds in a cage is as mysterious as Isabella's at the end of Measure for Measure or Coriolanus's at his final meeting with Volumnia. She does not respond to Lear again—perhaps out of indulgence, perhaps assent—and that she does not speak again at all gives her final lines a reinforced sense of finality that makes of the remainder of the play a rather awkward, inconclusive epilogue. It is as if the play ends at this moment but the other characters do not yet know it. Had both Lear and Cordelia lived, as in the hitherto traditional course of events, the play might have had more in common with the tragicomedies then beginning to appear on the Jacobean stage. What it does have in common with the tragicomedies is its deeply cynical attitude toward the governing values of a formerly feudal society that was becoming ever more individualistic. What Shakespeare adds to this problematizing trend in playwriting—what is his unique contribution with King Lear—is the blending in, to an abstract and urbane meditation on interpersonal ethics, of a historical perspective. The publication of the chronicle King Leir, which was nearly contemporaneous with the First Quarto of King Lear,*37* might have encouraged him to attempt a rewriting, and a revisiting of the historical genre, in the spirit of a changed theatrical atmosphere. The Mirror for Magistrates had, from its first edition, demonstrated how the chronicle histories could be adapted to poetic ends, the figures of history given voices to speak on their own behalf directly to readers. Gorboduc, the first English tragedy, also based on a historical legend of the same ilk as King Lear, and partly attributed to one of the Mirror's original contributing authors, extended that idea to the stage. The chronicle King Leir continued the tradition, adding elements of romance that further indicated the potential for shaping historical accounts in the mold of broader narrative visions. History, in the hands of these poets and dramatists, became a moldable material, resulting in works that fell somewhere between historical fiction and the biopic. Some fantastical element inherent to the legendary past, or perhaps because it is so ill-defined, made it especially compelling material. That Lear's story did come from a legendary period, the historicity of which was beginning to be questioned toward the end of the sixteenth century, might have sanctioned Shakespeare to use it for such a thoroughgoing

dramatic experiment. And so he has his Cordelia die, and we are left wondering for what reason. Cordelia is the key element in the schema that coordinates that experiment, the character who was always central to the Lear legend as a plot device but who gains from Shakespeare a symbolic significance beyond simple protagonism, even as she has her "part" substantially curtailed. She is the victim of her father's folly, a folly that is personified first by an actual Fool and eventually, when he comes to identify with the "poor bare, forked animal" that his hapless illogic has made him, by Lear himself. Around Cordelia circulates Lear's nostalgic longings for an imagined past of paternal authority and filial obedience: she represents the country from which the play so suddenly bursts forth, at the very moment when Lear bursts it apart, and the country to which he would return. She is also the favored child who, in her absence from the center of the play—even as she directs from behind the scenes all the action of the play so hopefully toward Dover—evokes the absence of Queen Lear, who is absent even from Shakespeare's text, though her spirit haunts the division of the kingdom in the chronicle play. Janet Adelman regards this omission as structural to the gender dynamics of the play: For the idealized mother Lear seeks in Cordelia and the horrific mother he finds first in her sisters and then in himself are psychically one, merely flip sides of one another; they have a common origin in the developmental history of male identity as it is tenuously separated out from its originary matrix, the mother that it—like this text—would occlude.*38* Adelman makes of Cordelia perhaps too symbolic a figure—a figure, that is, that only has meaning insofar as she means something to Lear—but she is right to emphasize the considerable dramatic efficacy of Cordelia as a character, who exerts her force despite being out of sight for most of the play. But Shakespeare's idiosyncratic positioning of Cordelia is, in many ways, a more interesting phenomenon than what happens to Lear, especially where history is concerned. Cordelia's death, by the very fact that it interrupts history, serves like the most conclusive of dramatic bookends to Lear's discovery of himself as out of joint with a world that can just carry on: hence his total disconnection from the ineffective protests of Albany, Edgar, and Kent, who try to grant him a crown he no longer recognizes, who try, though it is "bootless," to draw him back into the drama he has forsaken. Instead, he dies as he must in order to experience the final, fatal fact of bare humanity, and we, as readers and audience, experience it with him. Cordelia dies as she must in order to affect this transformation but also to grant her character a strange dignity, the dignity of failure, of going beyond the service of the progression of history, a history of one fall after another, and into a role of heroic service that sacrifices everything for a hopeless, futile cause. But it is the intersubjective quality of Cordelia's sacrifice that makes her a fascinating figure, not her attempt to play

the military savior. Her elevation of her personal relationship to Lear above the significance of historical contingency is what makes the play historically revolutionary. She turns history into a personal matter that supersedes its usual narrative thrust of one event after another and turns the exemplary mirror of history inward. Perhaps there is something of the magistrate's mirror at work in Shakespeare. Higgins's Cordelia is a mirror for princes who narrates her own lamentable fate as an admonition to—what exactly? There is no clear lesson. But it is nonetheless a tragic fate, the fall of a prince, and it is not for the compiler of these tales to say which might actually serve in the capacity of a mirror for any given reader. Such tales could also be relevant and effective in the city playhouse, which offered to theatergoers its own varieties of moralistic mirrors. One example is a Biblical play by Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene, A Looking Glasse for London and England, the very title of which is explicit about the didactic purpose of plays. In its conclusion, the authors extend the analogy presented by the play's action into a fulmination against the excesses of city life: O London, mayden of the mistresse Ile, Wrapt in the foldes and swathing cloutes of shame: In thée more sinnes then Niniuie containes, Contempt of God, dispight of reuerend age. Neglect of law, desire to wrong the poore: Corruption, whordome, drunkennesse, and pride. Swolne are thy browes with impudence and shame. O proud adulterous glorie of the West, Thy neighbors burns, yet doest thou feare no fire. Thy Preachers crie, yet doest thou stop thine eares. The larum rings, yet sléepest thou secure. London awake, for feare the Lord do frowne, I set a looking Glasse before thine eyes.*39* In this passage, the mirror, or looking glass, shows how remarkably versatile a basis for poetic figuration it is. When it appears as a physical object, it is hardly ever innocent, alluding by its very nature to an intersubjective encounter with oneself. Analogically, a mirror can be anything that reflects back the true nature of things, an ironic function for something that really only traffics in appearances and often distorted ones at that. But this reflecting function was crucial to early modern poetics. The idea that writing was revelatory, that it allowed you to see yourself as you really are, was fundamental to all species of discourse. Lodge and Greene are so insistent on it that they force the issue. King Lear, however, develops the intersubjective encounter afforded by the mirror to a much higher level of abstraction, whereby the play itself becomes at its conclusion a reflecting surface for the association between the experience of the characters in the world of the play and the experience of the audience as witnesses to their own history. The play like a mirror reflects for the audience the personal costs of history which requires a disruption from history's smooth flow. In the chronicle Leir, Cordella is a more central character and a romance heroine. In Lear, she functions rather as an audience surrogate, witnessing like an audience member the proceedings of the

opening scene and bearing witness to the degraded, transformed Lear at the end. In language that echoes across the dramatic literature of the period, Cordelia herself experiences the shock of recognition of the barest state of humanity when she sees her father again for the first time: Was this a face To be oppos'd against the [warring] winds? [To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder? In the most terrible and nimble stroke Of quick cross lightning? to watch—poor perdu!— With this thin helm?] Mine enemy's dog, Though he had bit me, should have stood that night Against my fire, and wast thou fain, poor father, To hovel thee with swine and rogues forlorn In short and musty straw? Alack, alack, 'Tis wonder that thy life and wits at once Had not concluded all. (King Lear, 4.7.30-41) The most obvious precursor to this rhetorical image of disbelief, this recognition of the distance between form and substance, idea and reality, is in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. The resemblance to Faustus's encounter with Helen of Troy is uncanny: Was this the face that launched a thousand ships And burnt the topless towers of Ilium? Sweete Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.*40* And from Shakespeare's own Richard II is an equally famous moment of mirrors and misprision: Was this face the face That every day under his household roof Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face That like the sun, did make beholders wink? Is this the face which fac'd so many follies, That was at last out-fac'd by Bullingbrook? A brittle glory shineth in this face, As brittle as the glory is the face, For there it is, crack'd in an hundred shivers. Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport, How soon my sorrow hath destroy'd my face.*41* If that were not enough, even one of Shakespeare's comedies, All's Well That End's Well, cites similar lines from a now lost ballad: "Was this fair face the cause," quoth she, "Why the Grecians sacked Troy? Fond done, done fond, Was this King Priam's joy?" With that she sighed as she stood, With that she sighed as she stood, And gave this sentence then: "Among nine bad if one be good, Among nine bad if one be good, There's yet one good in ten."*42* An earlier example of such a moment occurs in a mid-sixteenth century translation of Cicero's Tusculan Disputations: Is this that Telamon, whom late frayle glory raysde on hye. On whom the Greekes of late dyd gase with many an enuious eye.*43* The pattern and variations on it also show up in several places later in the seventeenth century, too. One example is Thomas May's The tragedy of Julia Agrippina: Was this the face, that once in Caesar's love Was Agrippinaes rivall, and durst hope As much 'gainst mee, as my unquestion'd power Has wrought on her?*44* Cordelia looking on Lear's face is the most touching version of the "was this the face" tradition because it's the only one that involves true intersubjectivity. In the case of Faust, he is still living through his texts, recalling a past glory. In the case of Richard, he is wrapped up in himself and the infinite regression of his own self-indulgent symbolism. But Cordelia remarks on the

true gap between the image of authority, which is only image as we have learned from Lear himself, and the bare humanity before her. History attempts to provide rationales for human behavior, and the history play to depict the waxing and waning of fortune. In King Lear, however, Lear and Cordelia step out of history and climb off the wheel of fortune, leaving history no longer as a mirror for human action but human action as something that cannot be comprehended by history. We must wait for the epigrammatic finality of Lear's closing lines to make sense of the play as an aesthetic whole. All the perturbations in meaning, the equivocations, the horrors, the generic displacements get smoothed out by "the weight of this sad time" and the event, Cordelia's death, that configures Shakespeare's radical reinterpretation of the Lear story. Our purpose in reading the play, or the audience's in watching it performed, is, in fact, to witness Cordelia's death, to witness the moment of release from history and from the paternal/familial order of society that structures it. The play is less about leitmotifs of seeing than a constant recurrence of mirror images, mirrors by which we see but do not witness ourselves: the play, as a second cousin of the Mirror for Magistrates, holds a mirror up to the audience. The Fool, like a mirror, reflects back to the unhearing Lear the substance of his folly. The Gloucester subplot mirrors the main plot; the rival sisters Regan and Goneril mirror each other in motive and behavior, and their mirror-image husbands, the good Albany and the evil Cornwall, like the virtuous King of France and the conniving Burgundy, reflect the dutiful Edgar and the scheming Edmund. Cordelia, in this configuration, is an absent element. Who does she mirror? The answer is Lear. In two scenes we see mirror images of a sleeping Lear regarded by a pitying Cordelia, and later, as if in counterpoise, the more celebrated tableau of the dead Cordelia in the dying Lear's arms. Lear, who "hath ever but slenderly known himself," asks for a "looking-glass" by which to gauge Cordelia's life. Is this the end itself or only an image of it? Shakespeare characteristically leaves us with an equivocation. In historical terms, it is surely the end. Debates about the implied succession do not give the play its proper due as a rejection of historical time itself, of the guarantee of continuity. As a work of poetry, it is surely an image to be reflected back to the reader or audience. The play is a reflection of history as it is: without point or justice, without sense but the sense we bring to it. The audience is left to fill in the ending, as critics have attempted to do for centuries, and it may be this that often makes productions of Lear so deeply unsatisfying, and that convinced audiences for more than a hundred years to prefer a happier ending. The play requires too much of us, the "we" of the final lines too great a demand if it is extended to include the audience. It evinces a deep skepticism about historical progress, about the potential for any historical discourse, whether teleology or exemplum, to have any reliable, practical

bearing on modern life. Albany/Edgar's "smug sententiousness"*45* is what is dismissed by the play's conclusion, just as the stoic philosophy as a brace against the depredations of history is dismissed. The outcome of Edgar's education of Gloucester is his father's death, and we should expect the same for Lear and not be surprised by the dual outcome in the main plot. With all these characters dead for the sake of their educative journeys, only the audience is left to bear witness to Albany/Edgar's unrelenting piousness even in the face of utter destruction, of the absolute end of history. And we are meant to perceive that and decide for ourselves what to do with the sad time, its weight, and the necessity of carrying on without a convenient discourse to guide us, and that is what makes King Lear such a challenging play.

Notes

[1]For the exemplary statement of this position, see Warren.

[2]See Urkowitz: 1980, Blayney: 1982, Taylor and Warren: 1983, Clare: 1995, Knowles:1999, and Knowles:2008

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