

Thesis
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**The Shakespearean Object:
Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity and the Gaze**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, is the result of my own work and has not been included in any other thesis.

.....*Vance Adair*.....

Vance Adair

Abstract

Through a close analysis of four plays by Shakespeare this thesis argues that the question of subjectivity ultimately comes to be negotiated around a structural impasse or certain points of opacity in each of the text's signifying practices. Challenging assumptions about the putatively "theatrical" contexts of Richard III, Richard II, Hamlet and Antony and Cleopatra, I argue that, to varying degrees, the specular economy of each play is in fact traversed by a radical alterity that constitutively gives rise to a notion of subjectivity commonly referred to as "Shakespearean."

Elaborating upon the work of both Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, I argue that "subjectivity" in the plays is, rather, the articulated confrontation with a non-dialectizable remainder that haunts each text from within. Crucially in this respect I relate each of the texts to Lacan's account of the "gaze" as a species of what he calls the object a: an alien kernel of jouissance exceeding all subjective mediation yet, paradoxically, also that which confers internal consistency both to subjectivity and to the very process of symbolization as such. I am, moreover, also concerned to read the work of Jacques Derrida as providing an illuminating context for how this incursion of alterity that he terms differance (what Lacan calls the Real) may be read as the unacknowledged support of subjectivity. The thesis concludes with a consideration of how this analysis of the Shakespearean object, rather than succumbing to the heady pleasures of an unfettered textuality, opens, ineluctably, onto a rethinking of the very category of the "political" itself.

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Preface

Sections of the following two chapters have already been published: an edited version of chapter three entitled “’Rewriting the (S)crypt’: Gazing on Hamlet’s Interiors,” appeared in QWERTY, 6 (October 1996), pp. 5 – 17; also, an edited version of chapter one was published in Critical Survey, 9, 3 (1997), pp. 32-59.

An edited version of chapter two, “’Tis In Reversion That I Do Possess: Speculation and Destination in Richard II” is due to appear in The South Atlantic Quarterly.

References to Shakespeare’s texts throughout are to the Arden editions of individual plays unless otherwise stated.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my uncle,

David Balfour Scott

(1927-1999)

Introduction

“We Three”

I

Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night is a text that, in many respects, is quite remarkable for the way that it scrutinizes what remain some very orthodox assumptions about how language relates to identity. Perhaps most explicitly so, it is through the anarchic wit of Feste the clown that language in the text comes to gorge itself on a reality that can, apparently, either be created or annihilated at will. In only one of several memorable incidents in the play, at one point Feste delivers a message to someone that he assumes is named Cesario. Met with angry incomprehension, the clown deals with this predicament through what is, effectively, a wholesale denial of the deixis of difference itself:

No. I do not know you, nor am I sent to you
 by my lady, to bid you come speak with her;
 nor your name is not Master Cesario; nor this is not
 my nose either. Nothing that is so is so.

(II.ii.38-41)

Similarly, at the close of the play, Duke Orsino is presented with the task of negotiating this perplexing co-presence of identity and difference when he is confronted with the

twins of Viola and Sebastian. Paradoxically, both twins are presented as identical but not, strictly speaking, in a way that is identifiable:

One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons -
A natural perspective, that is and is not.

(V.i.214-15)

What the Duke encounters here, I would like to suggest, is that surplus which is missing in the mirror image, i.e. something unspecularizable yet, precisely as such, present in the shape of an unfathomable X on account of which the double obtains its unheimliches character. That is to say, the double here is the same yet totally strange, a sameness which all the more accentuates the uncanniness of that which “is, and is not.”

Earlier in the play, in another example of the text’s strangely skewed perspectives, we find a more explicit commentary on what might account for this gap – this thing that makes the difference where it is impossible to establish any positive difference as such. Offering a genially insulting greeting to Sir Andrew and Sir Toby, Feste inquires whether they did “never see the/picture of ‘we three’”? (II.iii.16-17). The joke, of course, refers here to a popular sixteenth-century painting depicting two asses which, when viewed from a prescribed angle, also includes the spectator as the “third” ass. Indeed, the title of the painting offers itself as an eloquent comment on the way that identity comes to be negotiated beyond the dyadic structure of the mirror image. What is at issue here, it seems, is a dialectical inversion that exceeds the logic of doubling and opens instead on to the implied accommodation of, precisely, a certain third element that eludes capture at the level of any “natural perspective.” In the example of “We

Three” not only is the frame of the picture in a sense already framed by part of its content: it is at this very point of formal inconsistency (the picture’s anamorphic stain of non-sense) that the viewer also finds himself inscribed or, quite literally, caught in the picture.

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan addresses a similar paradox in his seminar on anamorphosis where he discusses the example of Hans Holbein’s The Ambassadors.

Lacan similarly argues that it is this point of anamorphic tension (which in Holbein’s painting, when the viewer assumes the proper position, is subsequently revealed to be a floating skull) that functions “to catch, I would almost say, to catch in its trap, the observer.”¹ For Lacan, however, what is in fact “caught” here, what is momentarily rendered visible, is the materialized nothing that incarnates the decentred symptom of the ‘subject’ itself. Indeed Lacan argues that the Renaissance experimentation with trompe l’oeil is suggestive of nothing less than the passage to modernity itself, precisely insofar as Renaissance culture became increasingly fascinated by this “thing that mediates the relationship between the subject and the signifier.”² Renaissance painting, literature and architecture, Lacan was to argue on more than one occasion, is characterized by a preoccupation with what he calls the domain of the “vacuole,” this “construction around emptiness that designates the place of the Thing.”³ Moreover, in a comment that is impossible to read without recalling the contemporary political anxieties aroused by the signifying practices of Shakespeare’s “wooden O,” Lacan in

¹ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1994), p.92.

² Jacques Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London, 1992), p.129. In his seminar on anamorphosis Lacan argues that “at the very heart of the period in which the subject emerged and geometral optics was an object of research, Holbein makes visible for us something that is simply the subject as annihilated.” The Four Fundamental Concepts, p.88.

fact privileges the “Elizabethan theatre as the turning point in European eroticism..It is at that moment, in effect, that the celebration of this idealized object occurs.”⁴

In short, for Lacan, every scene of representation is both haunted and impelled by a foreign element that yawns in the midst of meaning itself. That is to say, there can be no symbolic communication without this piece of the real or phallic detail that serves as a kind of pawn to guarantee the very consistency of the symbolic order. It is precisely to this extent that every symbolic relationship implies a minimal distance toward this unheimliches third element that cannot accede to presence, but whose very elision gives rise to the scene of presence as such. In a comment that would appear particularly apposite to Twelfth Night in this respect, Lacan also goes so far as to claim that “If something ex-ists with respect to something else, it is precisely inasmuch as it is not coupled, but rather ‘tripled’ to it, if you will allow me this neologism.”⁵ In other words, according to Lacan symbolization constitutively turns around a void, a nothing that insists in the symbolic network as a “Thing that will always be represented by emptiness, precisely because it cannot be represented by anything else – or, more exactly, because it can only be represented by something else.”⁶

Alternatively, in an effort to define the contours of the problematic that we are trying to get at here, we might refer to an example that Lacan provides from the field of linguistics

³ Jacques Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, p.140.

⁴ Ibid., p.100. For a brilliant study of the significance of the ‘O’ in Elizabethan culture see Bruce Smith, The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor (London, 1999), cf: pp.207-45.

⁵ Quoted in Bruce Fink, The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance (Chichester, 1997), p.195, n.34.

⁶ Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, p.129-30.

which serves as yet another variation of this paradox of “We Three.” Here, Lacan argues that

...before any formation of the subject...things are counted, and in this counting he who counts is already included. It is only later that the subject has to recognize himself as such, recognize himself as he who counts. Remember the naïve failure of the simpleton’s delighted attempt to grasp the little fellow who declares – I have three brothers, Paul, Ernest and me. But it is quite natural – first the three brothers, Paul Ernest and I are counted, and then there is I at the level at which I am to reflect the first I, that is to say, the I who counts.⁷

In what is, effectively, another kind of Lacanian reflexive inversion, the speaker includes his own position of enunciation within the statement itself. Lacan, however, pushes this distinction between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enunciated even further to suggest that this moment of self-relating negativity hollows out the very space of what we call subjectivity itself: everything that “I” positively am, every enunciated content I can point at and say “that’s me,” is not “I”; “I” am only the void or surplus of form over content that remains as the empty distance toward every content as such.

In terms of Lacan’s logic of the signifier we once again encounter here how, paradoxically, the horizon of meaning is always already linked to a point within the field disclosed by it. As a variation of the dialectic between the view and the gaze, it is this very point of a certain formal inconsistency or locus of non-sense that actually condenses that Thing beyond the mirror image that the subject is. “We Three” offers, then, an eloquent gloss on the function of the gaze as the place holder of this beance in the symbolic order: what is available to the subject’s view, what is experienced as

“reality” in fact constitutes itself through the foreclosure of some traumatic x, some extimate kernel of jouissance that both provides the obscene support of meaning qua the law and also that which threatens to disrupt the internal consistency of the law itself.

Indeed, we might consider briefly here what is in many respects that most Shakespearean of moments - the soliloquy – as a particularly resonant example where “self-consciousness” is shown to depend upon a similarly strange dialectical inversion.

Commenting specifically upon Hamlet’s soliloquies as an ambivalent marker of “emergent consciousness,” Margreta de Grazia argues that the soliloquy posed a contradiction for an Elizabethan theatre that aspired increasingly to naturalistic conventions: “it is an awkward solution to be sure: speaking is asked to give the illusion of non-speaking.”⁸ A little later de Grazia somewhat teasingly asks the question of whether the soliloquy can be thought of in terms of a “dramatized cogito?”⁹

What is peculiar about the soliloquy, rather, is that its “theatrical” illusion properly consists in the way that speech is always-already mediated through an agency that exceeds any intersubjective relation, whereas naturalistic speech seeks to privilege what is said by failing to account for its place of enunciation.¹⁰ What this suggests, in a strictly Lacanian reading, is that as soon as the subject comes to be, he owes it to a certain non-being on which he raises his being. A “pseudo-Shakespeare stuck for improvisation,” is Lacan’s

⁷ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.20.

⁸ Margareta de Grazia, “Soliloquies and wages in the age of emergent consciousness,” Textual Practice, 9,1 (Spring 1995), pp.67-93, p.74.

⁹ Ibid, p.75.

¹⁰ In other words, as a theatrical device the soliloquy actually engages a critique of Cartesianism by implying that the subject of enunciation, who relates to himself only on condition of projecting himself ‘outside’ himself, is not reducible to the subject of the statement. This ‘dramatization’ compels the cogito to exceed its own laws in a way that conforms to its Lacanian rewriting as “I

appropriate choice of metaphor, "who paces up and down, repeating - To be or not..to be or not.., again - To be or not...to be."¹¹ In fact, we might recall here that for Hamlet to speak is also to submit to a certain disappearance: either to hold discourse "with the incorporeal air" (III.iv.118) or to "eat the air" (III.ii.93) is simultaneously to bear witness to the fact that as soon as words are spoken they are no longer "mine now" (III.ii.97). In other words, the speaking subject is no longer to be found at the axis of the relation between the signifier and the signified, but is the locus of a certain non-sense where, in Lacanese, the subject of enunciation quite literally "vanishes" into the subject of the statement.

Not only does the soliloquy announce that reflexive gesture where our direct immersion in narrative reality is momentarily perturbed, is not the soliloquy also a species of that putatively post-modern moment par excellence when the actor extracts himself from his narrative context and assumes the position of an observer of his own diegetic position of enunciation? In an argument that extends beyond the conventional wisdom relating to questions of self-reflexivity, Slavoj Žižek avers that "this apparently innocent procedure threatens the very foundation of the standard ontological edifice; it inscribes a subjective point of view into the very heart of 'objective reality.'"¹² Again, the Lacanian point here is that this logical snare that would appear to impede self-identity is in fact the embodiment of a structural antagonism within the symbolic order itself that is, strictly speaking, the very cause of the subject as such. In many respects the soliloquy stages how, in this retreat from reality, we are brought closer to some repressed formal

think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think." Jacques Lacan, Écrits: A Selection, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977), p.166.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III: 1955-1956, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (London, 1993), p.262.

inconsistency within the symbolic order that is also constitutive of the very “frame” of reality itself.¹³ This enigmatic cause is what Lacan, of course, came to call the object a: that little piece of the Real or trace of jouissance that is also, paradoxically, nothing but the “subject” itself in its negative magnitude.

This thesis argues that the production of subjectivity in four plays by Shakespeare also inverts the standard notion of the symbolic order as the agency that mediates or interposes itself between the subject and reality. Rather, following Lacan, I argue that the subject and the Other variously come to overlap in the object a as something which incarnates a void that irretrievably bars both the subject qua $\$$, and the symbolic order itself (\bar{A}). That is to say, in the Shakespearean texts under discussion subjectivity comes to find its most pronounced aspect of articulation at those moments when this trace of alterity is shown to confound the mastery of all dialectics: i.e. the “effect of subject” takes place precisely insofar as this remainder of substance (jouissance) escapes the grasp of subjective mediation. The further supplementary twist (and one that I read as both Shakespearean and Lacanian), is that far from simply being an impediment preventing the subject’s full actualization, this remainder is strictu sensu correlative to the very being of the subject.¹⁴ It is here, precisely, that we reach what

¹² Slavoj Žižek, The Plague of Fantasies (London, 1997), p.66.

¹³ See also Franco Moretti’s comments on soliloquy where he argues that with Shakespeare it is not part of “promoting the action or establishing its implications, but rather of retarding it and making its implications ungraspable.” “A Huge Eclipse’: Tragic Form and the Deconsecration of Sovereignty,” Genre, 15 (1982), pp.7-40, p.32.

¹⁴ We are now able to extrapolate a working hypothesis of the subject that is yet to find any adequate degree of articulation in Renaissance Studies: “I” am aware of myself, I am compelled to turn reflexively on to myself, only insofar as “I” can never “encounter myself” in my noumenal dimension, as the Thing I actually am. Herein resides the importance of Lacan’s comments on the gaze. The subject, strictly speaking, becomes a placeholder for the fact that reality (the socio-symbolic structure) always already includes the gaze of the subject. It is, precisely, in this respect that I wish to argue that what we call subjectivity is inherently pathological: i.e. something that is both biased and limited to a distorting, unbalanced perspective on the whole.

is perhaps the most concise definition of what I will refer to as the Shakespearean object: that surplus of substance in the plays which, precisely insofar as it resists subjectivization, also comes to open the very space of desiring subjectivity itself.

It may seem contradictory to thus attribute ontological or real status to what has hitherto been characterized as precisely a lack of substantial existence.¹⁵ However, both the Shakespearean and the Lacanian subject – as unavailable void – frequently appear as correlative or even isomorphic to the object a. In my reading of the texts it is not so much “theatricality” as a certain incursion of the gaze that I read as the preeminent example of this object. For both the gaze and the subject properly consist in those epistemological gaps which take on substantial or real status not in themselves but as object a. It is, precisely, this object a that constitutes the “substance” of the subject: a substance that, as Lacan never tired of repeating, is also the only one that is recognized by psychoanalysis.

Slavoj Žižek explains succinctly the identity of subject and object a in his discussion of the subjectivation of the field of reality in Hegelian philosophy: “‘subject’ and ‘object’ are the two leftovers of this same process, or, rather, the two sides of the same leftover conceived either in the modality of form (subject) or in the modality of content, of ‘stuff’ (object): a is the ‘stuff’ of the subject qua empty form.”¹⁶ The “subject qua empty form” is the same subject cleared of substantial content that we encountered above, but it contains a new

¹⁵ In this respect Francis Barker’s famous description of Hamlet as the harbinger of an incipient “modernity” is perhaps more Lacanian than would first appear: “At the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing. The promised essence remains beyond the scope of the text’s signification: or rather, signals the limit of the signification of this world by marking out the site of an absence it cannot fill. It gestures towards a place for subjectivity, but both are anachronistic and belong to a historical order whose outline has so far only been sketched out.” The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection (London, 1984), p.37.

substance – an ungraspable surplus object leftover by the symbolic organization of reality.¹⁷ It is, in many respects, an aim of this thesis to consider the ways that the Shakespearean texts under discussion are preoccupied with certain remainders or islands of jouissance (with that residual trace of “stuff”) that both imperils and gives rise to the symbolic sufficiency of the plays’ own putatively hegemonizing fictions.¹⁸

II

In the light of our foregoing discussion, how are we to account for those explicitly historical contingencies in the production of subjectivity, especially in an age that appears so inhospitable to the Lacanian categories with which we are concerned? Bearing in mind the pervasive influence of what has come to be known as “New Historicism” in Shakespeare studies in the last twenty years or so (and whose own commitment to theory is, at best, ambivalent), I am mindful of a powerful, if not yet fully institutionalized, resistance to psychoanalysis in this regard. Stephen Greenblatt, for example, offers a suggestive yet still deeply inadequate account of the limitations of psychoanalysis as a strategy of interpretation in reading early modern texts. Arraigning psychoanalysis for making “universalist claims” that are “unruffled by the indifference of the past to its own categories,” Greenblatt is especially impatient

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, Tarrying With The Negative (Durham, 1993), pp. 21-2.

¹⁷ The Lacanian subject is not an autonomous power “positing” the substance but precisely a name for the gap within substance, for the discontinuity which prevents us from conceiving the substance as a self-contained totality.

¹⁸ In this respect my own interests are both a response to and further elaboration of the extraordinary (and much too neglected) work of Joel Fineman. Fineman has gone further than any other critic in trying to identify this substantial or “Real” object with the substance of the “subjectivity effect” that has been adduced as characteristically “Shakespearean.” See, for example, his remarkable study of the “Sound of O in Othello” where Fineman argues that “this sound – these abject Os, which I associate with Lacan’s objet a, and the mark of the Real – is,

with what he sees as a “totalizing vision” that ignores the “historical” contingencies which in fact fashioned a “mode of selfhood that psychoanalysis has tried to universalize into the very form of the human condition.”¹⁹

At the close of his essay, however, Greenblatt in fact unwittingly stumbles upon the very paradox that psychoanalysis reads as the constitutive antagonism that gives rise to the very moment of “historicity” itself. Stopping short of dismissing psychoanalysis as an anachronism Greenblatt nevertheless avers that

[...] psychoanalytic interpretation is causally belated, even as it is causally linked: hence the curious effect of a discourse that functions as if the psychological categories it invokes were not only simultaneous with but even prior to and themselves causes of the very phenomenon of which in fact they were the results. [...] psychoanalysis can redeem its belatedness only when it historicizes its own procedures.²⁰

This temporal paradox that Greenblatt cites as impoverishing the force of psychoanalysis as properly “historical,” is also, precisely, what psychoanalysis insists upon as the very moment of the historical itself. Whether in terms of Freud’s

both for Shakespeare and for Othello, constitutive of Othello’s self.” “Sound of O in Othello” in The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition (Cambridge MA, 1991), pp.143-64, p.152.
¹⁹ Stephen J. Greenblatt, “Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture” in Learning To Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture (London, 1992), pp. 131-45, p.136, 137, 138. In the wake of new historicism, this claim is variously rehearsed in a shower of publications on early modern “subjectivity” that are either politely dismissive of or openly hostile to psychoanalysis on account of its putatively “universalizing” tendencies. See, for example, Francis Barker, The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection (London, 1984), pp. 31-7, p.58; Margareta de Grazia, “Motives for Interiority: Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Hamlet,” Style, 23, 3 (Fall 1989), pp.430-44; Peter Stallybrass, “Shakespeare, the Individual and the Text,” in Lawrence Grossberg et. al. eds., Cultural Studies (London, 1992), pp.593-612; Katherine Eisaman Maus, “Proof and Consequences: Inwardness and Its Exposure in the English Renaissance,” Representations, 34 (Spring 1991), pp.29-52; Emily C. Bartels, “Breaking the Illusion of Being: Shakespeare and the Performance of Self,” Theatre Journal, 46 (1994), pp.171-85. For a trenchant critique of current accounts of early modern subjectivity, see David Aers, “A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the ‘History of the Subject,’” in David Aers ed., Culture and History: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing (Detroit, 1992), pp.177-202.

Nachtraglichkeit or Lacan's future anterieur, psychoanalysis posits the priority of synchrony over diachrony in a way that remains decidedly problematic for classical historicism. This aspect of retroactive causality, at least for Lacan, arises on account of the fact that language as synchronic order itself comes up against an internal limit, a foreign kernel that can only be integrated after the fact. As Slavoj Žižek maintains, "if the passage from 'genesis' to 'structure' were to be continuous, there would be no inversion of the direction of causality,"²¹ to the extent that it is this inert presence which opens the very space for any reordering of the past. Epistemologically, it is this posture that, perhaps surprisingly, brings psychoanalysis into closest proximity with historical materialism whose "knowledge" is similarly self-referential; i.e. whose object of critique is comprised of no substantial content that is prior to the very intervention that would seek to reintegrate it into the symbolic network. That is to say, it is only through the act of knowledge that the object becomes what it truly "is."

Briefly: the problem with Greenblatt's conception of historicism is that it assumes that what we call "history" has always already begun, and that therefore it merely continues. In other words, Greenblatt presupposes history, instead of taking it as that which remains to be thought.²² Insofar as it names a praxis wherein all historical content is to some extent relativised, i.e. made dependent on "historical circumstances," the problem with historicism (as opposed to historicity) is that it routinely evades every encounter

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.142.

²¹ Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor (London, 1994), p.171.

²² Indeed, Greenblatt's own historical rigor has itself become the focus of some debate, see for example, Carolyn Porter, "Are We Being Historical Yet?," South Atlantic Quarterly, 87 (1988), pp. 743-86; Joseph Kelly and Timothy Kelly, "Searching the Dark Alley: New Historicism and Social History," Journal of Social History, 25 (1991-92), pp.677-94; and Robert D. Hume, "Texts Within Contexts: Notes Towards a Historical method," Philological Quarterly, 71 (1992), pp.69-100.

with the Real. In other words, historicisms both new and old are, ultimately, in thrall to the notion of a linear succession of historical epochs that (according to Lacan) are nothing other than, precisely, a series of failed attempts to deal with this radically unhistorical traumatic kernel that always returns to the same place. In an argument that appears to offer itself as concise rejoinder to Greenblatt in this respect, Slavoj Žižek makes the broader claim that “the most succinct definition of historicism is [...] historicity minus the unhistorical traumatic kernel which returns to the Same through all historical epochs.”²³ In this respect, psychoanalysis (and Lacan in particular) is as far as it is possible to be from “universalizing” the Real into something that is exempted from historical analysis. Lacan’s point, rather, is that the only true ethical stance is to assume fully the impossible task of symbolizing the Real, inclusive of its necessary failure.

The truly radical critique of ideology should therefore go beyond the self-congratulatory “social analyses” which continue to participate in the fantasy that sustains the object of their critique and to search instead for ways to sap the force of this underlying fantasy-frame itself - in short, to perform something akin to what the later Lacan called “going-through the fantasy.” Indeed, in many respects, it is an aim of this thesis to begin thinking another historicity - not a new history or still less a “new historicism,” but something closer to what Jacques Derrida has elsewhere referred to as “another opening of event-ness as historicity.”²⁴ In this crucial respect, my reading of Derrida

²³ Slavoj Žižek, Enjoy Your Symptom: Lacan in Hollywood and Out (Routledge, 1996), p.81.

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London, 1994), pp.75-6. It is well known that in the French academic scene of the 60s and 70s Derrida and Lacan were regarded as a somewhat uncomfortable pair of intellectual bedfellows. Lacan was derisive and often openly dismissive of what he regarded as Derrida’s ‘derivative’ project of deconstruction. See Elizabeth Roudinesco,

throughout this thesis is concerned, precisely, to maintain a sensitivity to each text's "logic of repetition and the trace, for it is difficult to see how there could be history without it."²⁵

Beginning with an analysis of Richard III, I argue that the question of Richard's deformity comes ultimately to be negotiated at the level of a more persistent kind of formal or anamorphic tension that haunts the texts own signifying practices. To this extent, the formal consistency of the text's historical project is routinely implicated with the figure of Richard as, in many ways, the embodiment of the text's own difficulties in trying to secure the illusion of temporal homeostasis. Turning more explicitly to the work of Jacques Derrida, the second chapter focuses on Richard II as a text that is similarly preoccupied with the relationship between history and temporality. The gaze here, however, becomes an index for the traumatic incursion of an other repressed scene

Jacques Lacan & Co. (London, 1986). Similarly, Derrida maintained a critical distance from many of Lacan's ideas – most obviously so in his charge of Lacan's 'phallogocentrism' in "Le facteur de la verite," in The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond, Alan Bass trans., (London, 1979), pp.411-79. For a dazzling analysis of both Lacan and Derrida in this regard see Barbara Johnson "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida" in Shoshana Felman ed., Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading Otherwise (London, 1982), pp.457-506. It was not until only very recently that Derrida publicly affirmed his indebtedness to Lacan in an essay entitled "For the Love of Lacan," Peggy Kamuf trans., in Jacques Derrida, Resistances of Psychoanalysis (California, 1998), pp.39-70.

It is not within the scope of this thesis to engage a diacritical encounter between Derrida and Lacan. Rather my concern is to show that Derridean differance offers a productive insight into considering the ways that the negotiation of jouissance in the Shakespearean text is also never far away from "the-effect-of-subject." In this respect, I propose to take as axiomatic Derrida's claim that "Every time there is "jouissance" (but the 'there is' of this event is in itself extremely enigmatic), there is 'deconstruction.'" Indeed, Derrida's further reflections on this issue are worth quoting at length: "Deconstruction perhaps has the effect, if not the mission, of liberating forbidden jouissance. That's what has to be taken on board. It is perhaps this jouissance which most irritates the all-out adversaries of 'deconstruction.' Who, moreover, blame those they call 'deconstructionists' for depriving them of their habitual delectation in the reading of the great works or the rich treasures of tradition, and simultaneously for being too playful, for taking too much pleasure, for saying what they like for their own pleasure, etc. An interesting and symptomatic contradiction." "This Strange Institution Called Literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (London, 1992), pp.35-76, p.56.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, Positions, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1981), p.57.

of radical alterity that I argue to be that of writing itself. If, as I maintain, writing names a relation of interiority that is in fact without belonging, this strange movement so contaminates the text's signifying practices that Richard II comes to stage a drama of "de-positioning" in a way that has hitherto been given insufficient attention in critical accounts of the play.

I examine the question of interiority further in the third chapter. Hamlet, I argue, is only able to sustain the illusion of its interiorizing voluminosity through the elision of an extimate kernel of jouissance that, ultimately, the play itself is powerless to occlude. Reading Lacan alongside Derrida's preoccupation with cryptonymy, identity is variously shown to be negotiated around certain topological paradoxes whose very formal inconsistencies, I argue, are in fact crucial to the production of subjectivity itself.

The concluding two chapters offer a more extensive consideration of the question of jouissance and how it comes to threaten the socio-symbolic edifice to which it gives rise. Antony and Cleopatra, I argue, is a text that both routinely and ambivalently comes to meditate upon the incursion of an excess that complicates the historical project of its imperial narrative. Various negotiating the excessive presence of some remainder or trace of enjoyment that come to antagonize the authority of Roman "Law," this is also reticulated within the text at the site of certain metastases that I read as disclosing the discontinuous production of subjectivity peculiar to the colonial encounter itself. In the conclusion I offer a brief introduction to Romeo and Juliet as a text which more explicitly locates enjoyment as the element that sustains desiring subjectivity. To this end it is argued that, far from appeasing social conflict, every "love story" is to some

extent a compromise formation which attempts to fill out the place of a radical stain of non-sense that comes to threaten the coherence of the Law itself.

Chapter One

Back to the Future: Subjectivity and Anamorphosis in Richard III

...the unconscious is manifested to us as something that holds itself in suspense in the area, I would say, of the unborn.

Me And My Shadow

Having confounded his own expectations in the successful wooing of Lady Anne, the Duke of Gloucester has recourse to a model of ego formation that, for a modern audience at least, has much in common with the Lacanian archetype:

I do mistake my person all this while:
Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,
Myself to be a marv'ulous proper man.
I'll be at charges for a looking glass,
And entertain a score or two of tailors,
To study fashions to adorn my body:
.....
Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass,
That I may see my shadow as I pass.

(I.ii.252-258, 262-263)

Internalising the gaze of the Other, in this case that of Lady Anne, Richard's acquisition of a looking glass is accompanied by an idealisation of body image that is redolent of the "jubilation" experienced by the subject of Lacan's mirror stage. To recount briefly, in the mirror stage the ego is formed in terms of an identification with one's specular image: the infant who has not yet mastered the upright posture upon seeing himself in the mirror will

“jubilantly assume” this upright position.¹ The apparently “orthopaedic” effect of captation by the mirror image would appear especially apposite for a character who is frequently disposed to descanting upon his own deformity. This transition from an uncoordinated body image, what Lacan refers to as the corps morcele, to the Gestalt of bodily wholeness is not, however, reducible to a myth of origins. As Jane Gallop has argued, the mirror stage involves a temporal dialectic that is simultaneously anticipatory and retroactive and, in many ways, is of paradigmatic importance for Lacan’s lifelong preoccupation with the anachronistic relationship that inheres between subjectivity and the signifying chain:

The mirror image would seem to come after “the body in bits and pieces” and organise them into a unified image. But actually, that violently unorganised image only comes after the mirror stage so as to represent what came before. What appears to precede the mirror stage is simply a projection or a reflection. There is nothing on the other side of the mirror.²

The mirror stage, it seems, is the threshold for a paradoxical short circuit from a not yet to the always-already: that is to say, eluding a moment of pure, undivided presence, the “I” produced in the mirror stage is Lacan’s earliest pronouncement on the status of the subject as something that constitutively lacks its own place. Lacan’s subsequent engagement with paradoxical models of temporality was always implicitly concerned to rearticulate the question of the subject’s being as something that, in a quite radical sense, is crucially dependent upon this formal inconsistency in the signifying network.³ Indeed, if the

¹ Jacques Lacan, “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I,” Ecrits: A Selection, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977), pp.1-8, p. 2

² Jane Gallop, Reading Lacan (Ithaca, 1988), p.47.

³ Lacan’s most considered excursus on this relation is elaborated in the seminar entitled “The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious” in Ecrits: A Selection, pp.292-325. See also figure 1 on p. 293 of this thesis.

category of the Real was to enjoy increased theoretical elaboration in Lacan's later work, it was partly in order to emphasise this point: that the subject crucially owes its ontological consistency to a certain formal inconsistency in the symbolic order.⁴ There can only be an "I," Lacan maintains, precisely insofar as somewhere there remains a formless stain, a quotient of non-sense wherein the subject finds his or her being condensed.

Alternatively, we might recall here Lacan's audacious revision of Descartes' formula for the *cogito*: "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think."⁵ According to Lacan, not only the subject but also the symbolic order itself is rendered efficacious by virtue of an antagonism that is, ultimately, the void around which every moment of symbolization turns. Of central importance here is Lacan's invocation of what he frequently refers to as the "future anterior," which is given its most succinct definition in his account of the temporality of a subject where

What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what it was, since it is no more, or the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.⁶

This notion of the subject as something that can only relate to itself in terms of an essential *contretemps*, as that which "will have been," is ineluctably tied to Lacan's often

⁴ It is from within this context that we must understand the "later" Lacan's otherwise perplexing fascination with mathematics and topology. Namely, that what we refer to as the subject is, in the last instance, nothing but an impasse in formalisation. In Lacan "le réel" – the real of *jouissance* – "ne saurait s'inscrire que d'une impasse de la formalisation" – can be discerned only by way of the deadlocks of its formalization. In short, the status of the real is thoroughly non-substantial: it is a product of failed attempts to integrate it into the Symbolic. In his effort to grasp how both the subject and the symbolic order are inherently split from within, Lacan also sought to reveal how theories of linear determinism characteristically elide a radical ambiguity that pertains to every Cause. Herein resides the significance of Lacan's epigrammatic account of the unconscious: "there is cause only in something that doesn't work." Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1994) p.23.

⁵ Jacques Lacan, "The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud" in *Écrits: A Selection* pp. 146-79, p.166.

misunderstood definition of the signifier as “that which represents the subject for another signifier.” In other words, what Lacan refers to as the “subject” can only appear in the signifying chain as a kind of anamorphic stain (what Ernest Jones refers to as the site of a certain aphanisis or “fading”); i.e. as something that is an “effect” of the signifier but which does not imply, let alone “represent,” the wealth of any substantial content.

It is precisely on account of this fact that, for Lacan, every formation of identity is closely umbilicated to a certain formlessness, or even a radical deformity that persists as the immanent necessity of every identity tout court.⁷ If, as Lacan argues, the “meaning” of a signifying chain always runs behind the signifying production itself, it is on account of this retroversion effect that the subject becomes at each stage what he was before, and announces himself – he will have been – only in the future perfect sense. Moreover, for Lacan, it is precisely this ambiguous point of tension between delay and anticipation that “is essential to knowing myself (un meconnaitre essentiel au me connaitre) [...] For, in this ‘rear view’ (retrovisee), all that the subject can be certain of is the anticipated image coming to meet him that he catches of himself in the mirror.”⁸

If the subject is unable finally ever to fully coincide with itself, this unbearable fact is embodied by that unreflected remainder (Lacan’s object a) which haunts the symbolic order from within. This, of course, is the substantive point of Lacan’s extraordinary

⁶ Ibid., p.86.

⁷ According to an excellent analysis by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe of “identity” in another context, it is here precisely that deformity generally acquires a truly subversive and constitutive force: “This presence of the contingent in the necessary is what we earlier called subversion, and it manifests itself as symbolization, metaphorization, paradox, which deform and question the literal character of every identity.” Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a New Democratic Politics (London, 1993), p.114.

⁸ Jacques Lacan, “The subversion of the subject,” p.306.

account of anamorphosis in his seminar on the gaze. Here, Lacan maintains that this anamorphoic blot is strictly homologous to the gaze qua object a insofar as it embodies the (impossible) point of view from which the blot can be perceived in its “true meaning,” i.e. the virtual point from which, instead of the anamorphic distortion, it would be possible for the subject to grasp without remainder the contours of a formless stain.⁹

While anamorphosis is the favoured Lacanian motif for the analysis of the retroactive dynamic of desire (i.e. the subject) in the Real, what may be called a temporal anamorphosis also provides the topological model for the Symbolic. Indeed, as early as 1953 Lacan argued that:

The past and the future correspond precisely to one another. And not any old how – not in the sense that you might believe that analysis indicates, namely from the past to the future. On the contrary, precisely in analysis because its technique works, it happens in the right order - from the future to the past.¹⁰

By reading events “backward,” so to speak, Lacan is concerned to theorise the structural implications of this anamorphic entity that gains its consistency only in retrospect, when it is viewed (belatedly) from within what is always, ultimately, a contingent field of meaning and sense. Effectively, the very emergence of the symbolic order opens up a beance that can never be wholly accounted for by meaning: “sense” is never all $S(\mathcal{A})$, it is always truncated, marked by some phallic detail that “does not fit” and as a consequence comes to denature the field of so-called “reality.”

⁹ And it is for this reason that anamorphosis is ultimately a reminder of castration: it is precisely on account of this void in the symbolic order that the subject comes to find the unbearable truth of his being.

Difficult Births

From this brief overview of Lacan's analysis of the relationship between temporality, subjectivity and the Real, we are in a better position to understand how subjectivity and meaning emerge only ambiguously at a dislocating and decentred point of anamorphic tension: "normal" reality (i.e. the Real pacified by the symbolic order) is perceptible only at a point where "it thinks" remains a formless stain.¹¹ By drawing upon the theoretical problematic yielded by Lacan's investigation of anamorphosis, and how it relates to the cognate psychoanalytical domains of repetition, the uncanny and the gaze, this chapter argues that, in its ostensible production of history, Shakespeare's Richard III is besieged by similar problems that centre crucially around the "deformed" figure of Richard himself.

We might "begin" then by considering the ways that the text routinely makes Richard's mis-shapen body the symptom of a certain imbalance or disturbance in the symbolic order itself. If being "sent into the world in a less than finished state"¹² indicates for Freud how prematurity is a founding condition of subjectivity, Richard's bitter declaration that he was "sent before my time/Into this breathing world, scarce half made up" (I.i.20-21), is also not the only occasion in the text where deformity becomes aligned with anxieties of origination. In III Henry VI Richard is referred to as "an indigested and deformed lump"

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, The Seminar Of Jacques Lacan Book One: Freud's Papers on Technique, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (Cambridge, 1988), p.157.

¹¹ Lacan's point, then, is not that self-consciousness is impossible since something always eludes the grasp of the conscious ego. Rather, it is the far more radical thesis that this decentred hard kernel which eludes the grasp of the subject is ultimately self-consciousness itself. It is here, pre-eminently, that psychoanalysis becomes unbearable in the eyes of philosophy.

¹² Moreover, in a comment that would appear to have a particular bearing upon this constitutive tension of delay and precipitousness throughout the play that is condensed in the figure of Richard, Lacan also argues that "generic prematuration of birth [is] the dynamic origin of specular capture." Lacan, "Subversion of the subject," p.308.

(V.vi.51) by the King, a description that is later echoed in Clifford's description of Richard as a "foul indigested lump" (ll. 157-58). This characterisation of Richard as something akin to an object that is "lodged" in the gullet of the symbolic order, is further complicated by the contradictory reports of his birth. The precise nature of Richard's deformity indeed becomes a confused affair when it is recalled that he had "Teeth.....in thy head when thou wast born" (ll.54), an image that is also recalled by Queen Margaret in her vituperative outburst in Richard III:

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept
A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death:
That dog, that had his teeth before his eyes,
To worry lambs and lap their gentle blood;

(IV.iv.47-50)

As a "lump of foul deformity" (I.ii.58), Richard is also imbued with this peculiar morphology of lack and surplus in John Rous's history, written in 1492, which relates how the royal birth was complicated by the extraordinary claim that Richard remained in his mother's womb for five years and was born with teeth and hair down to his shoulders.¹³ Even the account provided by Thomas More, who frequently disputes the veracity of such mythologizing tales of Richard's birth, provides the seemingly significant detail that Richard, apparently a breech birth, was born upside down: "It is reported that the Duchess his mother had so much ado in her travail that she could not be delivered of him uncut, and that he came into the world with the feet forward."¹⁴

¹³ For a useful, although brief, summary of this mythologizing of Richard see Retha M. Warwicke, "The Physical Deformities of Ann Boleyn and Richard III: Myth and Reality," Parergon, 4 (1988) pp.135-53.

¹⁴ Quoted in Desmond Seward, Richard III: England's Black Legend (London, 1983), p.23. Indeed, in III King Henry VI Richard himself refers to this account in a way that also suggests a degree of ironical self-distance from the narratives of his own

As facilitator to the Tudor succession, Richard is not the only “monster” in Elizabethan tracts to have his epochal significance distinguished by a “birth” that was, simultaneously, both too early and too late. For example, an account from 1600 relates how “A Strange and miraculous accident happened in the Cittie of Purmenent, on New Yeare's even last past 1599, of a young child which was heard to cry in the Mothers wombe before it was borne.”¹⁵ Temporally, the monster appears here to be a proxy for some formal disturbance in the symbolic order: arriving either too early or too late it can more properly be figured as that which Jacques Derrida has called an arrivant: a “singularity” that is nevertheless also anticipated. Indeed, this strange preparedness toward the future also informs the work of James Gardiner, an eminent historian of the nineteenth-century, who claims that “Richard left such a reputation behind him that even before him, at his birth, it was said that he was proclaimed a monster” (emphasis added).¹⁶ Insofar as we are able to detect here a problematical complicity between singularity and repetition, we can refer to the work of Jacques Derrida who similarly argues that “all of history has shown that each time an event has been produced [...] it took the form of the unacceptable, or even of the intolerable, of the incomprehensible, that is, of a certain monstrosity.”¹⁷

As a paradox of causation, then, the designation of Richard as a “monster,” I would like to suggest, also attests to pervasive anxieties in the text's representation of history. Although frequently attributed to divine will, this proliferation in narratives of the “monstrous” in the sixteenth-century, as Katherine Park and Lorraine J. Daston have argued, inevitably

symbolic crystallization; namely, in his recollection that “I have often heard my mother say/I came into the world with my legs forward” (III.ii.56).

¹⁵ “A Strange and miraculous accident,” 1599, STC 20551.

¹⁶ James Gardiner, History of the Life and Reign of Richard the Third (Cambridge, 1898), p. 5.

circulated around the difficult question of "how [to] tell which monsters arise in the course of nature and which are expressly produced as signs by God."¹⁸ Elevated to the status of a cultural milieu following the upheavals of the reformation, this study of monsters cathected, rather, a crisis of authority in narratives of linear historical progress. The doctrine of Aristotle, which provides the discursive frame of reference for most early modern accounts, characterises the monster as a paradox of causation that also accomplishes an erasure of filiation: "anyone who does not take after his parents is really

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Passages – from Traumatism to Promise" in Points...Interviews, 1974-1994, ed. Elizabeth Weber (California, 1995), pp. 372-95, p.387.

¹⁸ Lorraine J Datson and Katherine Park, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century France and England," Past and Present 92 (1982) pp.20-54, p.34. A more recent study by Kathryn M. Brammall has identified a trend in the way that the appellation of "monster" was increasingly employed as a rhetorical trope from 1570. Kathryn M Brammall, "Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England," Sixteenth Century Journal, 27, 1 (1996), pp.3-21. See also the extraordinary study by David Williams that makes several important points about how the monstrous comes to occupy the site of a certain formal disturbance in narratives of 'linear' progress. Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature (Exeter, 1996), pp.40-48.

As will become clear, what I am principally attempting to elaborate here is an account of the monstrous which makes use of Lacan's complex association between spatial and temporal anamorphoses; that is, the way that the monster indexes the intrusion of a stain of non-sense in the signifying chain. In this respect, perhaps surprisingly, Michel Foucault makes some characteristically subtle and apposite comments in his analysis of the emergence of the study of monsters in the human sciences. Critiquing theories of evolutionism Foucault argues that

[...] continuity is not the visible wake of a fundamental history in which one same living principle struggles with a variable environment. For continuity precedes time. It is its condition.....First, the necessity of introducing monsters into the scheme....The monster ensures in time, and for our theoretical knowledge, a continuity that, for our everyday experience, floods, volcanoes, and subsiding continents confuse in space. The other consequence is that the signs of continuity throughout such a history can no longer be of any order other than that of resemblance....On the basis of the power of the continuum held by nature, the monster ensures the emergence of difference. This difference is still without law and without any well-defined structure; the monster is the root stock of specification, but it is only a sub-species itself in the stubbornly slow stream of history.

Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York, 1990), pp.155-6.

in a way a monstrosity.” Later in the text Aristotle similarly avers that “monstrosities come under the class of offspring which is unlike its parents.”¹⁹

This somewhat perplexing preoccupation with the question of Richard's “origins” has even found its way into the text's critical history; most notably so in E.M.W. Tillyard's somewhat anxious consideration of the proper “place” that Richard III should be assigned in the Shakespeare canon. In Shakespeare's History Plays Tillyard's attempts to adduce what should be considered “historical” in the context of the play invariably confronts the issue of Richard's deviant morphology. The monster, qua diegetic form, is revealed ultimately to be an agency within the text that disorders the formal balance of its hegemonizing fictions. Initially, Tillyard considers the question of authority in terms of an overarching telos of the artistic development of the author. It soon becomes clear, however, that if Richard is indeed the victim of arrested development, this is merely a dissimulated effect (and symptom) of his literary genitor's immaturity:

He [Shakespeare] was to do better when he matured, but in Richard III he delivered himself of what he was good for at that time. Not being the fully accomplished artist he had to labour prodigiously and could not conceal the effort (emphasis added).²⁰

In a text that Coppelia Kahn has correctly identified as suggesting “the importance of the mother, rather than the father, in the formation of masculine identity”²¹ Tillyard's metaphors here reveal a highly vexed relationship towards the question of authority that, ultimately, is negotiated around the thorny issue of paternity and filial piety. Indeed,

¹⁹ Aristotle, Generation of Animals, trans. A.L. Peck (Cambridge, 1953), pp.402, 405.

²⁰ E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1981), p.205.

²¹ Coppelia Kahn, Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare (London, 1981), p.63.

Tillyard's implicit claim that the text somehow fails to conceal the traces of its production not only encodes artistic impropriety as a peculiarly feminine vice,²² the putative failure of Richard III to demarcate successfully a space between the author and his work also displaces a gnawing dissatisfaction about the text's representation of history onto a consideration of the masculinization of Shakespeare himself. If Aristotle is correct in his argument, i.e. what makes the monster truly monstrous is that it serves as too conspicuous a reminder that paternity can never really be proven, then Tillyard's analysis is similarly concerned with this need to recover the father's image.²³ Moreover, such anxieties acquire

²² Marilyn Francis has argued in another context that such a strategy is concerned "to contain the imagination [...] relying on the attribution of deformed, sterile progeny, which functions as a sign of the deviant female mind and of the corruption of biological and literary maternity." "The Monstrous Mother: Reproductive Anxiety in Swift and Pope," English Literary History, 61 (1994) pp. 826-51, p.840. It is also relevant to note here that for Aristotle the monster's origin is also, not coincidentally, related to the feminine in terms of their shared dissimilarity to the father: "The first beginning of this deviation is when a female is formed instead of a male, though this indeed is a necessity required by Nature, since the race of creatures which are separated into male and female has got to be kept in being." Aristotle, op. cit., p.402. The appropriately named Alain Grosrichard's analysis of the relationship between the monstrous and filiation similarly argues that "the child runs the risk of monstrosity both if the father does not play his proper role in the original structuring language of the maternal imagination, and if his role is excessive." "The Case of Polyphemus, or, a Monster and its Mother" in Cogito and the Unconscious, ed. Slavoj Zizek (London, 1998), pp.117-48, p.137.

²³ I am particularly indebted here to Marie-Helene Huet who, in a brilliant essay, has argued that "if resemblance creates a visible connection between father and child, it also conceals the questionable character of all paternities. At the same time that it suggests filiation, by instituting a "natural," visible link between the genitor and his child, resemblance, used as a criterion for establishing paternity, elides the fact that this filiation can never be certain. Thus, resemblance masks a fundamental, primordial disorder. And what resemblance conceals, the monster un.masks." Marie-Helene Huet, "Monstrous Imagination: Progeny as Art in French Classicism," Critical Inquiry, 17 (1991) pp. 131-159, p.142. This question of Richard's self-proclaimed auto-genesis finds a wider resonance in the way that early modern culture sought to create an identity for the nebulous processes of literary production itself. In a comment that inevitably recalls Richard, both in its choice of metaphor and in its aggressive claims of autonomy, Thomas Nashe contests his status as an 'outsider' to "proudly boast [...] that the vaine which I have (be it median vaine or a madde man) is of my owne begetting, and calls no man father in England but my selfe." Quoted in David Scott Kastan, "His semblable is his mirror': Hamlet and the Imitation of Revenge," Shakespeare Studies (1994) pp. 52-78, p.63.

It is Philip Sidney, however, who provides a more complex example of how questions of literary creativity inevitably confront the issue of masculine identity. In a prefatory letter which dedicates The Countess Of Pembroke's Arcadia to his (then pregnant) sister, Sidney offers a disclaimer that deploys multivalent levels of displacement as he seeks to negotiate the claims of literary patrimony under the aspect of the prodigious:

added ironical force when one considers the text's bibliographical history. A speech by Richard that appears in Q1 of III Henry VI, and that is frequently offered as an apology for his subsequent villainy, is in fact prefixed with a line that is not contained in the Folio text:

I had no father, I am like no father
 I have no Brother, I am like no Brother:
 And this word (love) which Gray-beards call pure,
 Be resident in men like one another
 And not in me.

Tillyard's contention then, that Shakespeare was "to do better," also attempts to fantasize a paternal presence on behalf of a character who is particularly notable for eloquent pronouncements upon his own perceived alienation, "I am myself alone" (III Henry VI V.vi.83).²⁴ In other words, Tillyard's suggestion that, redeemed retroactively, the text will come to recognise its origins, is also an attempt to occlude textual difference in a rhetorical manoeuvre that, as Jacques Derrida argues in another context, involves a restitution of paternal rights where none other than Shakespeare himself is invoked as "a father that is present, standing near it, behind it, within it, sustaining it with his rectitude, attending it in person in his own name."²⁵

I hope, for the father's sake, it will be pardoned, perchance made much of, though in itself it have deformities...In sum, a young head not so well stayed as I would it were...having many fancies begotten in it, if it had not been in some way delivered, would have grown a monster, and more sorry might I be that they came in than that they gat out. But his chief safety shall be the not walking abroad; and his chief protection the bearing the livery of your name.

Philip Sidney, The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones (Oxford, 1985), p.4.

²⁴ Desmond Seward has argued that "It is unlikely that little Richard ever saw much of his father. We may guess that his childhood was as painful as his birth [...] We know that he spent a good part of his early years at Fotheringay with his sister Margaret [...] It has been fancifully suggested that Margaret 'played mother to him' but it is more likely that nurses performed this role." Desmond Seward, Richard III: England's Black Legend (London, 1981), p.28.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" in A Derrida Reader: Between The Blinds, ed. Peggy Kamuf (London, 1991), pp.112-143, p.118.

Subjectivity and Anamorphosis in Richard III

It is, however, a more persistent failure of the text to satisfactorily recognise its origins that leads Tillyard to comment upon what he calls the “confused” place that Richard III occupies in the tetralogy. Positioned within a temporal frame that is simultaneously proleptic and retrospective, Tillyard negotiates this paradox of the text in terms of an ostensible “working out” of the traumatic civil war as merely a mechanical exercise in preparation for the Tudor succession: “the main business of the play is to complete the national tetralogy and to display the working out of God's plan to restore England to prosperity.”²⁶ What threatens to disrupt the fantasmatic consistency of this Elizabethan world picture on display, however, are points of discontinuity throughout the text that betray a potentially troublesome mark of over-proximity to the site of the play’s own contingent position of enunciation: “Richard III inevitably suffers as a detached unit...the play can never come into its own till acted as a sequel to the other three plays.”²⁷ This foreclosure of self-reference, the putative failure of the text to “come into its own,” also (fortuitously) provides the title of an essay by Derrida²⁸ which locates the “monstrous,” precisely, at this site of tension between past and future.

“History” and “anamorphosis” co-operate in Richard III in terms of this radical asymmetry: unable to occlude fully the traces of its own historicity, the text shares a

²⁶ Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p.205.

²⁷ Ibid., p.206. It is also possible to read this aspect of the text as an example of the insistence of its self-reflexivity in the signifying chain, conforming to a movement that Shoshana Felman has described as that “which passing through the Other, returns to itself without quite being able to rejoin itself; a reflexivity which is thus untotalizable, that is, irreducibly dialogic.” Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight (London, 1987), p.60.

²⁸ Arguing how “every speculation implies the frightening possibility of the Hysteron Proteron of the generations,” Derrida undertakes a brilliant re-reading of the Freudian account of repetition that includes biographical details of how neither Freud or his wife “got over the monstrous fact of children dying before their parents.” Jacques Derrida, “Coming Into One’s Own” in Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text, ed.

peculiar affinity with its protagonist in that both are, in the words of Linda Charnes, a "product of their own belatedness."²⁹ Indeed, Derek Traversi also discusses the text in terms that can only be described as prenatal, arguing that Richard III is a "new type of drama at once the necessary conclusion of all that has gone before and the expression of a new conception of what the chronicle play implies."³⁰

Similarly, returning to Tillyard, not only is Richard III presented as something of a misfit that prevents the symbolic order from fully constituting itself, in an attempt to rescue the play's reputation Tillyard confers what he somewhat anxiously refers to as "shape" on the play. Effectively, what ensues is an invocation of the monologic authority of Shakespeare as the expedient through which contingency can successfully, if not seamlessly, be reconstituted as necessity:

...at the end of the play Shakespeare comes out with his full declaration of the principle of order, thus giving final and unmistakable shape to what, though largely implicit, had been all along the animating principle of the tetralogy.³¹

Geoffrey Hartman (London, 1978), pp.114-149, p.144.

²⁹ Linda Charnes, Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare (London, 1993), p.340.

³⁰ Derek Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare: I Henry VI to Twelfth Night (London, 1968), p.46. The notion that Richard III can be considered a "seminal" moment in the artistic maturity of Shakespeare can still be found in more recent discussions of the text. Elizabeth Pearlman, for example, argues that "The differentiation of Richard from the comparatively colourless orators and warriors who populate the Henry VI plays marks a turning point - perhaps the turning point - in Shakespeare's development into a dramatist of more than ordinary excellence." Elizabeth Pearlman, "The Invention of Richard of Gloucester," Shakespeare Quarterly, 43,4 (1992) pp.411-31, p.411.

³¹ Tillyard, op. cit., p. 207.

Crucially, this totalizing procedure unwittingly engages the text, and more particularly the figure of Richard, as a kind of “vanishing mediator,”³² a structural-dialectical paradox that Slavoj Žižek formulates as “an effect which exists only in order to efface the causes of its existence.”³³ This temporal loop, which implicitly acknowledges the non-coincidence of the text with itself, is also the enabling condition for the putative working out of England’s traumatic past in terms of the text’s retroactive inscription within providential determinism. Crucially, concluding his analysis of the play, Tillyard reinvokes Richard III’s function as a “working out” of the history plays so as to harmonize the contradictory vectors of the text's signification: “Whereas the sins of other men had merely bred more sins, Richard's are so vast that they are absorptive, not contagious.”³⁴

In short, structural antagonisms which may contradict the historical design that Tillyard is attempting to adduce are obviated by the re-introduction of the character of Richard: thereby effecting a displacement of this preternatural excess onto a figure who is already conveniently encoded as deviant. The attempt to retain an origin of meaning from which history can be measured is possible only if the process of “working out” is coterminous with a movement of “absorption,” of coming back. In this respect, the recursive trajectory of the text's significations is more redolent of what Jacques Derrida has called an uncomfortable athesis that is also “contagious” precisely insofar as it exceeds the vigilance of teleology. As Derrida has argued, what the construction of a “tradition” amounts to is

³² According to Fredric Jameson, in an argument where the analogies to Lacan’s definition of the Real are almost too obvious to miss, a system reaches its equilibrium, i.e. it establishes itself as a synchronous totality, when it “posits” its external presuppositions as its inherent moments and thus obliterates the traces of its traumatic origins. See Fredric Jameson, “The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller,” in The Ideologies of Theory: Volume 2 (Minneapolis, 1988), pp.32-64.

³³ Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor (London, 1994), p.204.

³⁴ Tillyard, op. cit., p.216.

an attempt to negotiate a "pathway out of tension between protensions and retentions, projections forward, and retainings of the past."³⁵

"The King Is A Thing"

To recount our discussion so far: as both symptom and cause of all that has gone before, Richard is "within the limits of the play," as Tillyard remarks significantly in the context of a discussion on the credibility of character, "both possible and impossible."³⁶ It is tempting here to read this invocation of "limits" as a species of the kind of Hegelian problematic discussed by Slavoj Žižek; i.e. as a "reflection-into-itself" of the boundary which "emerges when the determinedness which defines the identity of an object is reflected into this object itself and assumes the shape of its own unattainable limit, of what the object can never fully become."³⁷ The figure of Richard, I am suggesting, materialises throughout the text this strangely embodied condition of possibility that is, simultaneously, a condition of impossibility. In other words, it is precisely because Richard is the embodiment of society's meaningless excess ("a foul deformed lump") that he is also the locus for its perceived return to an idealised (and ultimately spurious) vision of harmonious consistency.³⁸

³⁵ Quoted in Marian Hobson, "History Traces" in Poststructuralism and the Question of History, ed. Derek Attridge et. al. (London, 1988), pp 42-68, p.51.

³⁶ Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p.216.

³⁷ Žižek, op. cit., p.100.

³⁸ It is in this more radical sense that we should understand the following remark by M.M. Reese, (which typifies a prominent strain of thought in the criticism of the play): "Gloucester concentrates within himself all the evil and suffering which the country has borne since the Lancastrian usurpation, and all the causes that flowed from it." M.M. Reese, The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1961), p.209. Again we can see here how Richard is located ambivalently as both "cause" and "effect" of the trauma of the civil wars.

Crucially, this vacillation between lack and surplus is also implicit in many of the contemporary debates which sought to identify the obligations of the Absolute Monarch. In a sermon preached in 1594 the Jesuit Robert Parsons employs a familiar trope when he asserts that the community is beautified by the presence of the monarch, without whom it “would be but...A masse of confusion, an ugly and deformed Monster.”³⁹ Indeed, both the function and the “person” of the monarch came increasingly to be regarded in terms that can only be described as phantasmatic: i.e. as a bulwark between a fragile social order and the chaos that remains its immanent necessity. The observation of one commentator that “there is an impression or rude character of dreadful Maiestie stampt in the very visage of a King”⁴⁰ suggests that, while ostensibly committed to the regulation of excess, the monarch is also marked by an over-determined relationship between the seemingly competing categories of waste and transcendent value.

The “invisible” body of the monarch is sublime in the Lacanian sense, insofar as it presents the paradox of an object that is able to subsist only in shadow. Indeed, Slavoj Žižek discusses this point in a way that inevitably returns our attention to the pre-natal associations of Richard. For Žižek the Lacanian sublime object is similarly pre-ontological, it is something that can be conceived only in an “intermediary, half-born state, as something latent, implicit, evoked: as soon as we try to cast away the de-forming shadow to reveal the substance, the object itself dissolves.”⁴¹ We similarly find that the

³⁹ Quoted in Robert Eccleshall, Order and Reason in Politics: Theories of Absolute and Limited Monarchy in Early Modern England (London, 1978), p.34.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.96.

⁴¹ Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture (London, 1996), pp.83-4.

figure of the monarch simultaneously guards against and threatens to dissolve into the excremental dross that is the last phantasmatic support of his sublime body.

For example, anticipating that the recently crowned Queen was destined to have a slightly less than glorious reign, in 1558 the former Bishop of Westminster opined that Elizabeth's England would be comparable to how "as a sowe comyng in to a faire garden, roteth up all the faire and sweet flowers and holesome simples, leaving nothing behinde, but her owne filthye dirte."⁴² It is, however, Edward Forset who provides what is perhaps the most vivid description of the function of the Queen in terms of this negative magnitude; i.e. as the embodiment of the excremental dross or "filthye dirte" that renders the social edifice thinkable in the first place:

Who seeth not, that it belongs to the office of Soveraigntie, to provide for the nourishing and mainteining of the state with necessaries, to amplifie the dominions [...] to spread abroad the encrease of the people by Colonie, in the nature of generating or propagating, to cherish in the subjects an appetite of acquiring of commodities, to grant to them places of Mart and market for the digesting of the same unto all parts of the realme, and so change forme and assimilate them to their most behoofe: to give order for the holding and retaining of that which is become their well agreeing and naturall sustenance, and for the expelling as well of the hurtfull overcharge, as the unprofitable excrements of the weal publique.⁴³

In short, from a Lacanian perspective, what may be discerned in this remarkable passage - where, to be blunt, society becomes a condensation of the rights to eat, fuck and shit - is an understanding of the monarch as nothing less than the particular agency that maintains society's access to the materia prima of enjoyment itself. Crucially, as Jacques-Alain Miller has so persuasively argued, the ethnic moment conceived as nation is, strictly

⁴² Eccleshall, *op. cit.*, p.25.

speaking, possessed of no positive content and it is for this reason that the social edifice attains its identity only in some shared access to enjoyment (jouissance). In fact, the monarch here is located at the site of a surplus enjoyment (sometimes referred to by Lacan in the term plus de jouir which he made structurally homologous with the function of object a). What the monarch “amounts” to is, precisely, a surplus that escapes the network of universal exchange that, paradoxically, he is also called upon to crystallize. From within the context of our discussion of Richard’s “deformity” then, we can see here how the monarch discloses that symbolic intersubjectivity is not the ultimate horizon behind which one cannot reach: what precedes it is not some “monadic” subjectivity, but a pre-symbolic impossible relation to jouissance.⁴⁴

Insofar as the monarch embodies a non-subjectivizing stain or “smear of enjoyment,” can we not also detect here a strangely articulate comment on the “pathological” disposition of Richard? Arraigned time and again as a character that is rendered implausible on account of his “motiveless malignity,” a Lacanian gloss permits the rejoinder that Richard’s role in the play is distinguished by the fact that he is, pre-eminently, someone who enjoys.⁴⁵ For Charles Lamb it is precisely this aspect of Richard that singles him out for special attention as a figure of “habitual jocularly, buoyant spirits and [an] elastic

⁴³ Edward Forset, The Frame of Order, ed. James Winny (London, 1957), pp.93-4.

⁴⁴ It would be particularly useful to refer here to Slavoj Žižek’s discussion of the role of the King in the Jacobinical universe which similarly occupies the locus of a certain surplus of enjoyment:

The Jacobins effectuated a kind of anamorphic reversal: what appeared in the traditional perspective as the charismatic embodiment of the People, as the point at which the People’s ‘life-substance’ acquired immediate existence, changes now, when viewed from another perspective, into a cancerous protuberance contaminating the body of the people.” Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do, p.254.

⁴⁵ In a way that, hopefully, will become clearer as both this and subsequent chapters develop, my point is that the element which holds a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members

mind that rejoices in the success of its machinations.”⁴⁶ Moreover, the New Cambridge editor of the text cautions the reader that any pleasure gleaned from the play is also compromised by a certain displeasure (this, we should note, is also the most basic formulation of Lacanian enjoyment: the ambivalent conjunction of pleasure and displeasure⁴⁷), and that it is “only by realizing that Shakespeare expects us at once to enjoy and detest the monstrous Richard can we fully appreciate the play he wrote about him.”⁴⁸ There is, indeed, as Slavoj Žižek suggests, a curious structural complicity that inheres between enjoyment and deformity. In the following analysis of what Žižek calls “ugly jouissance” it is possible to discern a particularly eloquent summary of how Richard’s own deformity is, as I am arguing, the last phantasmatic support of every symbolization:

The ugly object is an object that is in the wrong place, that ‘shouldn’t be there.’ This does not mean that the ugly object is no longer ugly the moment we relocate it to its proper place; rather, an ugly ‘deformed’ object is ‘in itself’ out of place, on account of the distorted balance between its ‘representation’ (the symbolic features we perceive) and ‘existence’ – being ugly, out of place, is the excess of existence over representation. Ugliness is thus a topological category; it designates an object that is in a way ‘larger than itself,’ whose existence is larger than its representation.⁴⁹

always implies a shared relationship toward what Lacan calls the Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Wilson ed., William Shakespeare, King Richard III (Cambridge, 1958), xxxviii. Moreover, it is this capacity for enjoyment that, perhaps surprisingly, also links Richard to Falstaff as another “larger-than-life” figure who operates as a kind of vanishing mediator of modern subjectivity. That is, both figures may be thought of as mediators between a hierarchized medieval society and the calculating utilitarian attitude of the modern “disenchanted” world. In this precise sense, Richard is the Renaissance figure par excellence.

⁴⁷ According to Lacan, enjoyment (jouissance) is not to be equated with pleasure (Lust): enjoyment is precisely “Lust im Unlust”; it designates the paradoxical satisfaction procured by a painful encounter with a Thing that perturbs the equilibrium of the “pleasure principle.” In other words, enjoyment is located “beyond the pleasure principle.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., xvii.

⁴⁹ Slavoj Žižek, F.W.J. Von Schelling, The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World, Judith Norman trans. (London, 1998), p.21.

So too it is in the deformed figure of Richard that we find perhaps the most disarming example of how lack comes to function as an excess: a necessarily “de-formed” excess or as yet not fully realized “matter” that is in search of a real, or in Richard’s words, “proper” body. In many ways, Richard is the most radical expression of the truth of the pre-bourgeois monarch: for the king to be the rationalizing principle of society, then, he must also embody secretly that element of radical negativity which, according to Hegel, renders the king such a “strange body within the fabric of the state.”⁵⁰ In other words, the monarch has much in common with what Lacan also referred to as the “pure signifier”: although s/he remains unaccounted for by rational mediation, it is precisely this opacity that renders the monarch the element through which society comes to recognize itself in the moment of its impossible unity. It is possible then to bring a properly Lacanian twist here to Hamlet’s scurrilous observation that “The King is a thing...of nothing”: the monarch not only indexes the site of a formal disturbance in the symbolic order, s/he is, in a very radical sense, an optical illusion. Like the anamorphic stain that assumes its contours only when it is viewed from a prescribed angle, the figure of Richard intuitively bears witness to the suspicion that the King is indeed a Thing: he is nothing but this strange materialization of a hole in the Other, a protuberant excess of enjoyment that is the last support of the socio-symbolic edifice itself.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Quoted in Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do, p.228.

⁵¹ Perhaps it is useful to recall here that in 1560 the Queen’s palace at Whitehall contained a series of paintings that claimed to represent a genealogy of the Kings of England, some of which “represented at first sight something quite deformed, till, by looking through a small hole in the cover, which is put over it, you see it in its true proportions.” Quoted in The Public Processions Of Queen Elizabeth I: Volume I, ed. John Nichols (London, 1823), p.25. While this “peephole” form of tromp l’oeil was fashionable at the time, it offers itself as a useful analogy here for our suggestion that the monarch is a semblance that is similarly “incarnated” around a hole in the symbolic order.

In what follows, I would like to develop further some of the Lacanian implications of these issues; partly in the service of what we may refer to cautiously as an ideological analysis of the text. Working upon Ernesto Laclau's provocative hypothesis that "there is ideology whenever a particular content shows itself as more than itself,"⁵² the structural antagonisms cathected by the character of Richard can be read not merely as symptomatic of ideology so much as the ideological effect strictu sensu. Arguing that the "dialectics between necessity and impossibility gives ideology its terrain of emergence" Laclau's account of ideology, at least at a heuristic level, is remarkably similar to the dialectical production of the object that we find in Lacan's model of anamorphosis:

On the one hand closure as such, being an impossible operation, cannot have a content of its own and only shows itself through its projection in an object which at some point assumes the role of incarnating the closure of an ideological horizon, will be deformed as a result of that incarnating function. Between the particularity of the object which attempts to fulfil the operation of closure and this operation, there is a relationship of mutual dependency in which each of the two poles is required, and at the same time, each partially limits the effects of the other.⁵³

Similar to the anamorphic stain in a picture, where consistency is conferred only as a retroactive product brought about by a change in point of view, Laclau's discussion of ideology implicates this structural interdependence of meaning and non-meaning as analogous to the way that the frame of view of so-called reality is always-already framed by a part of its content.⁵⁴

⁵² Ernesto Laclau, "The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology," Modern Language Notes, 112 (1997) pp.297-321, p.303.

⁵³ Ibid., p.303.

⁵⁴ We may refer profitably here to Lacan's assertion that the anamorphic blot, the stain of senseless contingency that gapes in the midst of the symbolic order, exemplifies a "marking [of] the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen." Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. David Macey (London, 1994) p.74. For Lacan this invaginated topology is the most

It is at this anomalous juncture of the traumatic Real that Richard most assiduously solicits the gaze of his audience, retroactively redeeming past crimes only by paradoxically manifesting cause as remainder. What the Real encodes is the radical impossibility of teleology: “cause” is always produced, apres coup, in the symbolic space.⁵⁵ As an “indigested lump” Richard shares a morphology similar to Lacan's definition of the Real as “the object that cannot be swallowed, as it were, which remains stuck in the gullet of the signifier.”⁵⁶ That is, both Richard and the Real pertain to a certain limit that is always missed: they are either too early or too late. Taking seriously Derek Traversi's suggestion that Richard succeeds in “gathering into his person the savagery which everywhere prevails around him,”⁵⁷ then it is precisely at this level of a metaphorical surplus-signification upon which the symbolic coherence of the text's representation of history crucially depends. Retroactively sealing meaning from a point in futurity the monster is truly portentous. In a comment that perhaps encapsulates even more succinctly the paradoxical deixis of contingency and necessity that accompanies any discussion of monsters, we can proceed with our discussion in the light of Aristotle's claim that “The monstrosity though not necessary in regard of a final cause and an end, yet is necessary accidentally.”⁵⁸

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articulate illustration of the constitutive split between the eye and the gaze that is characterized by the scopic drive.

⁵⁵ For Lacan the relationship of the unconscious to the “cause” may be summarized as “the prohibition that brings to being an existent in spite of its non advent, it is a function of the impossible on which a certainty is based.” *Ibid.*, pp.128-9.

⁵⁶ Jacques Lacan, “Subversion of the subject,” p.270.

⁵⁷ Traversi, *op. cit.*, p.54.

As recent critics have noted, both Richard III and Richard II disclose at a more obvious level a paradox that threatens to unmask the teleological project of the history plays: the “first tetralogy” was written earlier but chronicles events that occur in time after the events of the “second.” Both texts appear to evince a paradoxical temporality that actively contests a notion of history in which events are serially disposed. Occupying contradictory and seemingly antagonistic polarities that frame the histories, the “two Richards” constitute a doppelganger logic which operates more properly at the level of Freud's model of traumatic memory, neatly described by Jean Francois Lyotard as “a first moment of shock without affect and a second moment of affect without shock.”⁵⁹

Throughout the text more generally it is the very possibility of a “first time” that is routinely called into question. Indeed, something that renders the play unique in the context of the history plays, we might bear in mind that the title of Richard III announces in advance that Gloucester is in fact destined to be king. It is not only in this sense that the text can be said to reach its destination even before it begins. Time and again Richard III appears to conform to a paradoxical logic that has much in common with Maurice Blanchot's account of narration, described as something moving

towards a point...that is strange but such that it seems to have no prior reality apart from this movement, yet is so compulsive that the narration's appeal depends on it to the extent that it cannot 'begin' before it has reached it.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *op. cit.*, p.20.

⁵⁹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, Heidegger and the Jews (Minneapolis, 1990), p.12.

⁶⁰ Maurice Blanchot, The Siren's Song: Selected Essays by Maurice Blanchot, ed. Gabriel Josopovici, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (Brighton, 1982), p.62.

Analogously, Richard III is marked throughout by this compulsion to repeat, referred to in suitably theatrical terms by Freud in “The Question of Lay Analysis” where he describes the analysand's relation to his past as one in which he “is obliged to stage a revival of an old piece, as though it were actually happening, instead of remembering it.”⁶¹ Freud's metaphor here is not entirely fortuitous. A well known entry in John Manningham's diary dated 13 March 1601 relates how an audience member was so enamoured of Burbage's portrayal of Richard that the actor arranged to meet her for what was, presumably, a secret liaison. The entry in the diary further recalls how

Shakespeare overhearing their conclusion went before, was intertained, and at his game ere Burbidge came. Then message being brought that Rich. the 3.^d was at the dore, Shakespeare caused returne to be made that William the Conqueror was before Rich. the 3.^d⁶²

Although frequently cited, what this entry ironically discloses is how the putative “duping” of Burbage is inexorably tied to the problematic relation between history and repetition that is one of the issues negotiated by the text itself. That is to say, Richard III regularly imparts a self-consciousness of its own theatricality in terms of its uncanny inhabitation of a space of repetition that is, like Burbage's rival, always already there. Indeed, as soon as the text can properly be said to “begin,” Richard outlines the “plots I have laid” (I.i.33) and provides what in fact amounts literally to a synopsis of subsequent plot developments:

Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams,

⁶¹ Sigmund Freud, “The Question of Lay Analysis” in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume 12, ed. David Strachey (London, 1964), p.149.

⁶² Quoted in E.K. Chambers, William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems (Oxford, 1930), p.212.

To set my brother Clarence and the king
 In deadly hate the one against the other:
 And if King Edward be as true and just
 As I am subtle, false and treacherous,
 This day should Clarence closely be mewed up,
 About a prophecy, which says that G
 Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.

(I.i.33-41)

It is here, pre-eminently, that both the text and its protagonist engage in a preposterous logic that even elicits from Richard the self reproach that he must not “run before my horse to market” (I.ii.160). If, as I am arguing, Richard occupies a traumatic place within the text then it is largely because the text itself proffers what Geoffrey Hartman refers to in another context as a “paraprophetic discourse, as prophecy after the event - an event constituted or reconstituted by it, and haunted by the idea of traumatic causation.”⁶³

One particularly resonant example of this discourse may be discerned in an episode which, significantly, also gestures toward an acknowledgement of the text's own derivative and supplementary identity. Announcing the indictment of Hastings, the scrivener is suspicious of the document's authenticity and invites the audience to

...mark how well the sequel hangs together:
 Eleven hours I have spent to write it over,
 For yesternight by Catesby was it sent me;
 The precedent was full as long a-doing:
 And yet within these five hours Hastings lived,
 Untainted, unexamined, free, at liberty.

(III.vi.5-10)

⁶³ Geoffrey Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness* (London, 1980), p.40.

In More's account of Richard's reign, a putative "source" of Richard III, the publication of this defamatory proclamation moves one citizen to comment upon the sequence of events with the sardonic observation that "it was written by prophecy."⁶⁴ Indeed, the uncanny aspect of this scene is compounded further by the fact that Hastings, in a much remarked upon encounter, meets his own double in the person of the pursuivant who is also called Hastings. From a specifically psychoanalytical perspective, however, the fate of the appropriately named "Hastings" may be read as a kind of allegory for the recursive temporal dynamic that is such a prevalent feature of the text. That is to say, it is because the subject's symbolic identification always has an anticipatory, indeed "hastening" character that this bizarre textual intromission also recalls Richard's anticipatory recognition of self in the mirror: the paradigmatic case where the subject is, in a sense, already preceded by its "double."⁶⁵

Nevertheless, it remains the case that it is the character of Richard who is most frequently identified as the site of this traumatic causation, locating him at a contestatory position in relation to questions of "sequence" and "history" that compete for legitimacy throughout the text. Indeed, at one point Richard interrupts Queen Margaret and appoints himself not

⁶⁴ Thomas More, History of King Richard the Third, ed. J.R. Lumby (London, 1953), p.53.

⁶⁵ Bearing in mind my suggestion that Richard III is a text where the consistency of the symbolic order is compromised through the inclusion of the object a in the person of Richard, it is tempting to pursue this particular analysis even further. According to Mladen Dolar's radical reworking of the uncanny as symptomatic of this proximity of the Real, the figure of the double is read as evidence that the object a has not been evacuated from the field of "reality": "We can now see the trouble with the double: the double is that mirror image in which the object a is included. So the imaginary starts to coincide with the real, provoking a shattering anxiety. The double is the same as me plus the object a, that invisible part of being added to my image." It is precisely to this extent, Dolar argues, that "the double is always the figure of jouissance." Mladen Dolar, "I Shall Be with You On Your Wedding Night': Lacan and the Uncanny," October, 1991(58), pp.5-23, p.13.

only the adjudicator of matters relating to historical verisimilitude, but, more radically, as the very figure around which the collective memory should reconstruct itself:

Let me put in your minds, if you forget,
 What you have been ere this, and what you are;
 Withal, what I have been, and what I am.

(I.iii.131-133)

Effectively, what Richard does here is to question the notion that memory is a strictly symbolic function by implying that subjectivity inheres in a network of signifiers that constitute a certain relationship toward the Real. We may refer here briefly to Laplanche and Leclaire who have argued that the so called “return of the repressed” should not be understood in terms of an element which, once recovered, will reactivate continuity, but as “an interpretative elaboration or working through whose role is to weave around a rememorated element an entire network of meaningful relations that integrate it into the subject's explicit apprehension of himself.”⁶⁶ Indeed, as the accomplished actor, Richard's diabolic force resides precisely in this talent for reinterpreting the relationship between subjectivity and memory in terms of improvisation:

Elizabeth: Shall I be tempted of the devil thus?
 Richard: Ay, if the devil tempt you to do good.
 Elizabeth: Shall I forget myself to be myself?
 Richard: Ay, if yourself's remembrance
 wrong yourself.

⁶⁶ Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, “The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study,” *Yale French Studies*, 48 (1972), pp.111-141, p.128. Moreover, it is in this precise sense that Richard reveals himself to be a subject that is defined by his “historicity.” According to Lacan this may be read as a “limit [that] represents the past in its real form, that is to say, not the physical past whose existence is abolished; nor the epic past as it has become perfected in the work of memory, nor the historic past in which man finds the guarantor of his future, but the past which reveals itself reversed in repetition.” Jacques Lacan, “The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, pp.30-113, p.103.

(IV.iv.419-423)

Richard's theatrical conception of selfhood is demonstrated frequently in the application of his improvisational skills to successive writings and re-writings of history. Nowhere is this facility more deftly deployed than in his "seduction" of Lady Anne. Presenting himself as "the plain devil and dissembling looks" Richard exclaims

And yet to win her! all the world to nothing!
 Ha?
Hath she forgot already that brave prince,
 Edward, her lord, whom I, some three months since,
 Stabbed in my angry mood at Tewkesbury?

(I.ii.230-235)

Commenting upon his own performance, especially as one who is committed to resurrecting events that are "In the deep ocean buried" (I.i.iv), Richard becomes the conduit through which the text, in this strange sense, regularly encounters its own forgetfulness. That is, it is precisely through his function as an agent of repetition throughout the text that he also discloses the unheimliche effects of "something which is secretly familiar...which has undergone repression and then returned from it."⁶⁷ Richard, in fact, regularly invokes his double, whether it is by becoming a spectator to his own "shadow" (I.1.26; I.ii.230), or by christening Buckingham "my other self" (III.iii.48). The double is not only the initial repetition, the first repetition of the same, but also that which, for Lacan, is a species of the object a insofar as it signals that remainder or trace of jouissance which escapes the otherwise "totalizing" function of the mirror stage. It is in this precise sense that Richard's capacity for doubling also operates as a harbinger of

⁶⁷ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" in Art and Literature (London, 1974), pp. 342-68, p.354.

death: as a little piece of the real that bears witness to something that persists (and insists) “beyond the pleasure principle.” Indeed, commenting specifically on Freud's frequent association of the diabolical with repetition, Jacques Derrida argues persuasively that this appropriately titled “limping devil” is

The figure of the diabolical [which] simultaneously looks in the direction of Beyond...and in the direction of Das Unheimliche...it upsets the appeasing order of representation. However, it does so not by reducing double effects but, on the contrary, by expanding them, by expanding the effect of duplicity without an original, which perhaps is what the diabolical consists of.⁶⁸

So too it is the case that Richard, who is variously identified throughout the tetralogy as a “limping devil,” is equipped with a truly diabolical force precisely insofar as he indexes a potentially lethal surplus of radical alterity that, simultaneously, both thwarts and gives rise to the hegemonizing fictions of the text's putatively historical project. Crucially, it is also the case that the text's deeply ambivalent rhetoric of forgetting is invoked in contradictory ways that serve, at times, to contest the protocols of linearity and tradition that legitimise absolutist ideology. For example, Buckingham's protracted exhortation to Richard to become king is rendered doubly ironic: meticulously rehearsed in advance it also serves to implicate the iterability of theatre itself in a deeply ironic politics of memory:

The noble isle doth want her proper limbs;
Her face defaced with scars of infamy,
Her royal stock graffed with ignoble plants,
And almost should' red in the swallowing gulf
Of dark forgetfulness and deep oblivion.

(III.vii.125-129)

⁶⁸ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1987), p.270.

Once again, not only does Richard become the somewhat unlikely element through which the “nation” itself comes to acquire ontological consistency; simultaneously venerating Richard as both the congealing of England's memory and the embodiment of her identity, Buckingham's rhetoric here is all the more remarkable for its morphological frame of reference. In short, the erstwhile deformed Richard now becomes the phantasmatic support for what is envisaged as a reformation of national identity and historical continuity:

If not to bless us and the land withal,
 Yet to draw forth your noble ancestry
 From the corruption of abusing times
Unto a lineal true-derived course.

(ll. 197-200)

Ultimately, this speech occupies a deeply contradictory space in the repertoire of representations associated with Richard throughout the text: to recall our earlier argument, the formless is now converted into the sublime moment of national identity, and the previously orphaned Richard is the exemplar of linearity and a “true-derived course.” How are we to understand this paradox, especially in relation to Richard's problematic position in the text's putatively “historical” narrative?

“I call thee not”

At one level, we can once again approach what is, quite literally, this radical reorientation of perspective in terms of Lacan's account of anamorphosis: i.e. how an otherwise protuberant excess or stain of jouissance that appears initially to denature the field of

meaning and sense becomes, ultimately, its last phantasmatic support. For Lacan anamorphosis became a particularly useful heuristic device to illuminate how, in the logic of the signifier, meaning and non-meaning always collide at a point of structural, anamorphous tension.

Lacan's theoretical elaboration of this dynamic is perhaps best exemplified by his notion of the point de capiton. Just as the anamorphic stain only comes to acquire some measure of consistency through an always implicitly temporal dislocation and alteration in perspective, similarly no signifier is itself isolatable until a point is reached in the signifying chain which then confers symbolic consistency on preceding events retroactively. Lacan identifies the locus of this “quilting” as the point de capiton, a “pure” signifier that is, in itself, meaningless but which gains its privilege only belatedly as the signifier through which other signifiers come to recognize themselves in their “unity”: “A signifying unit presupposes the completion of a certain circle that resituates its different elements.”⁶⁹ Sense emerges from nonsense only at a point which retroactively and provisionally seals the meaning of a sentence, such that notions of “before” and “after” co-operate in terms of a structural, anamorphic tension.

In relation to Richard III 's troubled encounter with its own teleological project, it is no surprise to find then that it is Richard who most frequently reveals this contingent aspect

⁶⁹ Jacques Lacan, The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III 1955-1956, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (London, 1993), p. 263.

Interestingly, both here and elsewhere in his work Lacan adduces Shakespeare as the most articulate spokesperson for this effect. Implicitly concerned to demonstrate how the subject can only find his very ‘being’ at the point of a certain formal disturbance in the signifying chain, it is also here, precisely, that subjectivization takes place: “What does one start with? [...] I go about looking for a sentence, a bit like this pseudo-Shakespeare stuck for improvisation, who paces up and down, repeating – To be or not...to be or not..., again – To be or not...to be.” *Ibid.*, p.262. As I have

in the construction of meaning and subjectivity. Significantly, it is precisely when his own identity is under the most sustained assault that Richard discloses the radical implications of Lacan's thesis: that what we refer to as identity emerges only at a point which, quite literally, "sews" meaning into the signifier:

Queen Margaret: Thou elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog!
 Thou that wast sealed in thy nativity
 The slave of nature and the son of hell!
 Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb!
 Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins!
 Thou rag of honour! thou detested

Gloucester: Margaret.

Queen Margaret: Richard!

Gloucester: Ha?

Queen Margaret: I call thee not.

(I.iii.228-237)

In many ways it is possible to read this encounter as offering nothing less than a critique of the performative dimension that underpins every gesture of ideological interpellation tout court. That is to say, in the domain proper to ideology interpellation consists in the subject's acceding to the "call" of the Other in a way that simultaneously occludes the strictly performative nature of this seemingly "spontaneous" accession to the address of the Other.⁷⁰ In contrast, Richard's intervention just before his name is to become the

argued, in the case of Richard we find a figure who is, in fact, considerably adept at "improvisation."

⁷⁰ See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays (London, 1991), pp.52-91. Despite Althusser's much remarked upon 'indebtedness' to Lacan here, on the question of interpellation there remains a quite considerable distance between the two thinkers. Crucially, the point of disagreement appears to rest upon Althusser's understanding of the Real in a way that is in fact quite foreign to Lacan's use of this term. By far the most important commentary on this issue is provided by Slavoj Žižek: "What is missing from the Althusserian account of this gesture of symbolic identification, of recognizing oneself in a symbolic mandate, is that it is a move aimed at resolving the deadlock of the subject's radical uncertainty as to its status (what am I qua object for the Other?). The first thing to do apropos of interpellation in a Lacanian approach is therefore to reverse Althusser's formula of ideology which 'interpellates individuals into subjects': it is

“quilting point” of Margaret's speech serves partly to unmask the way that signification seeks to produce identity apres coup. In other words, Richard demystifies the illusion necessary to the conferring of a symbolic mandate; where, for it to be effective, the subject must misrecognize that it is the very act of recognition that in fact makes him what he has recognised himself as.

The subversive aspect of Richard's interruption, then, achieves its impact precisely because Richard discloses the structural conditions under which he successively becomes pinned to signifiers that “represent” him for the other and assign him a place in the intersubjective network. Disclosing the arbitrary nature of every mandate, Richard ultimately refuses to accede to the call: “I cry thee mercy then, for I did think/Thou hadst called me all these bitter names” (ll. 238-239).⁷¹ Indeed, read as an example of his much noted skill at improvisation throughout the play, Richard comes perilously close here to an understanding of the Lacanian “Big Other” as something that, strictly speaking, does not exist (\bar{A}): like the subject ($\$$), the symbolic order is constitutively split from within. In other words, Richard discloses how symbolization is always a retroactive illusion, a

never the individual which is interpellated as subject, into subject; it is on the contrary the subject itself who is interpellated as x (some specific subject-position, symbolic identity or mandate), thereby eluding the abyss of $\$$.” Slavoj Žižek, Tarrying With The Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology (Durham, 1993), pp.73-4. It is precisely this kind of reversal that, I am arguing, is also revealed through Richard's interventions. Therein consists the anti-Althusserian gist of both Richard and Lacan: subject qua $\$$ is not an effect of interpellation, of the recognition in an ideological call; it rather stands for the very gesture of calling into question the identity conferred on the subject by way of interpellation.

⁷¹ Again, Lacan offers a particularly eloquent summary of the structural co-ordinates of this “speech”: “What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as a subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me.” Jacques Lacan, “The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis” in Écrits: A Selection, pp.30-113, p.86. In other words, desire finds its meaning here in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object of desire, as because the first object of desire, according to Lacan, is to be recognized by the other.

compromise formation produced around an antagonism that gapes in the midst of “meaning.”⁷²

Indeed, as John Drakakis points out, this very question of Richard’s symbolic mandate, of what name he is to be called, has in fact been the source of sustained editorial dispute.

Briefly, in Q the speech-prefix of “Glo” is used until Richard becomes King, after which the prefix changes to “King”; in F, however, the speech-prefix of “Rich.” is used throughout. Drakakis avers that

The instability in Q encourages the conjecture that in this version of the printed text the allegorical and non-individuated mode of the dramatic characterisation of Richard predominated, emphasising its fundamentally interactive nature. F reduces this fluidity to a coherent identity, a practice which modern editions have been reluctant to give up. (emphasis added)⁷³

It is precisely this dramatic characterisation of Richard as performing, in the most radical sense, an “interactive” function in the text that I am trying to insist upon here.

Throughout the play, in fact, the efficacy of certain symbolic titles routinely become the focus of some anxiety. For example, in an attempt to persuade Elizabeth that “The king, that calls your beauteous daughter wife,/Familiarly shall call thy Dorset brother”

(IV.iv.316-17), Elizabeth subsequently teases Richard with the question “Under what title

⁷² Richard appears to bear out Mark Poster’s contention that when an individual is addressed by an interpellation, she/he is “invited to play a role in such a way that the invitation appears to have already been answered by the subject before it was proposed, but at the same time the invitation could be refused.” Mark Poster, The Second Media Age (Cambridge, 1995), p.81.

⁷³ John Drakakis (ed) Shakespearean Originals: First Editions, The Tragedy of King Richard the Third (London, 1996), pp.31-2. Drakakis offers a brief overview of the kind of confusion that this has caused in modern editions of the play: “[...]the New Arden edition..combines ‘Rich.’ For much of the text, and then uses ‘K.Rich.’ In Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (eds), William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, An Original Old-spelling Edition, the puzzling combination of ‘RICHARD GLOCESTER’ and ‘KING RICHARD’ is used, while in their modern spelling edition the combination ‘RICHARD GLOUCESTER’ and ‘KING RICHARD’ is used. In all these cases there is

shall I woo for thee..?” (IV.iv.341). Similarly, Richard’s vow that he will love Elizabeth’s daughter “everlastingly”, is greeted with the punning retort of “how long shall that title/ ‘ever’ last?” (IV.iv. 51-2).

If there is a persistent anxiety throughout the text about the stability of certain titles, it is partly on account of the fact that subjectivity is shown to depend less upon any question of individuated identity, than upon the very movement of the signifier itself. In this respect Richard III demonstrates considerable difficulties in every effort to “attend the sequel” (III.vii.232) and is more inclined to gravitate toward the time of interruption, toward that which is simultaneously “determined, not concluded yet” (I.iii.15). Indeed, it is discontinuity that comes increasingly to colour the rhetorical stratagems of numerous speakers throughout the text, all of which to some extent exemplify Lacan’s thesis that “it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning ‘insists’ but where none of its elements ‘consists’ in the signification of which it is at that moment capable.”⁷⁴ Time and again the text elevates to an idiomatic principle this propensity to “Murder breath in middle of a word,/ And then again begin, and stop again,” (III.v.3-4). Buckingham, for example, actually recommends this as a rhetorical strategy designed to ensnare Hastings:

Encourage him, and tell him all our reasons:
If he be leaden, icy-cold, unwilling,
Be thou so too; and so break off the talk,
And give us notice of his inclination.

(III.i.175-8)

an editorial reluctance to relinquish the coherence of individual identity.” *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7, n.43.

Throughout the text it is this fundamental anomaly that it falls to speech not to reduce but to convey, even if it does so without saying it or signifying it. Surprising Richard at prayer, Buckingham apologises for the “interruption/Of thy devotion” (II.vii.102-3); Richard is enraged that the Duchess of York “intercepts me in my expedition” (IV.iv.136) and compares Buckingham’s repeated interruptions to a clock which “keep’st the stroke/Betwixt thy begging and my meditation” (IV.ii.112-13). Effecting what is soon revealed to be a spurious concord among his court’s competing factions, King Edward intones that “There wanteth now our brother Gloucester here,/To make the blessed period of our peace” (II.i.44-5). Bearing in mind here that Richard characterises himself as one that “halts and am misshapen thus” (I.ii.250),⁷⁵ in a more radical sense he comes to function, quite literally, as a “period”⁷⁶: reshaping the meaning of the signifying chain in the ambivalent role of a “shifter,” described by Lacan as that moment when

[...] the sentence is interrupted at the point at which the group of words that one might call index-terms ends, the terms being either those designated by their function in the signifier, [...] as shifters, or precisely the terms which, in

⁷⁴ Jacques Lacan, “Agency of the letter in the unconscious,” p.153.

⁷⁵ In other words, Richard to some extent is the embodied representative of the kind of “error of perspective” that Slavoj Žižek perceives as a paradox that secretly supports every ideological edifice. Discussing Lacan’s point de capiton, Žižek argues that “we could denote this ‘error of perspective’ as ideological anamorphosis. Lacan often refers to Holbein’s ‘Ambassadors’: if we look at what appears from the frontal view as an extended, ‘erected’ meaningless spot, from the right perspective we notice the contours of a skull. The criticism of ideology must perform a somewhat homologous operation: if we look at the element which hold together the ideological edifice, at this ‘phallic’, erected Guarantee of Meaning, from the right perspective, we are able to recognise in it the embodiment of a lack, of a chasm of non-sense gaping in the midst of ideological meaning,” Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London, 1992), pp.99-100. Analogously, I am arguing that Richard is also homologous to this congealment of non-sense, the traumatic stain of jouissance that disturbs the coherence of the text’s symbolic fictions.

⁷⁶ There are several examples to be found which implicitly confirm this view of Richard as an “interactive” function in the text. For example, interrupting a conference that is in fact contrived to urge his accession to the throne, Richard languidly remarks “I trust/My absence doth not neglect no great design,/Which by my presence might have been concluded,” to which Buckingham responds “Had you not come upon your cue,/my lord,/William Lord Hastings had pronounced your part” (III.iv.24-8).

the code, indicate the position of the subject on the basis of the message itself.⁷⁷

Time and again Richard confers on speech what, following Lacan, we might refer to as its dialectical punctuation. To this extent, he is less a “character” in the play than a kind of empty integer which becomes a focal point for “effects” produced by the signifier.⁷⁸ The most common rhetorical gesture in this regard is Richard’s tendency to interrupt the flow of discourse: fastening upon a particular word, he then makes it compel a meaning fatally at odds with the one we assume that the speaker had originally intended. For example, in the midst of Richard’s inveighing against Queen Maragret’s witchcraft (which he blames for his deformity), Hastings volunteers the suggestion that

Hastings: If they have done this deed, my
Noble lord, -

Gloucester: If! Thou protector of this damned strumpet,
Talk’st thou to me of ‘ifs’? Thou art a traitor:
Off with his head!

(II.72-6)

Alternatively, we might recall Richard’s exasperation at Rivers’ attempts to rescue Elizabeth from the charge that she is responsible for Hastings’ imprisonment:

⁷⁷ Jacques Lacan, “On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, pp.179-225, p.186. Lacan borrows his use of the term shifter from the work of Roman Jakobson. Jakobson defines shifters as “a special class of grammatical units” whose general meaning “cannot be defined without reference to the message (namely, in Lacanian terms, to the signifying sequence). Quoted in Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe *The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan*, trans. David Pettigrew (Albany, 1992), p.69.

⁷⁸ To this extent, Richard becomes a kind of literalization of what Lacan refers to as ‘the subject of the signifier’: i.e., an empty place without support in imaginary or symbolic identification. Ironically it is in fact quite accurate to claim that Richard is the embodiment of pure “demonic” evil, precisely insofar as he also embodies the

Gloucester: You may deny that you were not
 The mean
 Of my Lord Hastings' late imprisonment.
 Rivers: She may, my lord, for –
 Gloucester: She may, Lord Rivers! Why, who
 Knows not so?
 She may do more, sir, than denying that:
 She may help you to many fair preferments
 And then deny her aiding hand therein,
 And lay those honours on your high desert.
 What may she not? She may – ay, marry, may she –
 Rivers: What, marry, may she?
 Gloucester: What marry, may she! Marry with a king [...] ⁷⁹

(I.iii.90-100)

In a sense operating as a kind of distorting mirror for the speech of the other characters, Richard bears more than a passing resemblance to the function of the analyst in psychoanalysis: he is less concerned with “intention” than with “true speech,” with the surplus of what is effectively said over the intended meaning. Indeed, Richard’s perceived “villainy” is often proportionate to his expertise at manipulating the dialectical structure of communication, most famously defined by Lacan as that moment when the subject gets back from the other his own message in its inverted, true form. If for Lacan it is here that every letter arrives at its true destination, this is also the implied context for Edward’s horror at the death of Clarence:

King Edward: Is Clarence dead? The order

pure spirituality of a will that is delivered from every “pathological” motivation. Richard’s ability to “render blessings for curses” is strangely eloquent in this respect. ⁷⁹ Again, this exchange may be read, *avant la lettre*, as an illustration of Lacan’s claim that “the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by unfolding its dimension before it. As is seen at the level of the sentence when it is interrupted before the significant term: ‘I shall never....,’ ‘All the same it is....,’ ‘And yet there may be....,’ Such sentences are not without meaning, a meaning all the more oppressive in that it is content to make us wait for it.” Jacques Lacan, “Agency of the letter in the unconscious,” p.153.

Was reversed.
 Gloucester: But he, poor man, by your first order died,
 And that a winged Mercury did appear;
 Some tardy cripple bare the countermand
 That came too lag to see him buried.

(II.i.86-91)

Moreover, later in the play Buckingham is similarly horrified when he eventually falls victim to the villainy that he so strongly urged in Richard. Getting back from Richard his own message in what is represented, quite literally, as its inverted form, Buckingham laments how

That high All-Seer which I dallied with
 Hath turned my feigned prayer on my head,
 And given in earnest what I begged in jest.
 Thus doth He force the swords of wicked men
 To turn their own points in their Master's bosom.

(V.i.20-24)

In several other respects certain rhetorical set pieces in the text are characterised by a contrapuntal “question-and-answer” structure that, in fact, illustrate Lacan’s insistence that speech always subjectively includes its own reply. Indeed, this effect is nowhere more conspicuously in evidence than in Richard’s protracted exchange with Queen Elizabeth. Trying to convince the Queen of his fitness as a suitor to her daughter, what ensues is as eloquent an illustration as we are likely to find of Lacan’s thesis:

King Richard: Sweetly in force unto her fair
 life's end.
 Queen Elizabeth: But how long fairly shall her sweet
 life last?
 King Richard: As long as heaven and nature
 Lengthens it.
 Queen Elizabeth: As long as hell and Richard likes

Of it.
 King Richard: Say, I, her sovereign, am her
 Subject love.
 Queen Elizabeth: But she, your subject, loathes
 Such sovereignty.
 King Richard: Be eloquent in my behalf to her.
 Queen Elizabeth: An honest tale speeds best being
 Plainly told.
 King Richard: Then plainly to her tell my
 Loving tale.
 Queen Elizabeth: Plain and not honest is too harsh
 A style.
 King Richard: Your reasons are too shallow and
 Too quick.
 Queen Elizabeth: O no, my reasons are too deep
 and dead.

(IV.iv. 353-78)

The purpose of the preceding argument, where I have been concerned to pursue the implications of Lacan's notion of the point de capiton, is to suggest that Richard III is unable finally to occlude the traces of a textual difference that remains the immanent necessity of its signifying practices. Insofar as the text (particularly in the figure of its protagonist) frequently bears witness to a constitutive power of repetition, or what Marjorie Garber terms as "uncanny causality,"⁸⁰ it also unsettles the appeasing power of representation as something that privileges linearity, succession and sequentiality. Most significant in this respect, I have argued, is what amounts to a kind of "failed interpellation" that occurs in Richard's exchange with Queen Margaret.

⁸⁰ Marjorie Garber, Shakespeare's Ghost Writers (London, 1985). While, ultimately, her concerns are more thematic in this respect, Patricia Parker also makes some interesting points about the play in terms of its capacity to initiate reversals in the appeasing logic of linearity and sequentiality. Patricia Parker, "Preposterous Estates, Preposterous Events: From Late to Early Shakespeare," in Shakespeare From The Margins: Language, Culture, Context (London, 1996), pp.20-56.

Indeed, Queen Margaret is, we should recall, the only character to appear throughout the entire first tetralogy. At least at an exegetic level, her function in Richard III conforms precisely to the discourse of the Other which according to Lacan “is not the discourse of the abstract other, of the other in the dyad, of my correspondent, nor even of my slave, it is the discourse of the circuit in which the subject is integrated.”⁸¹ Indeed, earlier in the scene Richard elicits from Margaret a comment that would appear to support this view of her function in the text:

Gloucester: Foul wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou
in my sight?

Margaret: But repetition of what thou hast marred;
That will I make before I let thee go

(ll. 164-168)

“The meaning of repetition,” Lacan argues “has all to do with the intrusion of the symbolic register.”⁸² The failed capitonnage that is disclosed through Richard’s interventions also reveals that it is through repetition that the symbolic order tries to “hail” the individual into a space that is, in a sense, always already there. This is also the effect, irreducibly theatrical, that Lacan discerns in the story of Oedipus, where the oracle also comes to embody the discourse of the Other⁸³:

Oedipus' unconscious is nothing other than this fundamental discourse whereby, long since, for all time, Oedipus' history is out there - written, and we know it, but Oedipus is ignorant of it, even as he is played out by it since the beginning...Everything takes place in the function of the Oracle

⁸¹ Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (London, 1989), p.89-90. Moreover, Lacan argued that “The Other is, therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks to him who hears, that which is said by the one being already the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken.” Jacques Lacan, “The Freudian Thing” in Ecrits: A Selection, pp.114-46, p.141.

⁸² Ibid., p.88.

⁸³ Margaret, we should recall, is explicitly referred to as “a prophetess” (V.i.27).

and of the fact that Oedipus is truly other than what he realizes as his history...The whole pulsation of the drama of his destiny, from the beginning to the end, hinges on the veiling of this discourse, which is his reality without his knowing it.⁸⁴

Richard's "history", like that of Oedipus, is "played out" only insofar as the text "embodies its own forgetting."⁸⁵ One particularly notable case of amnesia occurs when the young Duke of York repeats the mythic account of his uncle's birth where Richard "could gnaw a crust at two hours old" (II.iii.36). The inquiry as to how the Duke came to be in possession of this knowledge is the cause of some dispute:

Duchess: His nurse! Why, she was dead ere thou
wast born.

York: If 'twere not she, I cannot tell who told me.

(II.iv.27-35)

What this quite bizarre exchange highlights is precisely the Oedipal maxim that "knowledge" is nothing other than the crystallization of symbolical activity which is subsequently forgotten once constituted. Again, though in a slightly displaced form, Richard stands in an antagonistic relationship to the text's traumatic return to the question of birth. If history at its most radical level conforms to a future anterior of that which only ever "will have been," i.e. as something that eschews recourse to an act of simple remembrance, through its eponymous anti-hero Richard III alludes to an awareness of its own inscription within a symbolic horizon that contradicts and anamorphically disfigures its status as merely a "chronicle" or non-problematic repository of past events. Indeed, another curious episode that we might wish to read as an index of the uncanny, centres around a dialogue on the origins of the Tower of London. Crucially, the exchange serves

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.245.

⁸⁵ Felman, *op. cit.*, p.105.

to contest explicitly the idea of memory as that which is concerned merely with the presencing of something that is absent:

Prince: Did Julius Caesar build that place, my lord?
 Buckingham: He did my gracious lord, begin
 that place;
 Which, since, succeeding ages have re-edified.
 Prince: Is it upon record, or else reported
 Successively from age to age, he built it?
 Buckingham: Upon record, my gracious lord.
 Prince: But say, my lord, it were not regist'ed,
 Methinks the truth should live from age to age,
 As 'twere retailed to all posterity,
 Even to the general all-ending day.

(III.i.69-79)

What the Prince refers to here is nothing other than the logic of repetition that characterizes the intersubjective network, an “always-already-there” which, in Derrida's words, “no reactivation of the origin could fully master and awaken to presence.” What I also want to suggest is that it is possible to read the Prince's comments here in the light of the Elizabethan theatre's own complicity in, literally, “retailing” and “retelling” truths in such a way that iterability becomes the *modus operandi* of symbolic exchange. This connection is made explicit in The Gull's Hornbook, Dekker's parodic consumer guide to London life, where the author identifies “The theatre as the poets' Royal Exchange....when your groundling and gallery commoner buys his sports by the penny and like a haggler is glad to utter it again by retailing.”⁸⁶ Indeed, what the theatre reveals is the essential impossibility of any absolute synchronization tout court. In a passage that has manifold implications for any discussion of the history plays, Jacques Derrida argues that theatre itself is unthinkable outside a consideration of repetition:

⁸⁶ Thomas Dekker, Thomas Dekker: Selected Writings, ed. E.D. Pandy (Oxford, 1967), p.98.

Disjunction, dislocation, separation of places, deployment of spacing of a story...could there be any theatre without that? The survival of a theatrical work implies that, theatrically, it is saying something about theatre itself, about its essential possibility. And that it does so, theatrically, then, through the play of uniqueness and repetition...⁸⁷

It is precisely this “play of uniqueness and repetition” that has so perturbed critics: either the text is arraigned for not letting the “audience know enough soon enough”⁸⁸ or, alternatively, it is accused of being “possessed of a much too anticipatable conclusion.”⁸⁹ Rather, what the text’s non coincidence with itself amounts to is a drama of dispossession: an expropriation of the text by itself as it seeks to integrate the radically non-historical kernel that simultaneously gives rise its own “historical” project. With its cast of monsters, dreams, ghosts and prophecies, Richard III resembles a psychoanalytic case study, yet what also emerges is how this phantasmatic space traces its trajectory in explicitly theatrical terms. A consideration of how the scopic register of the text participates in what I have been discussing as an anamorphous logic of repetition relies upon Lacan’s account of the gaze as that other impossible object which is similarly tied to the domination of the subject by the symbolic order. The last section will focus upon these theoretical issues by expanding upon Lacan’s crucial argument that “it is within the explanation of repetition that...the scopic function is situated.”⁹⁰

Fatal Attractions

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Aphorism, Countertime” in Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (London, 1992), pp.414-35, p.419.

⁸⁸ Tom F. Driver, The Sense of History in Greek and Shakespearean Drama (London, 1967), p.88.

⁸⁹ Louis Auchincloss, Motiveless Malignity (London, 1970), p.46.

⁹⁰ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.79.

In many respects Richard III can be said to articulate a relationship between theatre and history in terms of a repeated encounter with its own “blind” spots. A particularly resonant example can be found in the insistent anxieties relating to blindness recounted in Clarence's dream, although on this occasion it is associated with a surplus of vision:

"What dreadful noise of waters in mine ears!/What sights of ugly death within mine eyes!"

(I.iv.22-23). This figurative alignment of drowning with an overabundance of vision

becomes increasingly complex as Clarence relates the details of his nightmare:

Methought I saw a thousand fearful wracks;
A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon;
Wedges of gold, great ingots, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
All scatt'ed in the bottom of the sea.
Some lay in dead men's skulls; and in the holes
Where eyes did once inhabit these were crept,
As 'twere in scorn of eyes, reflecting gems,
That wooed the slimy bottom of the deep,
And mocked the dead bones that lay scatt'ed by.

(I.iv.24-33)

If, as Christopher Pye has suggested, Clarence indicates his awareness that he exists in the play solely in order to die,⁹¹ this speech is the most explicit example of how the play “shows itself showing itself” by returning its gaze upon the audience. At a psychoanalytical level, the speech itself indexes this radical alterity of the gaze in a way that conforms to Lacan's account of the scopical register of the dream. “In the so-called waking state,” Lacan argues, “there is an elision of the gaze, and an elision of the fact that not only does it look it also shows. In the field of the dream, on the other hand, what

⁹¹ Christopher Pye, The Regal Phantasm: Shakespeare and the Politics of Spectacle (London, 1992), p.80..

characterises the images is that it shows.”⁹² A field of pure monstrosity, the exhibitionist dimension of dreams, for Lacan, acts as a compelling example, pace Descartes, of the subject's inability to master the field of vision. Indeed, Clarence responds to Brakenbury's teasing enquiry as to whether he had time “To gaze upon the secrets of the deep,” by insisting that

Methoughts I had, and often did I strive
To yield the ghost: but still the envious flood
Stopped in my soul, and would not let it forth
To find the empty, vast, and wand'ring air.

(ll. 35-39)

Similarly, according to Lacan, the dream involves submission to an excessive and oppressive visuality so that “the subject does not see where it is leading, he follows.” Blindness and vision regularly supplant each other in Clarence's dream, climaxing in the image of the jewels which act as prosthetic eyes of “dead men's skulls.” It is no coincidence that, for Lacan, the jewel acts as a metaphor for the disarming proximity of the gaze of the Other insofar as: “The point of the gaze participates in the ambiguity of the jewel.”⁹³ The diffuse irradiating power of the jewel's reflection lures the viewing subject and transfixes him as an object in the sight of the world. This surplus visuality is comparable to drowning in the overflowing and inapprehensible function of the gaze where “Light may travel in a straight line, but it is refracted, diffused, it floods, it fills - the eye is a sort of bowl - it flows over too.” Similar to that other favoured Lacanian motif for the annihilating power of the gaze, Holbein's Ambassadors, the skull in Clarence's dream finds mortality inextricably linked to entrapment within a scopic field that cannot

⁹² Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.75.

be mastered. Just as anamorphosis reveals how the subject is both inscribed into and at the mercy of a scopic field that exceeds the subject's mastery, so Clarence's portentous dream also evokes an uncanny sense of his own inscription within the larger symbolic space of the text. When it inevitably comes, Clarence's death not only involves his drowning in a "malmsey-butt," in a bitterly ironic gesture, his demise is hastened by a naive faith in the power of perception:

Clarence: My friend, [to 2 Murderer] I spy some pity in thy looks
 O, if thine eye be not a flatterer,
 Come thou on my side, and entreat for me.
 A begging prince what beggar pities not?
 2 Murderer: Look behind you, my lord
 1 Murderer: ['stabs him']

(I.iv..264-269)

Although to a modern audience the warning to "Look behind you" is a refrain more commonly associated with pantomime, it also serves here as a comment on the fate of the subject caught in the "trap" of the gaze that "circumscribes us,..makes us beings who are looked at, but without showing this."⁹⁴ According to Lacan this emergence of the gaze is always potentially lethal: precisely insofar as it indexes the incursion into reality of something that must remain implicit if the subject is to retain any degree of ontological consistency. That is to say, for Lacan the gaze qua object a is that "thing" which is the objective correlative of the subject in the guise of a radical negativity.

This complex relationship between death and the scopic drive is most commonly associated with Richard who, we should recall, is frequently aligned with the myth of "the

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.96.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.75.

evil eye.” In III Henry VI he commits himself to “slaying more gazers than the Basiliskes.” In Richard III he is similarly endowed with a deadly power of fascination: the possessor of a “deadly eye” (I.iii.225) he is also, for the Duchess, a “cockatrice..whose unavowed eye is murderous” (IV.i.56). For Lacan, what the ubiquity of this myth alludes to is a “fatal function” that resides in its “power to separate,”⁹⁵ a “power” that is strictly correlative to a reproduction of the split between the eye and the gaze that hastens the death of Clarence. In the scopic field, Lacan argues, “The subject is strictly speaking determined by the very separation that determines the break of the a, that is to say, the fascinator element introduced by the gaze.”⁹⁶ The evil eye is what Lacan calls the fascinum, the dimension in which the power of the gaze is exercised directly, acting as the fatal lure which has a mortifying effect on the subject through its “captivation” in the sight of the Other. Initially, Richard’s description of Anne’s beauty proceeds in terms of an encounter with her look, producing a feeling of shame to the extent that he is caught out by the gaze of the other:

For now they kill me with a living death.
 Those eyes of thine from mine have drawn salt tears,
 Shamed their aspects with store of childish drops:
 These eyes, which never shed remorseful tear,
 No, when my father York and Edward wept,
 To hear the piteous moan that Rutland made
 When black-faced Clifford shook his sword at him;
 Nor when thy warlike father, like a child,
 Told the sad story of my father’s death,
 And twenty times made pause to sob and weep
 That all the standers-by had wet their cheeks
 Like trees bedashed with rain - in that sad time
 My manly eyes did scorn an humble tear.

(I.ii.153-164)

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.115.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.118.

This lament, which offers a complex juxtaposition of masculine aggression with the death dealing effect of female beauty, repositions Anne as the bearer of the 'evil eye'. In a comment that inevitably recalls Richard's speech in III Henry VI, Anne tries to repel Richard's advances by wishing that her eyes "were basilisks to strike thee dead!" (ll.150). The 'evil eye', in its role as "that which has the effect of arresting movement and, literally, of killing life,"⁹⁷ introduces the death drive into the scopic field.

This scene, however, elaborates a more complicated relationship between death, subjectivity and the scopic drive, foregrounding a dialectic of desire between Richard and Anne that locates "hell" and the "bed-chamber" as its discursive frame. In a discussion that makes no direct reference to the scopic politics of the text, but which, nevertheless, addresses some of the epistemological problems that arise from the question of his deformity, Marjorie Garber argues that "the very fascination exerted by Richard seems to grow in direct proportion to an increase in emphasis on his deformity (emphasis added)."

⁹⁸ What Garber gestures toward is a structural complicity between the text's strange circuit of desire and the seductive appeal of Richard. The fascinating, if albeit disconcerting, eroticism of this scene is negotiated around the deformed Richard's success in surmounting his initial unsuitability as the object of desire, precisely through hinting at the fragile border that separates beauty from disgust. Perhaps appropriately, Anne and Richard literally change places:

Anne: Out of my sight! thou dost infect mine eyes.
 Gloucester: Thine eyes, sweet lady, have infected mine.
 Anne: Would they were basilisks to strike thee dead!

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁹⁸ Marjorie Garber, "Descanting on Deformity': Richard III and the Shape of History" in The Historical Renaissance: New Essays in Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture, ed. Heather Dubrow et.al. (London, 1988), p.81.

Gloucester: I would they were, that I might die
at once;

(I.ii.148-152)

To an Elizabethan audience, this displacement of diabolic power from Richard to Anne would not have gone unnoticed. According to the accepted Renaissance physiology of vision, the eye operates as the organ by which “infected” spirits are transmitted from the body of the harlot to that of the observer. As the agent of infection or bewitchment, the eye forms the point at which sight transforms from passivity to activity, and where subject and object literally exchange places. An entire pathology of an erotics of vision were in part indebted to the influence of Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love. In 1588 Valleriola developed a thesis on the origins of erotic love in Observationum medicinalium libri sex which discusses love-sickness in terms of a fascination that enters through the eye, as an alien vapour that spreads contagion throughout the body.⁹⁹ By the seventeenth-century Robert Burton remained persuaded by this specular pathogenesis which made the fascinatio crucial to seduction:

the manner of the fascination, as Ficinus declares it, is this: Mortal men are then especially bewitched, when as by often gazing one to the other, they direct sight to sight, join eye to eye, and so drink and suck in Love between them; for the beginning of this disease is the Eye.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Donald Beecher, “The Lover’s Body: The Somatogenesis of Love in Renaissance Medical Treatises,” Renaissance and Reformation, 24, 1, pp.1-11.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.9.

The libidinal economy of the scene also locates the monstrous at that point where knowing and desiring reach a traumatic point of deadlock. The entire seduction is played out in a scopical register which serves to block desire and, paradoxically, opens desire to circumvent the blockage. Richard captivates Anne at precisely this site of antagonism:

Anne: I wish I knew thy heart
 Gloucester: 'Tis figured in my tongue
 Anne: I fear me both are false

(I.ii.192-194)

Here, desire is produced not as a striving for something, but only for something else or something more: having no determinate object that is not, as Richard punningly suggests, “dis-figured.” The apparent opacity of Richard's language is perceived by Anne as a veil which cuts off from view a reality that is other than what the subject is allowed to see. Desire, here, pertains precisely to the Lacanian formulation that “desire is the desire of the Other”: the subject may fashion itself in the image of the Other's desire, but only at a point of lack as there is, strictly speaking, no determinate image of this desire. Indeed, the Lacanian point to be made here is that an object is not worthy of desire because of its manifest “positive” symbolic properties: rather, what renders an object worthy of desire is the position that it comes to occupy in a particular fantasy space. To this extent every object of desire undergoes a kind of “deformity,” precisely because every object of desire is at some level a formal category. Richard's strategy of counter-identification, of “render[ing] good for bad, blessings for curses” (I.ii.69), is seductive precisely because it relies upon the fact that truth is not de-monstrable and implicitly positions his monstrous body as something that also acts at the level of failed phenomenalization. Contesting the

pronounced scopophilia of the scene Richard parodies the interiorizing subject of modernity: Here “depth” is literally generated by the monstrous distortion of the surface.¹⁰¹ The frontier separating the two “substances,” separating the thing that appears clearly in an objective view from the “substance of enjoyment” that can be perceived only by looking awry is precisely what maintains the consistency both of the subject and the symbolic order itself.¹⁰²

Indeed, it is around the wounds of Henry's corpse that the most insistent exhortations to see are made and where desire is shown to circulate literally around a void in the symbolic order. The eyes of Henry's corpse present a hole in the Other which Anne, metaphorically, seeks to occupy:

Lo, in these windows that let forth thy life
I pour the helpless balm of my poor eyes.
O cursed be the hand that made these holes!

(I.ii.12-14)

A site of pure monstrosity, the holes encode the corpse as an object that cannot look back but which, nevertheless, provokes the gaze of its spectators. Anne's substitution of the eyes for the holes locates a lack in the Other, a split between eye and gaze in terms of a failed encounter: “You never look at me from the place from which I see you.” If the

¹⁰¹ Here we find another variation of what I argue to be Richard's “interactive” function in the text: in this example we are dealing with a being whose entire consistency resides in the phantasmatic surface, as a constellation of pure events-effects devoid of any substantial support.

¹⁰² Insofar as this encounter between Richard and Anne reticulates the myth of beauty and beast, we might bear in mind that the gap which separates beauty from ugliness is the very gap that separates reality from the Real: what constitutes reality is the minimum of idealisation the subject needs in order to be able to sustain the horror of the Real.

gaze indexes a rent in the symbolic order, Anne's subsequent figuration of the holes as "mouths" emphasizes how the scopic drive itself is produced around some constitutive impasse or deadlock where symbolization fails:

If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,
Behold this patterns of thy butcheries.
O, gentleman, see, see! dead Henry's wounds
Open their congealed mouths and bleed afresh.

(I.ii.54-57)

It is, then, from within the context of this libidinal economy that Richard orchestrates his entire seduction of Anne. Unable to elicit a confession that he murdered Henry and Edward, Anne accuses Richard of being "the cause of that accursed effect." Richard's response, characteristically, is to complicate such a causal logic. He does so, however, by relocating death on an axis of desire where it is the power of fascination exerted by the sublime image of Anne that assumes a lethal dimension:

Your beauty was the cause of that effect;
Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep
To undertake the death of all the world,
So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom.

(I.ii.117-125)

The scene's seemingly incongruous engagement with the central motifs of courtly love has long been greeted with incredulity by critics who tend to view Richard's unlikely role as courtier solely in terms of pastiche. For Lacan, however, the encounter between beauty and the beast is paradigmatic of the libidinal economy of courtly love. It is precisely a crisis in symbolic authority, manifested in what Lacan defines as the Thing, which leads to an irruption of the monstrous in the feminine:

The poetry of courtly love, in effect, tends to locate in the place of the Thing certain discontents of the culture. And it does so at a time when the historical circumstances bear witness to a disparity between the especially harsh conditions of reality and certain fundamental demands. By means of a form of sublimation specific to art, poetic creation consists in positing an object I can only describe as terrifying, an inhuman partner.¹⁰³

Richard rehearses the Lacanian thesis that the power of fascination exerted by a sublime image always announces the proximity of the death drive. The haunting image of a dream, sublimation in Richard's account has nothing to do with the object of desire but, rather, with the primordial void around which the drive circulates. Both Richard's aggression and the question of his culpability become inseparable, as he claims, from "the beauty that provoked me" (ll. 180). In his increasingly rhapsodic meditations he represents Anne as this sublime object, the "angel" that is a "divine perfection of a woman" (ll.75). Offering a definition of the sublime as "an object elevated to the level of the Thing," Lacan again relies on anamorphosis to demonstrate how the conventions of courtly love attempt to inscribe the Real of desire. It is in relation to Lacan's contention that "If beyond appearance there is nothing in itself, there is the gaze" that this idealization of the woman is situated. It is, of course, a narcissistic move, but it is precisely because vision stumbles upon a certain opacity that desire itself is possible:

It is only by chance that beyond the mirror in question the subject's ideal is projected. The mirror may on occasion imply the mechanisms of narcissism, and especially the diminution of destruction or aggression that we will encounter subsequently. But it also fulfills another role, a role as limit. It is that which cannot be crossed. And the only organization in which it participates is that of the inaccessibility of the object.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (London, 1993), p.150.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.151.

If the anamorphic glance teaches that an object is discernible only by viewing it awry - that is, that a disinterested gaze reveals a void - so too in the conventions of courtly love the object is revealed as something graspable only at the site of its own erasure. This is the “vacuole” whose positive substance consists solely in the network of “detours and obstacles which are organized so as to make the domain of the vacuole stand out as such.”¹⁰⁵ The ring that Richard gives to Anne may be read as the most radical expression of how the 'gift' functions in this exchange as an attempted embodiment of this impossible Thing: i.e. as materialized Nothingness.

To begin again. Subjectivity is ultimately a question of this non-substantial self-relating, where self-consciousness is literally decentred in an anamorphic stain. That archetypal scene of Richard’s infantile “jubilation” captures fleetingly what kind of specular seduction is involved:

Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,
 Myself to be a marv'llous proper man.
 I'll be at charges for a looking glass,
 And entertain a score or two of tailors,
 To study fashions to adorn my body:

(I.ii.252-258)

By presenting himself as the negative image of his monstrous body, as a “proper man,” I have argued that the text also discloses how the deformed Thing is nothing other than the subject's impossible equivalent, the very negativity that defines the subject. As the

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p.142.

phantasmatic expression of the text's own inequality of form to itself,¹⁰⁶ Richard's deformity pertains to that other paradoxical object Lacan called the objet petit a; that remainder of matter which bears witness to the fact that form is not yet fully realized, that it remains a mere anticipation of itself. Temporally, it is an object which exists only as that which is either too early or too late, implying a temporal loop that short circuits from the "not yet" to the "always already."¹⁰⁷ In the light of the text's ambivalent relationship towards its teleological project, Richard is nothing other than this anamorphic expression of the constitutive antagonism between "incarnation and deformation" that Ernesto Laclau maintains "is at the root of all ideological process."¹⁰⁸ In this respect, it is not simply that Richard's formal excess stages the inherent inconsistencies of the depicted content of the text; rather he functions as "a return of the repressed" of the depicted content (i.e. Richard's formal excess is a negative expression of a hole that yawns in the very space of the play's depicted content). The anamorphic logic of the gaze not only implies how an

¹⁰⁶ . As Derrida has argued, "An object is 'prodigious' when, by its size, it annihilates and reduces to nothing the end which constitutes its concept. The prodigious exceeds the final limit, and puts an end to it. It overflows its end and its concept. Prodigious, or monstrous – let us pay close attention to this is the characteristic of an object, and of an object in its relation to its end and to its concept." "Parergon," in The Truth in Painting, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (London, 1987), pp.17-147, p.125.

¹⁰⁷ In a discussion that also attempts to analyse the relations between the monster and anamorphosis, Slavoj Žižek has characterised the emergence of the monster as signalling nothing less than the passage to modernity itself:

This empty form, this black stain in the very heart of reality, is ultimately the "objective correlative" of the subject himself...by means of anamorphic stains. "reality" indexes the presence of the subject. The emergence of the empty surface on which phantasmagorical monsters appear is therefore strictly correlative to what Heidegger calls 'the advent of the Modern-Age subjectivity,' i.e., to the epoch in which the symbolic "substance" (the 'big Other' qua texture of symbolic tradition) can no longer contain the subject, can no longer bind him to his symbolic mandate...the monster is the subject of the Enlightenment, that is to say, the mode in which the subject of the Enlightenment acquires his impossible positive existence (emphasis added).

Slavoj Žižek, Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out (London, 1996), p.134.

¹⁰⁸ Ernesto Laclau, "The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology," Modern Language Notes (1994) 112, pp.297-321, p.317.

object can become the retroactive product of its own effects, but also how without this deformed residue of matter the formal consistency of every field of so called “reality” itself collapses.¹⁰⁹ I will develop further some of the implications of this thesis in the next chapter. Turning more explicitly to the work of Jacques Derrida, I will argue that Richard II is a text that opens onto a similarly problematic encounter with temporality, subjectivity and the gaze. Focusing on problems that are more obviously associated with the question of textuality, I argue that Richard II also finds its historical project both imperiled and generated by the incursion of a radical alterity that, ultimately, the play itself is powerless to occlude.

¹⁰⁹ It is in this precise sense that Richard may be considered the ‘phallic’ element in Richard III: there is no structure without this ‘phallic’ moment of the crossing point of the short circuit at which – as Lacan insists – ‘the signifier falls into the signified.’ The point of non-sense within the field of Sense is the point at which the signifier’s cause is inscribed into the field of Sense.

Chapter Two

“’Tis In Reversion That I Do Possess’”: Speculation and Destination in *Richard II*

“Writing is the birthplace of ‘usurpation.’”¹

“Looking Awry”

On the afternoon of Saturday February 7 1601, the eve of the abortive Essex rising, eleven close associates of the Earl attended what most critics now believe to be a specially commissioned performance of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* at the Globe theatre.² Six months after the rebellion, while perusing documents in the Tower of London, Queen Elizabeth chanced upon a file entitled “Richard II” before remarking famously “I am Richard II. know ye not that?”³

While attempts to establish the veracity of any causal relationship between Shakespeare’s play and the Essex rebellion have been an enduring area of critical debate,⁴ in more recent years the connection between both narratives appears to have crystallized into historical

¹ Jacques Derrida, “Of Grammatology” in *A Derrida Reader: Between The Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York, 1991), pp.34-58, p.42.

² E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage: Volume 1* (Oxford, 1923), pp.368-9.

³ John Nichols (ed) *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth: Volume 3* (London, 1823), p.552.

⁴ Much of the controversy extends back to the exchanges between E.M. Albright, “Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and the Essex Conspiracy,” *PMLA*, 42 (1927) pp.686-728, and Ray Heffner, “Shakespeare, Hayward and Essex,” *PMLA*, 45 (1930) pp.745-80. An overview of subsequent developments in this debate is provided by Leeds Barroll, “A New History for Shakespeare and his Time,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39, 4, Winter (1988), pp.441-64.

fact. In the hands of Stephen Greenblatt and Jonathan Dollimore, for example, both narratives are adduced as evidence of nothing less than the counter-hegemonic potential of the Elizabethan theatre. If contemporary scholarship remains blazé about the political threat posed by Richard II, a reproachful Greenblatt claims that “in 1601 neither Queen Elizabeth nor the Earl of Essex were so sure: after all, someone on the eve of a rebellion thought the play sufficiently seditious to warrant squandering two pounds on the players [...] and the Queen understood the performance as a threat.”⁵ Similarly, in Political Shakespeare Jonathan Dollimore is quite unequivocal in reading the performance of Shakespeare’s play as “a famous attempt to use the theatre to subvert authority” arguing that “Queen Elizabeth afterwards anxiously acknowledged the implied identification between her and Richard II.”⁶ In short, even though Essex’s rebellion fell short of the mark, the subversive import of Shakespeare’s play ultimately found its true addressee. What I would like to suggest, however, is that Richard II is itself a text that repeatedly finds itself caught up in the very problems of the address, of forwarding, of the destination and, ultimately, of the thrust or project of history itself.

Whither is writing destined? What kind of speculation accompanies the idea that a text (however circuitously) arrives somewhere? Perhaps surprisingly, this is the kind of detective work encouraged by Fulke Greville in the conclusion to his Life of Sidney. In a text that, significantly, also includes a paean to the wayward Earl of Essex, Greville exhorts his reader to

⁵ Stephen J. Greenblatt, The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance (Oklahoma, 1982), p.4.

⁶ Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (eds) Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism, Second Edition (Manchester, 1994), p.8.

[...] behold these Acts upon their true stage, let him look on that stage wherein himself is an actor, even the state he lives in, and for every part he may perchance find a player, and for every line (it may be) an instance of life, beyond the author's intention or application, the vices of former ages being so like to these of this age as it will be easy to find out some affinity or resemblance between them. (emphasis added) ⁷

These remarks are concerned with something more than the theatrum mundi motif that was already commonplace in Elizabethan England. Rather, Greville appears to indicate a surplus of meaning, that which is “beyond the author's intention or application,” as the most promising site of readerly speculation. In other words, any “identification” that takes place here achieves its formative power only on the basis of a suspensive delay that invokes retroactively the text's symbolic content. History, Greville appears to suggest, occurs on credit.

In a way that Shakespeare's history plays repeatedly disclose, and Richard II in particular, ‘history’ increasingly comes to be negotiated at this speculative threshold which complicates assumptions about any pure loss or expense. In his earliest published text Jacques Derrida argues that this strange temporal modality describes the pure form of every historical experience as such, insofar as history involves “postal and epistolary reference or resonance of a communication from a distance [...] so that a return inquiry is asked on the basis of a first posting.”⁸ ‘History,’ then, is not a sedimentation of acquired experiences so much as an openness to receiving and placing calls, to taking up and sending on. While Catherine

⁷ Quoted in Selected Writings of Fulke Greville, ed. Joan Rees (London, 1973), p.152.

⁸ Quoted in Marian Hobson, Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines (London, 1998), p.181.

Belsey avers that the term “‘history play’ is something of an oxymoron,”⁹ we might hazard the suggestion that Shakespeare’s ‘history’ plays frequently become the site where history plays, a scene of supplementation and deferred overlapping that, according to Derrida, opens onto the original modality of the speculative itself. As I have already suggested in connection with Richard III, history and textuality cooperate here in the precise sense that “instead of [history] being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.”¹⁰ The “play” that is at issue here must not be understood merely in terms of the “ludic”¹¹ but as that non-dialectizable movement or trace that gives rise to the very possibility of history tout court. As Derrida argues,

the tension between play and history..is also the tension between play and presence. Play is the disruption of presence [...] but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence.”¹²

In this crucial respect the retroactive constitution of a text’s sense not only bears upon the way that a text, in its historical necessity, is always modified, transformed, traversed, separated from itself and returned to its outside by all those works that might seem only to come after it.¹³ Maurice Blanchot goes further in his suggestion that every text

⁹ Catherine Belsey, “Making Histories” in Graham Holderness (ed.) Shakespeare’s History Plays: Richard II to Henry V (London, 1992), pp.103-21, p.103.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1978), p. 289.

¹¹ What I have in mind here should be distinguished from the kind of “culturalist” concept of play that is advanced so routinely in putatively “new historicist” accounts of Shakespearean drama. See, for example, Leonard Tennenhouse, “Playing and Power” in Staging The Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, ed. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (London, 1991), pp.27-40.

¹² Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass, p.292.

¹³ Along with Derrida I am concerned to retain a notion of retroactivity or Freudian “deferred action” “that is not limited [...] to Nachtraglichkeit. It deconstructs that too, going toward what exceeds it and

constitutively is an open space of deferred reciprocity between reading and writing. That is to say, a text is always “open,” “its sense always open both in arrival, to come and in a process of retroactive constitution by the accidents of its ‘future.’”¹⁴

Let us hold these issues in suspense for the moment to consider a crucial exchange that actually takes place in Shakespeare’s Richard II, where questions of speculation and destination, of temporality and alterity, are in fact submitted to a sustained critical commentary. In an effort to console the Queen’s grief at her husband’s recent departure for Ireland, Bushy initiates discussion of a logico-formal paradox that is also specifically concerned with the gaze. Famously, Bushy adapts the popular Renaissance motif of anamorphosis which, heuristically at least, appears to offer itself as a particularly useful allegory for the Queen’s predicament:

Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
Which shows like grief itself, but is not so.
For sorrow’s eye, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects,
Like perspectives, which, rightly gaz’d upon,
Show nothing but confusion; ey’d awry,
Distinguish form. So your sweet Majesty,
Looking awry upon your lord’s departure,
Find shapes of grief more than himself to wail,
Which, look’d on as it is, is nought but shadows
Of what it is not.

(II.ii.14-23)

carries beyond it or after it.” Jacques Derrida, “Afterwards or, at least, less than a letter about a letter less” in Afterwards ed. Nicholas Royle (Finland, 1991), pp.197-203, p.201.

¹⁴ Quoted in Timothy Clark, Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot: Sources of Derrida’s notion and practice of literature (Cambridge, 1992), p.134. Perhaps it is here that we find a suggestive context for Elizabeth’s anxious recollection that Shakespeare’s play was performed, specifically, in “open streets and houses.” Indeed, Dollimore argues that “what made Elizabeth I so anxious was not so much a retrospectively and clearly ascertained effect of the staging of Richard II [...] but the fact of the play having been appropriated - been given significance for a particular cause and in certain ‘open’ contexts.” Dollimore, op. cit., p.9.

Reading the anamorphic gaze as emblematic of how the Queen's view of events is lacking proper perspective, Bushy's somewhat infelicitous aside becomes entangled in the logical confusions that he is ostensibly at pains to clarify. Initially, he compares the elusive source of the Queen's presentiments of woe to the trompe-l'oeil of a sharpened perspective glass (ll.16-17) which, because of its uneven surface, multiplies and disproportions the thing that it reflects. Labouring the analogy, Bushy argues that only when it is looked at from a prescribed angle ("ey'd awry") is it possible for the Queen to discern the equally phantasmal quality of her grief.

Almost imperceptibly, however, Bushy implies another reading of anamorphosis that seems to dispute this logic. While the anamorphic gaze maintains that an object can "distinguish form," i.e. be grasped visually, only if it is viewed from aside; Bushy appears to depart from his own thesis in his subsequent advice to the Queen that her "looking awry upon your lord's departure,/Finds shapes of grief more than himself to wail" (ll.21-2). In other words, Bushy's argument itself becomes split and redoubled here in his paradoxical suggestion that the Queen is "looking awry" at Richard's departure precisely because she fails to "look awry." Ironically, in an argument that seeks to establish the primacy of the "thing-in-itself" over the vagaries of how it is reflected (or rendered meaningful to the subject in the symbolic order), this very point of opacity in what Bushy is trying to say demonstrates how meaning itself is apt to go "awry" from any ostensibly self-regulating ordinance.

It is not, however, until the Queen's response that we find a much more pithy account of the logical paradoxes that are exposed in this (non) figure of anamorphosis. Impassive to Bushy's suggestion that her grief is in fact without foundation, the Queen develops the

exhortation to “look awry” into the strange time of another detour, that of the future anterior:

[...]nothing hath begot my something grief,
Or something hath the nothing that I grieve -
'Tis in reversion that I do possess -
But what it is that is not yet known what,
I cannot name; 'tis a nameless woe, I wot.

(II.ii.36-40)

This idea that “nothing” can beget something is also, of course, central to Jacques Lacan’s extended consideration of anamorphosis which, as we argued in the previous chapter, illuminates the necessarily retroactive dynamic of desire in the constitution of subjectivity.¹⁵ For Lacan, the anamorphic stain that appears to distort and temporarily disaggregate the consistency of so-called “reality” is analogous to the function of what he calls “the gaze as object a.” What is peculiar about this “object” is the fact that it is, strictly speaking, a semblance; a “nothing” which takes the form of “something” only when it is apprehended by a sideways glance that constitutively produces it, apres coup, as the (belated) “cause” of desire.¹⁶ Crucially, for Lacan this object is also “nameless”; it eludes any appropriable identity precisely insofar as it expedites a temporal short-circuit from the “not-yet” to the “always already” that is peculiar to the signifying chain (which, we should recall, constitutively defers any contact between the signifier and the signified in a moment of undivided presence).

¹⁵ See the section entitled “Anamorphosis” in Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1994), pp.79-90. Slavoj Žižek, in typically anecdotal fashion, also discusses briefly the exchange between the Queen and Bushy as a species of this Lacanian problematic. Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture (London, 1997), pp.9-12 .

¹⁶ This much should alert us to the necessarily ambivalent and paradoxical resonance of the term “cause” in Lacan’s repeated assertions that the object a is the “object cause of desire.”

Lacan's object *a*, then, may be approached as nothing but this materialized distortion or embodiment of the radically non-synchronous character of the symbolic order. Deprived of any specular identity, the anamorphic blot registers the incursion of a radical alterity into the symbolic order that is domiciled not in the dyadic structure of the Imaginary (as Bushy suggests, II.ii.27) but in the category that Lacan refers to as the Real. Indeed, the Queen's suspicion that "'Tis in reversion that I do possess" (II.38) provides a strangely eloquent gloss on Bushy's bungled excursus on anamorphosis: for it is precisely in this difficult sense of "reversion" as "a past that is yet to come," only in the furtive glance of an impossible encounter which eclipses the "subject" as such, that the subject (*\$*) finds the mark of its desire. What ostensibly is coming back then, the Queen appears to imply in a logic not dissimilar to Lacan's definition of the Real,¹⁷ has never in fact left the place that it already occupies.

The "speculation" implicit in this dialogue, then, complicates any notion of self-reflection as that which comes to repose in a moment of self-adequation. Strictly speaking, there is nothing that precedes the movement of reflection since this movement itself "posits its presuppositions"; produces the retroactive illusion according to which its object was given in advance. The destination that is speculated upon here, rather, is one that is contingent upon a subject that (constitutively) lacks its own place: "As though on thinking on no thought I think,/Makes me with heavy nothing faint and shrink" (II.ii.31-3). In other words, subjectivity finds itself inscribed here in a movement of some disjointing, disjunction or disproportion: as a "cause" that eschews any nostalgia for the security of a point of

¹⁷ I am referring here, of course, to Lacan's well worn dictum that "the real always returns to the same place."

departure. Opining to Bushy that she is unable to determine a “cause” (II.ii.6) of her grief, the Queen can only articulate her predicament through reference to the anachronism of how, in some strange sense, she perceives herself to be late with respect to that which has already happened to her in the future:

methinks

Some unborn sorrow ripe in Fortune’s womb
Is coming towards me, and my inward soul
 With nothing trembles; at some thing it grieves;

(II.ii.9-12)

Simultaneously anticipated and summoned from a single coming that exceeds figuration, the Queen appears to be in thrall here to a strange kind of telepathy which, according to Jacques Derrida, is also the constitutive ground of (im)possibility that haunts every telecommunication system whatever its content, form or medium.¹⁸ In a speech that, like the play itself, gains its rhetorical force by adopting what can only be described as “an apocalyptic tone,” throughout Richard II this essentially ambivalent aspect of that which is to “come” also becomes (and keeps on coming as) the tonal figure of a radical non-sense or otherness that, for Derrida, derives “only from the other, from nothing that may be an origin or a verifiable, decidable, presentable, appropriable, identity.”¹⁹ “Come” disseminates.²⁰

¹⁸ Insofar as the Queen’s ruminations can be described as prophetic, her ensuing exchange with Bushy also reveals how prophecy, which “returns to itself from the future of its own to-come,” renders any “position” of enunciation deeply problematic. See Jacques Derrida, “Telepathy,” Oxford Literary Review, vol.10 (1988) pp.3-43, p.4.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Of an Apocalyptic Tone recently Adopted in Philosophy,” trans. John P Leavey Jr., Oxford Literary Review, 6:2, 1984, pp.3-37, p.34. For Lacan the unconscious, insofar as it can be said to “mean” anything, is apprehensible only under this tonal figure of that which is to come: “The unconscious is neither being, nor non-being, but the unrealized.” Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.30.

²⁰ “Come I appellant to this princely presence” (I.i.34); “..let him not come there” (I.ii.71); “say...why thou comest...Against what man thou com’st” (I.iii.11-13); “Who hither come ingaged by my oath”

Without deferral, nothing begins. As its more familiar legal provenance implies, “reversion” is concerned with inheritance in prospect: it yields, it brings back and comes back in a way that violates the very idea of an initial investment.²¹ Including the two mentions it receives in Richard II the term “reversion” occurs only three times in Shakespeare’s plays.

Significantly, the third reference is to be found in I Henry IV where, doubtful of any improvement in their political fortunes, Hotspur is reassured by Douglas that there

[...] now remains
A sweet reversion - we may boldly spend

(II.18); “..why he cometh hither” (II.28); “wherefore thou com’st hither...Against whom comest thou?” (II.31-3); “imagine it/to lie that way thou goest, not whence thou comest” (II.287); “Come, come, my son” (II.304); “if that come short..” (I.iv.47); “Come, gentleman...Pray God we may make haste and come too late!” (II.63-4); “Will the king come...?” (II.i.i); “The king is come” (II.69); “Come on, our queen” (II. 222); “here comes the Duke of York” (II.ii.73); “..others come to make him lose at home” (II.81); “..a tide of woes/Comes rushing on this woeful land at once” (II.98-9); “Come, sister” (II.105); “who comes here?” (II.iii.20); “Here come the Lords of Ross and Willoughby” (II.57; “But who comes here?” (II.67); “I come to seek that name in England” (II.71); “To you, my lord, I come” (II.76); “Here comes his grace in person” (II.82); “Com’st thou because the anointed king is hence?” (II.95); “Thou..art come/Before the expiration of thy time” (II.109-10); “as I come, I come for Lancaster” (II.113); “But in this kind to come” (II.142); “The Noble Duke hath sworn his coming” (II.147); “Witnessing storms to come, woe and unrest” (II.iv.22); “Come, lords, away” (III.i.42); “thither come again” (III.ii.78); “But who comes here?” (II.89-90); “comes at the last” (II.169); “no worse can come to fight” (II.183); “But who comes here?” (III.iii.19); “..hither come/Even at his feet to lay my arms and power” (II.39); “..his coming hither..”(II.112); “Northumberland comes back from Bolingbroke” (II.142); “may it please you to come down?” (II.177); “Down, down I come...To come at traitors’ calls,...Come down?...Yet he is come” (II.177-8;81-2; 186); “I come but for mine own” (II.196); “But stay, here come the gardeners” (III.iv.24); “Come, ladies, go” (II.96); “Great Duke of Lancaster, I come to thee” (IV.i.106); “Read o’er this paper while the glass doth come”/“Fiend, thou torments me ere I come to hell” (II.269-70); “The woe’s to come” (II.322); “Come home with me to supper” (II.333); “This way the king will come” (V.i.i); “..tell the rest...Of our cousins’ coming into London” (V.ii.1,3); “Here comes my son Aumerle” (II.41); “lest you be cropped before you come to prime” (II.51); “But who comes here?” (V.iii.21); “Come, my old son” (II.144); “Come, let’s go” (V.v.10); “Come, little ones” and then again/It is hard to come as for a camel/To thread the postern of a small needle’s eye” (II.15-17); “..how comest thou hither,/Where no man never comes?” (II.69-70); “Come mourn with me for what I do lament” (V.vi.47).

²¹ As an institution which made strategies of in-version and re-version part of its own signifying practice, it is no surprise to find that critics of the Elizabethan theatre were eager to fasten upon the social consequences of this fact. Stephen Gosson is characteristically forthright in this regard: “Overlashing in apparel is so common a fault, that the very hyerlings of some of our players, which stand at reversion of us, by the week, yet under gentlemen’s noses in suites of silke, excercising themselves to prating on the stage, & common scoffing when they come abroad, where they look askance over the shoulder at every man, of whom the Sunday before they begged an almes.” Stephen Gosson, Plays Confuted in Five Actions (London, 1972), p. 64.

Upon the hope of what is to come in.

(I Henry IV, IV.i.53)

Denoting at the same time that which is still to come and, in a more difficult sense, something that ostensibly “remains” as the retroactive product of this speculation, “reversion” here seems to imply an understanding of the remainder as that which precedes its own temporal genesis. Moreover, in Douglas’ faintly gastronomic reference to a “sweet” reversion we are also able to glimpse these paradoxical “remains” in a now obsolete use of the term that was still current in the sixteenth century. According to the SOED, “reversion” could also refer to “the remains, that which is left over, of any dish, drink, or meal....The rest, residue, or remainder.....”²² What may be discerned here is a slippage in meaning between “reversion” in the politico-legal sense of surplus value and “reversion” as the convocation of another kind of surplus: that of the fantasmatic “stuff” of enjoyment (jouissance) itself.²³

Indeed, what this etymological aside further illuminates is the fundamental ambiguity implied by the Lacanian Real qua object a as that which both “precedes” symbolization as a mere anticipation of itself, and that which also designates a left-over that is somehow posited or “produced” by symbolization. In his development of the object a into a central theoretical concept, Lacan regularly insisted upon this homology between surplus-value and surplus-enjoyment as the expression of a constitutive antagonism in the temporal harmony of the

²² Lesley Brown (ed) The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary Volume Two (Oxford, 1993), p. 2581.

²³ We should bear in mind here that in French plus-de-jouir plays punningly between the two notions of “excess of enjoyment” as well as “no longer any enjoyment.”

symbolic order: there is no substance of enjoyment without, prior to, its surplus.²⁴ The recursive trajectory announced in the term “reversion” returns us inevitably (and appropriately) to Queen Isobel’s account of the anamorphic gaze, whose object is similarly revealed to be a mirage retroactively invoked by a surplus that forever exceeds the determination of presence as “presence to itself.”

Considered within the context of a play like Richard II, which both interrogates and ultimately becomes ensnared by the logical confusions that arise when the law of “fair sequence and succession” (II.i.199) is placed in jeopardy, this apparently dialectical (and invisible) sleight of hand also constitutes the dramatic and, I would like to argue, traumatic conditions of its putatively “historical” narrative.²⁵ In a text that, as several critics have noted, is remarkable for the way that it so consistently invokes a metaphoric of vision that it is finally unable to master,²⁶ my concern in this chapter is to relate this aporia not so much to the specular, as to a constellation of figures announced in Derrida’s discussion of

²⁴ For a thorough exposition of this aspect of Lacanian thinking see chapter one of Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London, 1989) pp.11-53.

²⁵ According to Michel de Certeau, by the late Renaissance what was formerly regarded as a “cyclical” view of history was giving way to a discourse of history where the past itself became that which remained to be thought; in other words, “history” became ineluctably tied to a growing understanding of writing as a prior past that is, paradoxically, still to come: “The formerly living organization of a society invested within their point of view is changed into a past that can be placed under observation. Its status is transformed: no longer being present within authors as the frame of reference of their thought, it is now situated within the object that we, as new authors, have to render thinkable.” Michel de Certeau, The Writing of History (Oxford, 1988), p.34. For a more extended consideration of these issues see J.R. Hale, The Evolution of British Historiography: From Bacon to Naimier (London, 1967); Herschel Baker, The Race of Time: Three Lectures on Renaissance Historiography (Toronto, 1967); Ricardo Quinones, The Renaissance Discovery of Time (Cambridge, 1972); David Scott Kastan, “Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time,” Comparative Drama, 7, 1973-4, pp.259-77; Ronald R. MacDonald “Uneasy Lies: Language and History in Shakespeare’s Lancastrian Tetralogy,” Shakespeare Quarterly, 35, 1 (1984) pp.22-39.

²⁶ According to Scott MacMillan the most absorbing writing in Richard II “outweighs theatrical manifestation and gravitates toward the unseen. At the heart of loss there is nothing for the theatrical eye to see.”

“speculation.”²⁷ Insofar as this term marks for Derrida an excess in the dialectics of the presence of the present, Richard II also opens onto this other economy: as a drama of deposition that consistently defies the logic of every “position” as such (bearing within itself the recursive trajectory of that which is both rejected and withheld) the text’s historical project is impelled under the aspect of a curious auto-affection whose integrity cannot escape the necessity of a certain fort:da. Richard II, I argue, is a text that speculates on itself, comes back to itself, modifies itself, delegates itself, represents itself without ever leaving a scene of inheritance that is, ultimately, also a scene of writing. Along with Joel Fineman, then, I am interested primarily with those creases of textuality or aporias within the text- what Derrida calls écriture, what Lacan calls the Real - in order to examine the very Shakespearean enigma of how that which can be neither specularized nor represented nevertheless marks “the condition and consequence of both specularity and representation.”²⁸ Ostensibly ‘looking awry’ upon Bolingbroke’s “courtship of the common people” (I.iv.24), Richard also reveals himself to be possessed of some telepathic insight, espying that it is “As were our England in reversion his” (I.iv.35). Richard II, I maintain, never ceases to speculate on the basis of this strange anamorphous return; speculations that inevitably place its (re)versions of history in circulation with a lexicon of

²⁷ In this respect I will be making frequent reference throughout this chapter to Derrida’s The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond, Alan Bass trans., (London, 1987) [hereafter cited as The Post Card]. Addressing a number of problems that find extraordinary resonance in Richard II, especially insofar as the play is crucially concerned with the putatively “Freudian” questions of succession, genealogy and inheritance, Derrida’s avowedly corrupt use of the term “speculation” broadens onto an analysis of speculative structure “in the senses of specular reflection...of the production of surplus value, of calculations and bets on the Exchange..in the sense of that which overflows the (given) presence of the present, the given of the gift. I am doing this...in order to gain access to that which is played out beyond the ‘given,’ to that which is rejected, withheld, taken back..” The Post Card, p.284.

²⁸ Joel Fineman, “Shakespeare’s Ear,” Representations, 28 (Fall, 1989) pp.6-13, p.9.

sending, forwarding and destining that turn (indefatigably) on the “hope of what is to come.”²⁹

“Post”

It is little or no surprise to discover that Richard II seems always to have an eye turned toward the future. With an air of resignation that is quite disarming given that his fate is far from decided, Richard somewhat precipitously invites his audience to “sit upon the ground/And tell sad stories of the death of kings” (III.ii.155-6). Similarly, after the deposition Richard’s concern once again is with posterity, requesting to the Queen that

In winter’s tedious nights sit by the fire
 With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales
 Of woeful ages long ago betid;
 And ere thou bid good night, to quite their griefs
 Tell thou the lamentable tale of me
 [...]
 ... the senseless brands will sympathize
 And in compassion weep the fire out,
 And some will mourn in ashes, some coal-black,
 For the deposing of a rightful king.

(V.i.40-44; 46-50)

In terms of what I argue to be the text’s persistent difficulties in trying situate itself in relation to any date or destination (insofar as they are shown to implicate simultaneously the

²⁹ Even though she fails adequately to deal with the question of differance that she so routinely invokes throughout her argument, I am in agreement with Catherine Belsey’s contention that Shakespeare’s so-called “history” plays “compel their audience towards the as-yet unrepresentable [...] they tell of political struggle and of the difference within the signifier.” Catherine Belsey, “Making Histories” in Shakespeare’s History Plays: Richard II to Henry V, ed. Graham Holderness (London, 1992), pp.103-21, p.118.

strange exigence of a singularity and repetition), the culminating metaphor here of commemoration and loss, of a gathering together and a dispersal is of particular significance. Arguing how every “date gets carried away, transported [...] and thus effaces itself in its very readability,” at least figuratively, the scene of Richard’s commemoration is redolent of Derrida’s claim that “what must be commemorated, at once gathered together and repeated, is, at the same time, the date’s annihilation, a kind of nothing, or ash. Ash awaits us.”³⁰

Indeed, frequently telling its tale through the telling of tales that somehow post-date it, historical verisimilitude in Richard II is concerned less with a strategy of re-writing than of overwriting a text that increasingly comes to convey the impression that it is prior as well as posterior to any singular “event.”³¹ Perhaps the most striking example of this effect is to be found at Act V, scene II, which ostensibly “begins” with the Duchess of York’s rebuke to her husband for delaying his account of Richard’s ignominious passage through London:

Duch: My lord, you told me you would tell the rest,
 When weeping made you break the story off,
 Of our two cousins’ coming into London.
 York: Where did I leave?
 Duch: At that sad stop, my lord,
 Where rude misbegoverned hands from windows’ tops
 Threw dust and rubbish on King Richard’s head.

(V.ii.1-5)

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Shibboleth: For Paul Celan” in Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (Routledge, 1992) pp. 370-413, p.396.

³¹ Graham Holderness has recently argued that a familiar strategy in Richard II is to have “characters manufacturing history before it happens, preconfiguring the event in line with their own interpretative strategies,” in Shakespeare: The Histories (London, 2000), p.183. For an argument that also addresses the question of history and temporality in Shakespeare from an avowedly (if somewhat tentative) Derridean perspective, see 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 (London, 1986), pp.301-31.

In many respects quite appropriate to a play that finds its own tale(s) enfolded at the scene of an interminably repeated supplementation, what this “interruption” encodes is the paradoxical time of an event that is, precisely, “recalled” on the one hand and “anticipated” on the other. Phyllis Rackin, however, argues that we read this bizarre intromission as a dramaturgical “detour,” as something contrived by Shakespeare himself in an effort to relocate the text in the historical “present” of his Elizabethan audience.³² Rackin’s suggestion that the entire exchange secretly addresses itself to the theatrical spectator does not, however, contend with the troubling fact that even this implied destination is figured explicitly as the site of an ongoing displacement: “As in a theatre the eyes of men,/After a well-grac’d actor leaves the stage,/Are idly bent on him that enters next” (V.ii.23-5). Indeed, not only does the scene begin with an interruption, the ensuing dialogue is also routinely interrupted by asides that dwell upon the figure of digression. Ironically, the properly dramatic focus of the scene itself centres upon what is potentially a more egregious detour: the interception of Aumerle’s letter.

What this enigmatic exchange begins to make legible is how, in the text more generally, signification becomes routed in differential pathways that in fact constitutively fail to arrive at a “stop” (V.ii.4). In a doubly resonant connection that the text itself makes explicit on more than one occasion, we may suggest that the “plot” entertains a certain over-proximity to the traces of a “blot”; a surplus textuality or overwriting that compels the text repeatedly to bend back on itself in a way that imperils every effort of self-adequation. Indeed, Ernest Gilman’s contention that, viewed from within the context of the history plays, Richard II is

³² Phyllis Rackin, “Temporality, Anachrony and Presence in Shakespeare’s English Histories,” Renaissance Drama, 17 (1986), pp.101-123.

more akin to a “wedged contrariety,”³³ offers a particularly resonant metaphor for the way that the text so consistently speculates on a destination that is not in some sense always already produced at the scene of its own description. Simultaneously gathering itself together only to disperse itself again,³⁴ the “contrariety” of Richard II shares much in common with a more contemporary myth of filiation and symbolization; the Freudian double fort/da “which conjugates into the same genealogical (and conjugal) writing the narrated and the narrating of narrative.”³⁵ That is to say, in topological terms Richard II is in many ways a sort of constitutive self-impediment, a “wedged contrariety” insofar as it is comprised of a deferred overlapping with the scene of its own constituting fictions. Again, Lacan’s comments on anamorphosis are of some help here. If the blot is such a frequent leitmotif in the text, it is redolent of the anamorphic blot as that which also embodies this failure in dialectization: i.e., a stain that bears witness to the way that the frame of every text is, paradoxically, always already framed (re-marked) by a part of its content.³⁶

³³ Ernest B. Gilman, “Richard II and the Perspectives of History,” Renaissance Drama, 7 (1976) pp.85-115, p.92.

³⁴ Not, perhaps, entirely coincidentally Richard II is frequently given to metaphors that have an explicit bearing on this disseminating movement: The Duchess of Gloucester compares the death of Edward to how “One flourishing branch of his most royal root,/Is crack’d, and all the precious liquor spilt” (I.i.18-19); Worcester has “Broken the staff of office and dispers’ed/The household of the king” (II.iii.27-8); Richard’s Welsh supporters resolve to “disperse ourselves” (II.iv.4); Salisbury informs the beleaguered king that most of his retinue have “dispers’d and fled” (III.ii.74); Bolingbroke is anxious that king’s followers be “dispers’d” (III.iii.iv). Indeed, in an argument that would appear to be particularly suggestive of Derrida, Harry Berger Jr. maintains that “The succession of kings in the Henriad is a genealogy of guilt which, seeded in Richard’s own self-division, transmits itself with increasing virulence.” “Richard II, 3:2: An Exercise in Imaginary Audition,” English Literary History, 55,4 (1988), pp.755-97, p.757.

³⁵ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.303.

³⁶ To the extent that this chapter is implicitly concerned to analyse Richard II in the light of the relationship that might be said to inhere between a “letter” and its “destination,” Slavoj Žižek also argues that this kind of topological inversion is best exemplified via Lacan’s dialectic of view and gaze: “in what I see, in what is open to my view, there is always a point where ‘I see nothing,’ a point which ‘makes no sense,’ i.e. which functions as the picture’s stain - this is the point from which the very picture returns the gaze, looks back at me. “A letter arrives at its destination’ precisely in this point of the picture: here ↓ encounter myself, my own objective correlative - here I am, so to speak, inscribed in the picture.” Slavoj Žižek, Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out (London, 1992), p.15. In other words, the anamorphic

This invaginated topology is most conspicuously disclosed, however, through the surfeit of doubling in the text,³⁷ where Richard II bends itself even to the vertiginous and unfathomable limits of that which is “doubly redoubled” (I.iii.80). Famously, not only does the king himself come to engage in a dialogue with his own shadow, castles too are “doubly portcullis’d” (II.ii.65), Bolingbroke is charged with a “double wrong” (III.ii.215), Richard is on the lookout for “double tongues” (II.21), the bows of soldiers are possessed of “double-fatal yew” (II.117) and, in parting from Anne, Richard laments how he is “doubly divorc’d” (V.i.72).

Bearing in mind James Calderwood’s observation that Richard II is “a divorcing play,”³⁸ it is also the case that the text itself moves forward by doubling back through the detour provided by an original exclusion. In a connection that will be given further emphasis in the ensuing argument, we might suggest here that Richard II increasingly comes to pose itself as it deposes itself, insofar as depositioning becomes, strictly speaking, something that the text itself performs. If doubling raises the troubling suggestion that there can only ever be an essential duplicity without an original, bibliographical efforts to negotiate an authentic version of the text largely come to rest, appropriately, on the “deposition scene.”³⁹ Critical debate over the origins

“blot” corrects the standard subjective idealism by rendering the gap between the eye and the gaze: the perceiving subject is always-already gazed at from a point that eludes his eyes.

³⁷ We might refer here, for example, to the now classic study of the play by Ernst Kantorowicz who singles out for attention “the varieties of ‘duplications’ which Shakespeare has unfolded in the three bewildering central scenes [which] intersect and overlap and interfere with each other continuously” (emphasis added). “The Kings Two Bodies” in Richard II: Critical Essays, ed. Jeanne T. Newlin (London, 1984), pp.73-93, p.75.

³⁸ James Calderwood, Shakespearean Metadrama (Minneapolis, 1971), p.84.

³⁹ Graham Holderness has argued that Richard II poses a particular problem for the bibliographical historian: “no other historical drama of Shakespeare’s has proved more difficult to understand and interpret without the aid of external authorities. Richard II seems to depend to an unusual degree on open questions.” “Shakespeare’s History: Richard II,” Literature and History, 7,1 (Spring 1981), pp.2-26, p.2.

of the scene in the light of its reappearance in the fourth quarto of 1608, inevitably turn upon the unacknowledged suspicion that the origin is always already an addition. Either the scene is assumed to be a “later” addition to the text⁴⁰ or something that already existed in performance.⁴¹ Despite John Jones’ confident assertion that “the fourth quarto merely restores what was there at the start,”⁴² the deposition scene is already the site of an overwritten erasure, de-positioning the origin as an effect that is produced ex-post by an originary substitution that actually falls short of itself from the start. In other words, what is simultaneously at issue and disavowed in these editorial disputes - with its stockpiling of additions and subtractions (both of which amount to the same thing in a differential order) - is that, in Derrida’s words, any temptation to go “back from the supplement to the source must recognize that there is a supplement at the source.”⁴³

According to Jean-Luc Nancy every nostalgia for a primal scene is coterminous with a “storytelling” that tries to remain innocent of another scene: that of writing itself. In an argument that is strangely evocative of the metaleptic scenography of Richard II itself, Nancy argues : “We know the scene: there are men gathered around, and someone telling them a story...They were not gathered before the story, it is the telling that gathers them...It

⁴⁰ This is a still widely held view that was first put forward by David Bergeron, “The Deposition Scene in Richard II,” Renaissance Papers (1974), pp. 31-7, p.35.

⁴¹ For a summary of the main arguments in support of this claim see Janet Clare, “Richard II and the Deposition Scene,” Review of English Studies, 16 (1990) pp.89-94, p.94.

⁴² John Jones, Shakespeare at Work (Oxford, 1999), p.41.

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, Gayatri Spivak trans., (London, 1980), p.304. In a pithy essay that also reconsiders the relationship between the Shakespearean text and the question of source, Jonathan Goldberg maintains that “there is no...source of the text except through a relay of mediations...even the supposed ultimate source - the author - must be considered within a heterogeneous dispersal.” “Speculations: Macbeth and Source” in Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology, eds. Jean E. Howard and Marion O,Connor (London, 1990), pp.242-64, p.242.

is the story of their origin.”⁴⁴ There is a subtle yet crucial displacement at work here: the origin of the “nation” cannot be sought in stories, it is the very act of narration that constitutes an origin aporetically in an impossible moment of foundation and legitimation.

In the beginning there was the “post.” That is to say, it is precisely insofar as the founding moment, the pre-, is always already inhabited by this post that the nation narrates and produces its effects of legitimacy through repetition. Insofar as we can consider Richard II a text that, in this crucial respect, is uniquely concerned with the institutional politics of the Nation, both at a diegetic level and as the traumatic narrative “origin” of Shakespeare’s history plays, it is also the case that it can only acquit this task problematically: through certain postal effects that challenge any view of history as a narrative where events conform to a tidy seriality. Indeed, in an argument that would grant exemplary significance to the occasion of Aumerle’s purloined letter, Geoffrey Bennington argues that if the nation

was not troubled by the necessary possibility of the letter’s not arriving, then the state would be absolute and have no relation to any outside: it could not strictly speaking be a nation, ..it would have no history, and thus no narration.⁴⁵

In short, my point is that throughout Richard II it is the very idea of an initial point of departure that the text simultaneously invokes and renders most enigmatic. It is in Gaunt’s elegiac speech where both the nation and narration most obviously and ineluctably come into contact with a certain postal effect. In Gaunt’s famous evocation of England as “This other Eden, demi-paradise” (II.i.40-68; 42) nothing less than a myth of national origins appears to be endangered by Richard’s financial mismanagement. Venerating England as the product of

⁴⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, The Inoperative Community, ed. Peter Connor (London, 1996), p.43.

⁴⁵ Geoffrey Bennington, Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction (London, 1994), p.246.

a strange kind of auto-genesis, “This fortress built by Nature for herself/Against infection” (II.i.43-4) Gaunt’s metaphors also repeatedly make appeal to a logic of the boundary in an attempt to quarantine the nation from any relation to an outside, as “in the office of a wall,/or as a moat defensive to a house” (II.46-7).

It is, however, precisely this erosion of the boundary that clandestinely renders possible any movement of a “return” to origins. The very idea of a retreat before the boundary, of that which England must ambivalently “beat back”, is also secretly called for by the very institution that patrols it. Crucially, it is in his peroration that Gaunt’s speculations upon the multiple senses of the term “boundary” ultimately come into proximity with the scene of writing itself:

England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of wat’ry Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds;

(II.i.61-4)

The threatened erasure of the boundary here gives rise to another kind of insolvency; that of a bond which simultaneously binds and detaches (dispatches) identity from itself in an athletic movement that, for Derrida, is unthinkable outside consideration of what he calls the “postal principle.” In The Post Card Derrida discusses the strange topology at work in the lexicon of the boundary as, precisely, “collapses of the coastline”; an essential divisibility that is accompanied by “strategies of approach and overflow, strictures of attachment, places of reversion, strangulation, or double bind.”⁴⁶ Indeed, Richard II is variously

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.261.

concerned with a metaphysics of what Derrida terms a bindinal economy.⁴⁷ In one episode that has a more explicit bearing on writing, the Duke of York urges his son to show him the contents of a letter dismissed by his wife as “nothing but some band that he is ent’red into”:

Bound to himself? What doth he with a bond
That he is bound to? Wife, thou art a fool.
Boy, let me see the writing.

(V.ii.65; 67-9)

It is precisely this enigmatic syntax of binding/unbinding - as a movement that does not have at its disposal the unified space of a figure - that also concerns Gaunt. Asphyxiating itself on the economy of its own reserves, Gaunt’s conviction that England “Hath made a shameful conquest of itself” (II.i.66) and that the “state of law is bondslave to the law”(II.113) indicates what kind of double bind is involved when difference infiltrates the origin⁴⁸ : England’s identity is so indebted to itself (“leas’d out” II.59) that any return (owed) to itself merely amounts to a further expropriation of itself. Mortgaged to the perfidies of the signifier, in the image of “inky blots” we find a striking suggestion of how, turning away from itself, Richard’s England now occupies a relation of belonging that is without interiority: like writing, it is bound to (for) itself only by acceding to the threat of its own erasure.

⁴⁷ Richard inquires who would “dissolve the bands of life” (III.ii.65); Mowbray wishes to “cast off his chains of bondage” (I.iii.89); Fitzwater offers Bolingbroke his “bond of faith” (IV.i.76); the Gardener instructs his assistant to “bind thou up your dangling/apricots” (III.iv.29). For an expert analysis of deconstruction as concerned with the problem of binding in general, see Rodolphe Gasche, “Strictly Bonded” in Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida (London, 1995), pp.171-99.

⁴⁸ Derrida’s neologism of a “bidinal economy” appears especially appropriate here ibid., p.368. Moreover we may also usefully recall some comments by Peter Brooks who maintains that “To speak of “binding” in a literary text is thus to speak of any of the formalizations (which, like binding, may be painful, retarding) that force us to recognize sameness within difference.” “Freud’s Masterplot” in Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading Otherwise, ed. Shoshana Felman (London, 1982), pp.280-300, p.290.

Long before Richard's formal deposition, then, Gaunt draws attention to an originary violence of writing as the agent of a "usurpation [that] has always already begun."⁴⁹ This suggestion that writing alienates identity from essence, that it eats away at the entire scene of inheritance with its "rotten parchment bonds" (ll.64) is especially ironic in a play which, as Jonathan Goldberg argues, repeatedly discloses its "relationship to an emerging textuality."⁵⁰ Indeed, if writing provisionally sustains sequentiality, Derrida's reading of the paradigmatic scene of Freud's fort: da (with its own interminable movement of binding/unbinding) also argues that questions of "inheritance...of genealogy, of the paradoxes of nomination, of the king" are tied to a telematics of the post that constitutively unmoors identity from every assured destination.⁵¹

I would also like to suggest that this movement of self-division that is the focus of censure both produces and negates the "myth of origins" so conspicuously staged throughout the scene. Closer examination reveals how Gaunt's narrative is remarkable precisely in the way that it so often violates the genealogical axioms of continuity, tradition and providentialism that some critics have read unproblematically as a redaction of Elizabethan ideology.⁵² For example, in a particularly sinuous contamination of present and past tenses Gaunt admonishes Richard that

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London, 1980), p.37.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Goldberg, "Rebel Letters: Postal Effects from Richard II to Henry IV, Renaissance Drama, 19 (1988) , pp.3-29, p.6.

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.222.

⁵² This is the view advanced by E.M.W. Tillyard in Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1969), p.244.

..had thy grandsire with a prophet's eye
 Seen how his son's son should destroy his sons,
 From forth thy reach he would have laid thy shame,
Deposing thee before thou wert possess'd,
 Which art possess'd now to depose thyself.

(II.i.104-8)

In Gaunt's fantasy the scene of inheritance once again gives way to a complex pattern of forward and recursive loops. The image of the grandfather as one who comes "forth," who, through a teleological paradox, is simultaneously posed both before and after his grandson, bears a striking resemblance to Derrida's analysis of the Freudian scene of inheritance.

According to Derrida, Ernst's "calling himself back" and Freud's "posting" himself, writing to himself from a position not yet existing, point not beyond the pleasure principle so much as to a "postal principle" that both disorders and gives rise to every genealogical model whatever its content or medium. So too in Gaunt's speech we find this double conjugation of annulment and return - of posing and deposing, possession and dispossession - that confounds the very logic of positionality as such. Already something of a revenant himself, even Gaunt's solicitation of a "beyond" in the guise of a prophet is caught up in this contradictory movement of a "coming back" that annuls its own ostensible position of possibility; of that which has barely come to leave when it is going to come back:

"Methinks I am a prophet new inspir'd,/And thus expiring do fortell of him" (II.i.31-2).

Moreover, in Gaunt's description of Richard as "my brother Edward's son," and in his lament that Edward's "son's son should destroy his sons" (II.i.105) we find an equivocal syntax of the possessive and the genitive function that is not merely an artifact of grammar. This dissemination or threatened erasure of filiation is hinted at throughout the text: the

Duchess of Gloucester relates to Gaunt as “thy sometimes brother’s wife” (I.ii.54), speaking to Mowbray Richard refers to Bolingbroke as “our cousin, cousin” (I.iv.20) and addresses Gaunt as “brother to great Edward’s son” (II.i.121). Harry Berger Jr.’s astute observation that Richard II repeatedly comes up against “a structural flaw in the very notion of mimesis, [that] is magnified by confusion in the paternal deployment of the genealogical principle,”⁵³ may be glossed with the further suggestion that the text’s ascending and descending trajectories inscribes this capacity for dissemination as the very thrust of its historical project. According to Derrida, it is this very lexicon of doubling, binding and reversion that gives rise to history in a way that would not be possible “if the place of the letter were not divisible from the start.”⁵⁴

The sheer ubiquity of the term “post” in Richard II⁵⁵ is notable in that it condenses into itself perhaps most felicitously this entire enigma of what to come, to come before, to come after, to come back all mean: “post” as the tonal figure for that which unleashes every speculation. Indeed, the fiduciary rhetoric of Gaunt’s speech also characterizes the opening scene of the text in a way that implies more than simply a thematic settling of accounts. Richard II in fact “begins” problematically at the site of a suspensive delay, as a beginning that lacks any fixed and calculable domicile that would

⁵³ Harry Berger Jr., “Psychoanalyzing the Shakespeare Text: the first three scenes of the Henriad” in Shakespeare and the Question of Theory, eds. Geoffrey Hartman and Patricia Parker (London, 1985), pp.210-30, p.121.

⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.324.

⁵⁵ Mowbray promises to “post until it had return’d/These terms of treason doubled down (Bolingbroke’s) throat” (I.i. 55-6); Gaunt “hath sent post-haste/To intreat your majesty to visit him” (I.iv.55-6); Nothumberland invites Richard’s followers to “Away with me in post to Ravenspurgh” (II.i.296); York inquires if there are “posts dispatch’d for Ireland?” (II.ii.103); the gardener exhorts the queen to “post you to London” (III.iv.90); the Duchess urges her son to “Spur post” and get before his father to the king (V.ii.112); Richard laments how his time “Runs posting on in Bolingbroke’s proud joy” (V.v.59).

properly confer the power to begin. That is to say, the text quite literally moves forward under the obligation to acquit itself of a debt: it begins by coming back.⁵⁶ As Richard makes clear in his opening remarks, the ensuing confrontation between Mowbray and Bolingbroke is, in fact, an encounter that had previously been postponed from a time “Which then our leisure would not let us hear” (I.i.5). Significantly, the fact that Holinshed offers no account of this postponement leads a perplexed Arden editor to conclude that “Shakespeare invented it.”⁵⁷

What this seemingly inexplicable deferral offers, rather, is another gloss on the way that the text comes back to itself in a way that eludes the determination of any initiating point of departure. Beginning with the promise “to make good the boist’rous late appeal” (I.i.4) of the two appellants, Richard II begins with the necessity to yield to a certain calling that in fact precedes the text. We might recall here that, deriving from the French “to call,” the term “appellant” comprises both the singularity of one who calls and the neutrality of that which calls, an essential ambivalence hinted at in Bolingbroke’s announcement that “Come I appellant to this princely presence” (II.33). It is precisely this enigmatic association between calling and presence that is also of interest to us here. For Derrida any power to begin is related to a certain prior coming (prevenance), a strange power of reversion which, while it is foreign to and precedes every event, also calls forth every event as such: “The

⁵⁶ “It is thus the delay which is in the beginning. Without which, differance would be the lapse which a consciousness, a self-presence of the present, accords itself. To defer (differer) thus cannot mean to retard a present possibility, to postpone an act, to put off a perception already now possible. That possibility is possible only through a differance which must be conceived of in other terms than those of a calculus or mechanics of decision. To say that differance is originary is simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin. Which is why ‘originary’ must be understood as having been crossed out, without which differance would be derived from an original plenitude. It is a non-origin which is originary.” Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1978), p.203.

⁵⁷ Richard II, ed. Peter Ure (London, 1996), p.4, n.5.

event of this 'Come' [...] would be that starting from which there is any event, the coming, the to-come of the event that cannot be thought under the given category of the event."⁵⁸ In the following sections I will be concerned to develop further the implications of this paradox, especially insofar as Richard II constitutively fails to occlude the traces of this double determination; perhaps most explicitly so in the text's inveterate strategies of reversion and de-positioning that come to overflow the logic of every "position" as such.

The Step (not) Beyond

Whither, then, are we led by such speculations? Let us risk a leap forward to I Henry IV where Hal's delinquent behaviour is compared, significantly, to Richard who is described as "The skipping King, [who] ambled up and down, /With shallow jesters, and rash bavin wits" (III.ii.60-1). This idea of a degenerate and tottering monarch is developed further in an image that presents Richard as someone who was, quite literally, a "pushover," who would "stand the push/Of every beardless vain comparative" (ll. 66-7). In a footnoted reference to this appellation of "The skipping King" the Arden editor of the play remarks somewhat imperiously that "There is nothing like this behaviour in Richard II."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy," trans. John P Leavy Jr. in Derrida and Negative Theology, ed. Harold Coward (Albany, 1992), pp.25-73, p.64. Elsewhere Derrida remarks that Being "accedes to itself only on the basis of the Call (de Ruf), a call which has come from afar, which does not necessarily use words, and which, in a certain way, does not say anything." Jacques Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," trans. Tina Kendall in A Derrida Reader: Between The Blinds, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York, 1991), pp.569-601, p.573. In an argument that would also appear particularly apposite for any consideration of Richard II, Jean-Luc Nancy avers that "presence, as the present of its presence, depends on nothing that founds or produces it [...] it proceeds from a 'coming' that is itself not temporal, neither in the sense that it would come in time, nor in the sense that the duration of its procedure would there present itself (in this sense, it is not even a 'coming' - it does not properly come, but it perhaps comes forth, comes up, comes back." The Experience of Freedom, trans. Bridget McDonald (California, 1993), p.112.

⁵⁹ King Henry IV Part 1, ed. A.R. Humphries (London, 1978), p.103, n.60ff.

Let us take a step back. If Richard II discloses a certain recursive and a-thetic trajectory that we have been discussing in terms of the problematic of the “postal principle,” the text is no less emphatically caught up (possibly even ensnared) in the thematics and the lexicon of the step, a rhetoric of going or aller that Derrida discusses under the rubric “of the way or the a-way, of the near and the far, of all the frameworks in tele-, of the adestination [...].”⁶⁰ Time and again Richard II advances a rhetoric of the “step” as that which simultaneously registers and then hollows out the very distance that it is ostensibly called upon to measure. This curious epithet of “the skipping King” then, to borrow a formulation from Jean-Luc Nancy, more properly encodes the strange temporality of every text where “time skips, and skips itself; suspension, pulsation, continuity broken off and started up again on its very disjunction, thus the same (the same time) and never the same (never the same time).”⁶¹

Perhaps most memorably so in the scene of Richard’s protracted parting from Anne, the recently deposed king instigates a fantasy of “leaving,” of “two together” that seeks both to allay and delay the trauma of departure itself:

Richard: So two together weeping, makes one woe
 Weep thou from me in France, I for thee here;
 Better far off than, near, be ne’er the near.
 Go count thy way with sighs; I mine with
 groans [...].
 Queen: So longest way shall have the longest moans.
Twice for one step I’ll groan, the way being short,
 And piece the way out with a heavy heart.

(V.i.87-92)

⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.268.

⁶¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, The Muses, eds. Werner Hamacher and David Wellerby, trans. Peggy Kamuf (California, 1996), p.66.

What this eminently divisible step amounts to here is, in fact, less a departure than a “doubling back” that comes to arrest the very movement that the step itself renders possible. In fact, the entire scene becomes an extended meditation on the ontological vicissitudes of “parting” itself: Northumberland’s exhortation that the couple “Take leave and part, for you must part forthwith” (V.i.70) is taken up by Richard’s invitation to “part us’ (ll.76). Responding to her inquiry of “must we be divided? must we part?” (ll.81) even Richard’s determination that both should “dumbly part” (ll.95) becomes the focus of some wordplay in Anne’s remark that “’twere no good part/To take on me to keep and kill thy heart” (ll.97-8). In a text that demonstrates considerable difficulties in making any point of departure conform to the intangibility of an edge, the scene calls attention to the essential ambivalence that we also find in Derrida’s use of the French term partage: “a word which names difference, the line of demarcation, scission, cesura as well as participation, that which is divided because it is shared or held in common, imparted and partaken of.”⁶² Simultaneously engaged and divided, giving and taking in the same gesture, partage perhaps most effectively conveys the strange sense of that which, in Richard’s words, is “doubly divorc’d” (V.i.71).⁶³

⁶² Jacques Derrida, “Shibboleth” in Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (London, 1992), pp.370-414, p.411.

⁶³ Indeed the text is comprised of an entire metaphysics of breaking that originates with the appropriately named Bolingbroke. Richard is described as “a broken man” (ll.i.257); Bolingbroke is “late broke from the Duke of Exeter” (ll.281); Northumberland appeals to Richard’s followers to “imp out our country’s broken wing” (ll.292); the Duchess of Gloucester hopes that Mowbray’s sins “may break his foaming courser’s back” (l.ii.51); Ross wishes confesses that his heart “must break with silence” (ll.i.228); the Earl of Worcester “Hath broken his staff” (ll.ii.59; ll.iii.27); Northumberland promises that Bolingbroke will not “break [his] oath” (ll.iii.150); York is “loath to break our country’s laws” (ll.168); Richard’s courtiers are accused of having “Broke the possession of a royal bed” (ll.i.11); Aumerle somewhat portentously inquires of Richard how he fares after his “late tossing on the breaking seas?” (ll.ii.3); Richard inveighs against his faction as those who “break their faith to God as well as us” (ll.101); at his deposition Richard implores that “God pardon all oaths that are broke to me,/God keep all vows unbroke are made to thee!” (IV.i.214-15); York promises to “break open” (V.iii.45) the door when Aumerle and Henry are in conference; Richard warns that the sins of his deposition “shall break into corruption” (V.i.59); an incarcerated Richard muses on the way to “check

Richard II carries within it, is impelled forward by, a force of breaking from itself that also comes to organize the very scene of its inscription; a “force of breaking,” which we might read along with Derrida as something that “is not an accidental predicate, but the very structure of the written.”⁶⁴ Indeed, the entire text may be read as an extended allegory for this strange separating movement that frequently finds itself on the curvature of a return, ponderous steps that are as much retentional as they are protentional. As Richard’s vacillation in the deposition scene, his re-signing, perhaps demonstrates most vividly – “Ay, no; no, ay” (IV.i.201) - to say the word “not” (pas) of anything is still to speak and to leave in language that trace or footprint (pas) of one’s approach (through negation) to the other. Holding together the double movement of approach and distancing that skews and displaces the determination of any presence a soi, pas in both Derrida and Blanchot is, rather, a composite term - simultaneously an adverb (“not”) or a noun (“step”) - whose overall movement exceeds the simple opposition either of affirmation or negation.

This strangely recursive trajectory whereby a step forward is somehow coterminous with a movement back is, we should recall, also the focus of Gaunt’s conceit at the beginning of the play when he attempts to reinscribe Bolingbroke’s exile into the appeasing words of a poetic fancy:

The sullen passage of thy weary steps
Esteem as foil wherein thou art set
The precious jewel of thy home return.

time broke in a disordered string” which he renders equivalent to “my true time broke” (V.v. 46; 48) before wishing that his horse did “break the neck/Of that proud man that did usurp his back” (ll.88-9).

⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context” in A Derrida Reader: Between The Blinds, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York, 1991), pp.81-112, p.93.

(I.iii.265-67: emphasis added)

Do we not find here, in the necessarily ambivalent image of the “foil”, an explicit association between the idea of “speculation” as a venturing forth and as that which is constitutively allayed and delayed through the detour of a (specular) return? Implying, in other words, that a slippage occurs between identity and destination, Gaunt’s metaphor encapsulates neatly both senses of “foil” as that which impedes self-reflection and also that which becomes the surface for a relayed appropriation of identity.

Specifically, this speech also obliges us to consider Jacques Lacan’s seminal account of the way that the ego erects itself (stands by itself) only by anticipating itself on the basis of an irreducible “stepping” behind itself. In a text that never ceases to complicate the dialectical rigours that subtend every attempt to “pose-oneself-before- oneself,”⁶⁵ as Richard’s deposition scene illustrates perhaps most dramatically, we should bear in mind Lacan’s assertions that the subject learns to hold itself straight, upright, by spatially identifying with the specular image. According to Lacan the specular “dialectic” of subjectivity more properly consists of an “ortho-dramatization of the subjectivity of the subject” insofar as this subject assigns itself the task of optical erection.⁶⁶

Indeed, it is this very movement of aufhebung that informs a dominant strain of imagery throughout the text: Richard speaks of “High blood’s royalty” (I.i.58) and teases Bolingbroke about “how high a pitch his resolution soars” (II.109) and his “sky-aspiring and

⁶⁵ Quoted in Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Lacan: The Absolute Master (California, 1994), p.60.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.64.

ambitious thoughts” (I.iii.130); Bolingbroke, also referred to as “high Hereford” (I.iv.2), wishes that his father’s presence before Richard will “with a twofold vigour lift me up” (I.iii.71). Alternatively, Mowbray flatters Richard as an “upright gentleman” (I.iii.87) while Bolingbroke regards himself as “strong as a tower in hope” (I.iii.102), a conceit that contrasts ironically with the “ill-erected tower” (V.i.2) that later seals Richard’s fate. In this list, which is far from exhaustive, such “sky-aspiring” metaphors enter into an increasingly complex alteration in the text between the high and the low, the near and the distant, with the fort: da as the double conjugation of annulment and return.

Indeed, in a text that is manifestly concerned with the re-establishing of rights and property, Richard II makes legible a certain preoccupation with the feet as procuring the necessary space(s) for such restitution, a term which, according to Derrida, also implies “placing the subject upright again, in its stance, in its institution.”⁶⁷ We may go so far as to claim that Richard II also evidences a certain “orthopaedic anxiety” in that it so consistently assumes this necessity of establishing the subject in an upright position.⁶⁸ In fact, early in the text Mowbray sues for his rights to the King by invoking a term that is crucially concerned with the question of the subject’s optical erection. Refuting Bolingbroke’s charges Mowbray claims that “I am disgrac’d, impeach’d, and baffl’d here” (I.i.170). In (appropriately) a

⁶⁷ Jacques Derrida “Restitutions of the truth in pointing [pointure]” in The Truth in Painting, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (London, 1987), pp.257-382, p.286.

⁶⁸ From beginning to end the text appears to be obsessed with the contrasting postures of stooping and standing. In a list that is far from exhaustive we might consider the following examples: Richard refers to the “unstooping firmness of my upright soul” (I.i.121); Bolingbroke deposes himself as one that does “stand in arms” (I.iii.36); Bolingbroke “stands here, for God, his sovereign, and himself” (II.105) while Mowbray “standeth...On pain to be found false and recreant” (II.110-11); Greene expresses concern for the troops that “stand out in Ireland” (I.iv.38); Richard seizes the “moveables/Wehereof our uncle Gaunt did stand possess’d” (I.i.161-2); Bolingbroke thanks Ross for his support “Which, till my infant fortune comes to years,/Stands for my bounty..” (II.iii.66-7); arraigned by York for having his “banish’d and forbidden legs/Dar’d once to touch a dust of England’s ground,” Bolingbroke inquires of his “fault” “On what condition stands it and wherein?” (II.iii.89-90; 105-6); Richard fantasizes that his plotters will “Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves” (III.ii.46).

footnoted reference the Arden editor glosses the term “baffl’d” as a chivalric custom which, according to Hall, “is used when a man is openly perjured, and then they make of him an Image paynted reverted with his heles upwarde” (emphasis added).⁶⁹ Indeed, from Richard’s initial inquiry into whether there is “some known ground of treachery” (I.i.2) in Bolingbroke’s appeal, the entire scene encodes a syntax of throwing down and taking up so that any grounds for appeal rests, quite literally, on whether the combatants are in full possession of their feet: Mowbray agrees to meet Bolingbroke “were I tied to run afoot....Where ever Englishmen durst set his foot” (I.i.53, 66), a challenge that is later modified in his promise to “hurl down my gage/Upon this overweening traitor’s foot” (II.146-7). Even the king’s intervention is implicitly punned upon as a reference to footwear:

Richard: Norfolk, throw down we bid, there is no boot
 Mow: Myself I throw, dread sovereign, at thy foot.

(I. i. 164-5)

From Bolingbroke’s initial (and ultimately specious) “farewell” to “England’s ground” as a “mother” and “nurse that bears me yet!” (I.iii.306-7) we can discern an increasing preoccupation in the text with what Derrida calls “ [a] fundamental subjectivity of the ground [...] along with this pas de contact (this pas de sujet) which rhythmically raises the adhesion of a march/walk/step.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ King Richard II, ed. Peter Ure (London, 1996), p.14, n.170.

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Restitutions,” p.284.

Insofar as it may be said to inscribe a complex metaphor for Richard's "deposition," the text itself is preoccupied with various figures of "treading" which, borrowing a useful formulation from Paul de Man, also serve to "mimic the suspended gravity between rising and falling"⁷¹ that, in a strange sense, is performed by the text. The Duchess of York, for example, warns of the dangers to be found at the "untrodden stones" at Plashy (I.ii.69); Richard decrees that Bolingbroke is to "tread the stranger paths of banishment" (I.iii.143); Gaunt urges the 'banished' Bolingbroke to imagine the "The grass whereon thou tread'st the presence/strew'd with flowers" (I.iii.289-90); significantly, Bolingbroke even refers to his ignominy at the hands of Richard as one who has been "trod down" (I.iii.125).

In other words, the sheer ubiquity of this "treading" becomes perhaps the figure in Richard II that most obviously discloses the text's ambivalent relationship toward an experience of a ground that could root (and route) identity to destination. "Look not to the ground," Richard at one point intones to his dwindling band of supporters, "Yea favourites of a king, are we not high?" (III.ii.87-8). By contrast, when he is later imprisoned in the Tower, the recently deposed king is enraged by reports that his horse has conveyed Bolingbroke to the coronation "So proudly as if he disdain'd the ground": "Would he not stumble? would he not fall down,/Since pride must have a fall, and break the neck/Of that proud man that did usurp his back?" (V.v.83; 87-9). The incidence of the "fall" here not only involves an alternation between high and low, the very threat of usurpation itself is also connected with an implied threat to the very availability of a "ground."⁷² Bearing in mind Richard's

⁷¹ Paul de Man, The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York, 1984), p.111.

⁷² Not coincidentally Richard accepts the certainty of his "fall" quite literally in an image of debasement that is also (implicitly) a fall into writing: "Let us sit upon the ground/And tell sad stories of the death of kings." Hoping that his captors will "Save our deposed bodies to the ground" (III.ii.150), it is this very difference in altitude (between sitting and standing) that is further elaborated in Richard's conceit that "within the hollow crown/That rounds the mortal temples of a king/Keeps

instruction that Northumberland “Tell Bolingbroke, for yon methinks he stands,/That every stride he makes upon my land/Is dangerous treason” (III.iii.91-3), the figure of the “ground” again appears to be something that is instituted rather than simply revealed through its adhesion to a certain step.

If Richard II variously implies a certain necessity of the step, of that which is closest to the ground, this step also threatens the very institutional stability of the ground as such: i.e., as something that is, in a radical sense, always already in the process of being “usurped.” So it is that we find an embattled Richard trying to resist attack on his kingdom by enlisting the help of “heavy-gaited toads” that will “lie in their way,/Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet/Which with usurping steps do trample thee” (III.ii.15-17).⁷³ Again, it is around this question of the step, of the gait⁷⁴ - especially in a text where “forbidden legs” that have “dared to touch a dust of England’s ground” (II.iii.89-90) kicks of the tragedy proper - that Richard’s “fall” comes to be implicated, quite literally, in what is simultaneously both a strange and pedestrian kind of movement: “shoes are what you let fall. Particularly old shoes. The instance of the fall, the fallen, or the downfallen [...] You let something fall like an old shoe [...] The remainder is also this lowness.”⁷⁵

death his court, and there the antic sits” (II.187). Moreover, we might also recall de Man’s suggestion that treading cooperates with the movement of writing insofar as the “availability of a surface that could stiffen into solidity” becomes a problem. Paul de Man op. cit., p.111.

⁷³ “[...] differance instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom.” Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton, 1982), p.22.

⁷⁴ According to Derrida it is “the question of the step, the gait, the pace, the rhythm, the passage, or the traversal” that simultaneously gives rise to and threatens to terminate all determination and every destination.” Aporias, trans. Thomas Dutoit (California, 1993), p.7, p.10.

⁷⁵ Derrida, “Resitutions,” p.305.

It is, then, precisely this step, this pas that poses as it deposes in a negating and debasing movement, that also marks in the text a certain facility to deal with “being underneath, with ground and below ground” which, as Derrida argues, is inseparable from any consideration of institutional authority as also “‘the great question’ of the thing as subjectum.”⁷⁶ Indeed, we may like to recall here that, in a term that is not found elsewhere in Shakespeare, Bolingbroke’s advance toward the throne is described as a “patient underbearing of his fortune” (I.iv.29); and even York laments his role of having to “underprop” Richard’s land (II.ii.82-4). Yet this very question of the underneath itself comes, quite literally, to “rest” [restance]⁷⁷ on a rhetoric of the step (pas) as that which exceeds the dialectics of presence and absence, or the implied distance between the high and the low. This step whose very destination is imperiled by an essential divisibility,⁷⁸ according to Derrida, also opens onto another relation, a relation without relation:

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.285.

⁷⁷ This is a term that is used throughout Derrida’s work. Restance is the noun derived from the present participle of rester, to remain. Derrida’s notion of the trace returns repeatedly to this question of restance: as the reversion or remains that remain in excess of presence. The complex resonance of this term is in fact hinted at throughout the text; most notably in the somewhat infelicitous conceit that signals York’s determination to thwart Aumerle’s “conspiracy”: “This fest’red joint cut off, the rest rest sound;/This, let alone, will all the rest confound” (V.iii.83-4). Throughout the text the ubiquitous use of the term “rest” variously turns upon this dual association between that which remains and also that which is conserved as a remainder. Bushy inquires why Greene has “not proclaim’d Northumberland/And all the rest revolted faction traitors?” (II.ii.56-7); a servingman warns York that “I shall grieve you to report the rest” (II.ii.95); Salisbury predicts “unrest” (II.iv.22); Bagot refers sarcastically to “the restful English court” (IV.i.12); Bolingbroke ordains that “differences shall all rest under gage” (IV.i.86, 105); turning his eyes upon himself Richard finds himself “a traitor with the rest” (IV.i.248); preparing to watch Bolingbroke’s procession through London the Queen invites her attendants to “rest, if this rebellious earth/Have any resting for her true king’s queen” (V.i.5-6); the Duchess urges her husband to “tell the rest,/When weeping made you break the story off,” (V.ii.1-2).

⁷⁸ Derrida himself invites us to read the “shoe” as that which, like the letter, problematizes the certainty of every destination. “In ‘The Purveyor of Truth,’ replace the literal ‘letter’ by a ‘shoe’ and you will read: ‘This is what loses and risks, without guarantee of return, the restance of anything whatsoever: a shoe does not always arrive at its destination, and once that belongs to its structure, one can say that it never truly arrives there, that when it does arrive, its possibility-of-not-arriving torments it with an internal drift.’” Derrida, ‘Restitutions,’ p.364.

The crossing of borders always announces itself according to the movement of a certain step [pas] - and of the step that crosses a line. An indivisible line - the institution of such an indivisibility [is related to] the institution of the step...whether the step crosses it or not.⁷⁹

Richard II similarly gestures toward a limit that is never crossed. Or, more accurately, it retreats before a limit that the very approach of the step itself renders possible. We should recall here that Mowbray's initial challenge to Bolingbroke is to assign a meeting place that, on further reflection, proves to be uninhabitable. Mowbray promises to pursue Bolingbroke

Even to the frozen ridges of the Alps,
Or any other ground inhabitable
Where ever Englishmen durst set his foot.

(I.i.63-6)

Seeking not to be wrong-footed by this rhetoric of overtaking, the rendezvous subsequently wagered by Bolingbroke gestures toward what is, strictly speaking, an "elsewhere" that exceeds the bounds of any assignable topology: "here, or elsewhere to the furthest verge/That was ever survey'd by English eye" (II.93-4). Indeed, the text frequently discloses a certain preoccupation with the security of borders that are variously negotiated around this vacillating relation between the visible and the invisible. Northumberland, for example, tries to reassure Richard that Bolingbroke's "coming hither hath no further scope/Than for his lineal royalties" (III.iii.112-113). Commenting upon his own "proud heart" Richard immediately plays upon this term in his determination to "give thee scope to beat,/Since foes have scope to beat both thee and me' (II.140-1).

⁷⁹ Derrida, The Post Card, p.254.

Even more ambitiously, perhaps, the text sometimes evokes a “destination” that seeks to out-distance distance itself: as something that “lingers in extremity” (II.ii.71) or which threatens to exceed even “the extremest point” (IV.i.47). What, crucially, may be discerned here is the solicitation of a radical “beyond” that is nevertheless inscribed within the text itself: an implied step (pas) beyond that is also not (pas) beyond. That is to say, the question of the step in Richard II rigorously concerns this speculative threshold, the separation or interval that speculation properly crosses over: “It passes over, it is beyond measure. It goes beyond the observable and the visible.”⁸⁰ And is this not also the “beyond” that Maurice Blanchot characterizes as le pas au-dela endemic to all writing? For Blanchot writing is this strange power of reversion, this step (pas) toward the not (pas) that is forever beyond (au dela),⁸¹ precisely in so far as writing exposes the decision of a lack that marks itself only by a surplus without place, that is impossible to assign to a place.

⁸⁰ Derrida, The Post Card, p.380. Indeed, Richard II appears to be uncommonly preoccupied with the word “measure”: the Duchess accuses Gaunt that he does “consent/In some large measure to thy father’s death” (I.ii.25-6); Gaunt consoles his son by imagining exile as “no more/Than a delightful measure or a dance” (I.iii.290-1); Richard arraigns his followers for allowing Bolingbroke to “Measure our confines with such peaceful steps” (III.ii.125); refusing the invitation to dance Anne confesses that her “legs can keep no measure in delight,/When my poor heart no measure keeps in grief” (III.iv.7-8).

⁸¹ I am referring here to Maurice Blanchot’s essay entitled The Step Not Beyond which never ceases to interrogate the scene of writing as that which at once traces and effaces, where the the pas is at once prohibition and transgression. For Blanchot the pas must be read simultaneously as negation and the trace or movement of an advance. We might risk a summation of Blanchot’s concerns in the suggestion that the step beyond is never completed, or, if it is completed, is never really beyond. Transgression never really transgresses, but only calls for another limit:

The circle of the law is this: there must be a crossing in order for there to be a limit, but only the limit, in as much as uncrossable, summons to cross, affirms the desire (the false step) that has always already, through an unforeseeable movement, crossed the line.

Maurice Blanchot, The Step Not Beyond, trans. Lycette Nelson (New York, 1992), p.24.

With the step/not - the possible identification of an intangible edge - the crossing of the line becomes a problem.⁸² Nowhere is this more evident than in the inconclusive “trial” between Mowbray and Bolingbroke. Poised to “set forward” into combat, Richard, inexplicably, commands that the appellants “return back to their chairs again” (I.iii.117; 120). Once again, the destination that this implied step renders possible has a form of advance that does not consist in passing, traversing or transiting,⁸³ but rather which “sets forward” in a movement of negation that the step (pas) is obliged to take back at the next step.

“Return Back”

⁸² Jacques Derrida, Aporias, trans. Thomas Dutoit (California, 1993), p.3.

⁸³ According to a superb analysis by Samuel Weber, the problematic of “writing” (of the trace, the mark and iterability) inevitably comes down to this question of the spectral pas which haunts internally every consideration of the “past,” the “pass” and “passing” as terms that would imply a modified relation to the present: “a certain coming after emerges here as also the condition under which anything can come to be in the first place. If, however, what comes to be only does so by coming after, the most precise way to describe this paradoxical kind of event is as a coming-to-pass. Deconstruction does not simply take place. It does not simply come, stay a while and then depart. It comes to pass. It arrives only in passing, or inversely, it is only in passing that it arrives.” Samuel Weber, “After Deconstruction” in Alan Cholodenko ed., Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media (California, 1996), pp.129-52, p.140. Moreover Roger Laporte argues that “Pas’ has or should have at least four senses, the pas understood as ‘step,’ pas as in ne pas, ‘not’, or ne pas encore, ‘not yet’, the pas of passive [...] the pas of the past; four meanings then, but which communicate with each other in and by writing.” Roger Laporte, Maurice Blanchot: L’ancien, l’effroyablement ancien (Paris, 1987), p.44. I am indebted to Michael Sharp for his assistance in this translation.

I would also like to suggest here that Richard II is a text that discloses a somewhat conspicuous concern with transiting, and traversal, with the question of (pas)sage in general: Mowbray accuses Bolingbroke that “Through the false passage of thy throat thou liest” (I.i.125); Gaunt organizes an entire conceit around “The sullen passage” of his son’s “weary steps” who recoils from the idea of “a long apprenticeship/To foreign passages” (I.iii.265; 271-2); upon seeing the disgraced king Bolingbroke comments on how “the envious clouds are bent/To dim his glory and to stain the trace/Of his bright passage to the occident” (III.iii.65-7); Bolingbroke laments York’s digressing son who “through muddy passages,/Hath held his current and defil’d himself” (V.iii.60-1); an incarcerated Richard muses on how he “May tear a passage through the flinty ribs/Of this hard world” (V.v.20-1).

We will permit ourselves a slight detour at this point in order to suggest that the word “back” is disseminated throughout Richard II as a kind of tonal figure for this problem of what, precisely, it might mean either to take back, or to come back. As that which both threatens and inscribes the possibility of every arrival, Derrida discusses this strange complicity between the word “back” and the question of the destination in his claim that “There is only the back, seen from the back, in what is written [...] Everything is played out in retro.”⁸⁴ In Richard II the word “back” also assumes the burden of this equivocal spacing, of that which writes/is written. Like the step (pas), “back” signals a certain trace of alterity whose movement is no longer determinable according to a linear and indivisible line. If, as Nicholas Royle so patiently argues, there is “the incursion and recursion of the word ‘back’ whenever the prefix ‘re-’ is in operation,”⁸⁵ “back” becomes the (postal) signature of the question of the “re-” in general: of a turning “back” that has no reality that is signifiable prior to this very turn in re-turning.

Perhaps most strikingly, it is the aborted contest between Mowbray and Bolingbroke that gestures toward this spacing. Instructing the combatants to “return back to their chairs again” (I.iii.120), Richard’s use of “back” here appears to be placed in a strangely superfluous kind of relation to “return.” Simultaneously coming-and-going, moving literally “from one side to the other turning” (V.ii.18), the supplementary twists and turns of Richard’s language are only further compounded by the neutralising syntax of his request that the combatants “Withdraw with us...While we return these dukes what we decree” (I.iii.121-2).

⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p. 48.

⁸⁵ Nicholas Royle, “Back,” Oxford Literary Review, 18 (1996), pp.145-58, p.147.

“Return,” “back,” “again,” “withdraw”: all of these terms clear an undecidable path that opens onto nothing other than the moment of de-cision itself, to “what we decree.”⁸⁶

Indeed, the entire scene “returns back” to nothing apart from further effractions that serve only to expose the very enigma of the “return” itself. Commanding Mowbray to “Return again” (I.iii.178) after having decreed the “hopeless word of ‘never to return’” (ll.152), this ambivalence also comes to contaminate the very sense of Mowbray’s leave-taking:

“Farewell, my liege. No way can I stray/Save back to England all the world’s my way” (ll. 206-7). How are we to understand (indeed, to follow) this recursive syntax? A perplexed Arden editor of the play heroically glosses the meaning as “I can never go astray now, except in returning to England; I am free to wander anywhere in the world.”⁸⁷ In other words, what coming back amounts to here is, paradoxically, an arrival at the departure, an arrival that departs essentially from itself. That is to say, the equivocal syntax bears within itself the strange logic of an essential “straying” or detour that would seek the origin in the very distance that holds it from, or “saves” it from the origin.

It is in this strange sense, then, that the term “back” in Richard II comes increasingly to provide the tonal figure for what Nicholas Royle describes as “the essentially supplementary, the ghostly return of or revenge of writing as such.”⁸⁸ “Back,” in other words, can only “return” to what cannot, strictly speaking, either take place or “give place”

⁸⁶ I am concerned here to bear in mind Derrida’s numerous remarks regarding how every decision can occur only under the exposure to a necessary dehiscence. For example, Derrida argues that “It is from the moment one surrenders to the necessity of divisibility and the undecidable that the question of decision can be posed...A decision that would be taken otherwise than on the border of this undecidable would not be a decision.” “Dialanguages” in Points..., pp.132-55, p.147.

⁸⁷ King Richard II, ed. Peter Ure (London, 1991), p.33, n.206-7.

⁸⁸ Nicholas Royle, “Back,” p.154.

(V.v.95). Rather, writing implies the indefatigable detour of the step (pas) as that which inscribes itself in a non-unified system of relations that cross paths, but without any point of crossing that might affirm their coincidence. Crucially, we might recall here how “York thrives to beat back Bolingbroke” (II.ii.143), or Gaunt’s description of England’s shores as that which “beats back the envious siege” (II.i.62); and, in what is perhaps the most strangely articulate comment on this double movement, the Queen’s lament that hope is “a keeper back of death” (II.ii.70).

Simultaneously dispatching and saving, keeping and sending on, it is once again around (or behind) this problematical taxonomy of the near and the far that “back” comes to inscribe itself. What is announced in the very disposition of that which “keeps back” or “beats back” is a movement where what is “near” is not only repelled and held apart, it is in a more troubling sense taken “back” into the very separation of the distant. For Maurice Blanchot, it is precisely this deferred overlapping (through which proximity might be said to distance itself) that most explicitly returns the question of “presence” (of that which is proximate) to a consideration of writing:

The distant calls to the near, repelling it, not to define itself in it by opposition, nor to form a couple with it [...] but in such a way that the separation between the two still belong to the distant.⁸⁹

In a text that frequently sets “the word itself against the word” (V.iii.120; V.v.13-14), this disjunctive overlapping announces the very space of writing itself: responding to the call of an other which it cannot represent, Richard II also approaches alterity only in a movement of self-dislocation that inscribes this “double step of approach as distancing [where] the

⁸⁹ Maurice Blanchot, The Step Not Beyond (New York, 1993), p.69-70.

other dislocates the opposition of the near and the far, without however confounding them.”⁹⁰

Fearing that Bolingbroke’s appeal might pose a secret danger, Richard is reassured by Gaunt that “As near as I could sift him on that argument/ On some apparent danger seen in him,/Aim’d at your Highness, no inveterate malice” (I.i.12-14), an anxiety that is later echoed in the king’s reference to Bolingbroke’s “neighbour nearness to our sacred blood” (I.i.119). The text’s preoccupation with distancing is signaled ironically in the second encounter between Bolingbroke and Mowbray where Richard invites the combatants to “draw near” just before he decrees their exile from the kingdom (I.iii.123). Indeed, the text variously positions the figure of the king as the index of this pulsating economy of retreat and approach. Northumberland confesses that he “dare not say/How near the tidings of our comfort is” (II.i.271-2), while a fearful Greene is mindful of “our nearness to the king in love/Is near the hate of those love not the king,” prompting Bushy to remark how “we ever have been near the king” (II.ii. 126-7; 133). In an observation that is also, implicitly, a bid for the throne, Bolingbroke reminds his detractors how he is “Near to the king in blood, and near in love” (III.i.17). In other words, as the conspiracy to depose Richard gathers strength, so the very question of the near and the far comes to enter into a much more equivocal relation. Demanding a report of his dwindling military support, for example, “how far off lies our power?”, Salisbury’s evasive response to the king is that it is “Nor near nor farther

⁹⁰ Quoted in Timothy Clark, Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot: Sources of Derrida’s notion and practice of literature (Cambridge, 1992), p.137. Derrida, particularly in his work on Heidegger, repeatedly discusses the question of ‘presence’ as that which exceeds any simple opposition between the near and the far. For Derrida, rather, it is the movement of differance that remains to be thought here: “The near and the far are before the opposition of space and time, according to the opening of a spacing which belongs neither to time nor to space, and which dislocates, while producing it, any presence of the present.” “The Ends of Man” in The Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton, 1982), pp.109-36, p.132-3.

off" (III.ii.63-4). It is, however, in Richard's efforts to mollify his "separation" from Anne - "weep thou for me in France, I for thee here;/ Better far off than, near, be n'er the near" (V.i.87-8) - that we find what is perhaps the most strangely eloquent figure for the text's complex taxonomy of the near and the distant.⁹¹

I adduce this list of examples, which is far from exhaustive, in order to suggest that Richard II's uncommonly frequent evocations of the "king-as-presence"⁹² is negotiated, quite literally, in terms of a taxonomy of retreat and approach wherein "presence" becomes less a countervailing determination of this movement than one of its effects. Richard II is not merely concerned with the question of the king's deposition, then: the king is that which must be thought in terms of a radical de-positioning that has always already contaminated the scene of presence. Within the text's lexicon of distancing, the king is implicated in a certain problematic of the post: a figure that insists at a point of perpetual non-insertion, the "king" calibrates a taxonomy of retreat and approach where "presence" comes literally to depend upon the very hollowing out of distance itself.⁹³ While guarding against an appeal to any naive thematicism, do not the following remarks by Derrida on what he calls the

⁹¹ According to Hent de Vries what we call "textuality" elaborates a figural language of "nearness in a space that exceeds all ontic determinations [...] signaling itself through and in the concepts and figures of what it surpasses and calls forth." Hent de Vries, "Theotopographies; Nancy, Holderlin, Heidegger," Modern Language Notes, 109 (1994), pp. 445-77, p.462.

⁹² Richard calls Mowbray and Bolingbroke "to our presence; face to face" (I.i.15); Bolingbroke comes "appellant to this princely presence" (II.34); after his fateful return to England Ross remarks to Bolingbroke that it is "your presence makes us rich" (II.iii.63); Richard arraigns York for the fact that his "joints forget/To pay their awful duty to our presence" (III.iii.75-6); preparing to defend himself against Fitzwater's accusations, Aumerle flatters Bolingbroke by confiding that "Excepting one, I would he were the best/In all this presence that hath mov'd me so" (IV.i.31-2); Carlisle remarks upon Bolingbroke's "royal presence" (IV.i.115); York warns King Henry that he "hast a traitor in thy presence" (V.iii.38).

⁹³ Michel Foucault also offers a particularly compelling account of the king as this impossible "proximate outside" in "Distance, Aspect, Origin" in The Tel Quel Reader, eds. Patrick Ffrench and Roland-Francois Lack (London, 1998), pp.97-109.

“postal principle” also offer a succinct commentary on the strategies of reversion to be found in Richard II? For Derrida, the postal principle is ineluctably tied to

the vocabulary of going-coming, of the step, of the way or the a-way, of the near and the far, of all the frameworks in tele-, of the destination, of the adestination, of the address and the maladdress, ...of the inheritance and of the genealogy, of the paradoxes of the nomination, of the king...⁹⁴

What appears to be at issue throughout the text, then, no longer concerns a distancing rendering this or that absent, and then a rapprochement rendering this or that into presence. Rather, the distant and the near collapse into a more mysterious kind of spacing, an overlap without equivalence that confounds every positional logic.

Perhaps appropriately, it is in Richard’s fable of deposition, the conceit of the “two buckets,” that we find the paradoxical suggestion of how movement is in fact contingent upon a certain invisible reserve or holding back:

filling one another
The emptier ever dancing in the air,
The other down, unseen, and full of water.
That bucket down and full of tears am I,
Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high

(IV.i.185-9)

De-position here is less a question simply of gravitational pull than a more enigmatic impingement of force where there is neither contact or an absolute break between strata. Rather, the kind of displacement that appears to be at issue involves a reserve that is simultaneously compensatory and vicarious. In other words, both rhetorically and

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.222.

idiomatically, Richard's conceit here is uncannily reminiscent of Derrida's account of supplementarity:

[...] the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as one fills a void [...] the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which takes-(the)-place. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere something can be filled up of itself, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy.⁹⁵

We may suggest that, as a drama of seemingly interminable supplementary twists and turns, Richard II comes to implicate writing in an essential de-positioning that, for Derrida, is also the original modality of the speculative itself. As a pas de these that increasingly gives the impression of advance without advancing, the "play" appears never to advance anything that it does not immediately take back, "without ever positing anything which remains in its position[...]"⁹⁶ Most notably with its endless meditations upon appeals, requests, seductions, exhortations and supplications, Richard II advances only on the condition of an irreducible falling behind itself. In fact, in a suitably orthopaedic metaphor, York laments how this alienation of self-identity is now endemic to a nation which hearing "Report of fashions in proud Italy/....our tardy-apish nation/Limps after in base imitation" (II.i.21-2). Crucially, Derrida also discusses limping as the essential movement of repetition more generally: as that which never permits the conclusion of a last step. For Derrida "limping" announces a "diabolical" agency that upsets the appeasing order of representation and self-

⁹⁵ Jacques Derrida, "That Dangerous Supplement..." in Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (London, 1992), pp.76-109, p.83.

⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.284

identity through, precisely, an equivocal spacing and “tardy-apish” posture that “expand(s) the effect of duplicity without an original....”⁹⁷

Before The Law

Admittedly, several critics of the play have already noted how the text’s vacillating structure threatens to dispel the illusion of any dialectical progress or regress. E.M.W. Tillyard, for example, is particularly critical of Richard II as a play “where means matter more than ends,” and recounts a series of “missed encounters” which he regards as impoverishing the dramatic force of the play:

There is all the pomp of a tournament without the physical meeting of the two armed knights. There is a great army of Welshman assembled to support Richard, but they never fight. Bolingbroke before Flint Castle speaks of the terrible clash there should be when he and Richard meet - But instead of a clash there is a highly ceremonious encounter leading to the effortless submission of Richard.⁹⁸

Tillyard’s view of the play to be what he calls “static” is echoed in a more recent criticism. For Phyllis Rackin, for example, it is principally Richard’s “inaction that prevents [...] the conflicts that the audience is repeatedly led to anticipate and is repeatedly prevented from seeing.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.270.

⁹⁸ E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare’s History Plays (London, 1991), p.251-2.

⁹⁹ Phyllis Rackin, “The Role of the Audience in Shakespeare’s Richard II,” Shakespeare Quarterly, 36,3 (Autumn, 1985), pp.262-82. Rackin returns to this question in a later article that, despite its title, is even more evasive, “Temporality, Anachrony and Presence in Shakespeare’s English Histories,” Renaissance Drama, 17 (1986) , pp.101-23, p.105-6.

Time and again, it seems, Richard II cultivates a rhetoric of advance that in fact risks advancing nowhere. Gaunt implores his son to think of the “steps” of his journey into banishment as “no more/Than a delightful measure or a dance” (I.iii.290-1)¹⁰⁰; Scroope attempts to delay the news of Bolingbroke’s return to England by playing “the torturer by small and small/To lengthen out the worst that must be spoken” (III.ii.198-9); similarly, learning of Richard’s deposition, the Queen arraigns “Nimble mischance, that art so light of foot,/Doth not thy embassy belong to me,/And I am last that knows it?” (III.iv.92-4); departing from the Queen Richard resolves that “Twice for one step I’ll groan, the way being short,/And piece the way out with a heavy heart” (V.i.91-2).

Advancing “by small and small,” we might bear in mind here Joseph Porter’s classic analysis of how the speech action in Richard II also “distinctively tends toward the unmarked non-specific direction of address,”¹⁰¹ and that Richard in particular is frequently given to “saying what he does as he does it.”¹⁰² That is to say, the unusually large number of performative speech acts in Richard II also gravitate implicitly around this tension of the fort: da as that which is similarly always in the process of describing in advance the scene of its own description. Always at some level “attending but the signal to begin” (I.iii.116), following

¹⁰⁰ Significantly, Alan Brissenden remarks that “the use of ‘measure’ and ‘dance’ is tautological, since a measure is a dance.” Shakespeare and the Dance (London, 1981), p.26. Apart from deeming it appropriate to the “non-combatant quality of the play,” Brissenden adduces no further significance to the fact that “Richard II contains more references to dance than any of the histories,” p.25. Rather we might aver along with Derrida that even the most innocent dance thwarts “the assignation a residence....the dance changes place and above all changes places.” Jacques Derrida, Points: Interviews, 1974-1994 (California, 1995), p.94.

¹⁰¹ Joseph A. Porter, The Drama of Speech Acts: Shakespeare’s Lancastrian Tetralogy (London, 1979), p.40.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.32.

Heidegger we could say, at a stretch, that the text draws attention to a certain tautology at work insofar as “the ‘whither’ to which its steps directs us, develops and shows itself only in the execution of the step.”¹⁰³ Simultaneously posing and deposing, positing and depositing itself in the a-way of increasingly diminished returns,¹⁰⁴ Tillyard’s view of the text as “static” may now be read not merely in terms of neutralization, but as a movement immanent to the text - performed by the text - that is more complex than either affirmation or negation [pas].¹⁰⁵ In other words, what is at issue here is a certain marking¹⁰⁶ that vitiates itself through dividing itself, a re-signing that no dialectic of presence and absence can master: “Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be./Therefore no “no”, for I resign to thee” (IV.i.201-2).

¹⁰³ Quoted in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Obliteration” in The Subject of Philosophy, ed. Thomas Trezise (London, 1993), pp.57-99, p.68.

¹⁰⁴ This metaphor is not entirely fortuitous. John Blanpied, for example, argues that the text reaches a “cul-de-sac” with Richard so that “it [is] finally impossible to say whether Richard reveals an inner emptiness or the play itself can simply go no further in its self-consuming momentum.” John Blanpied, Time and the Artist in Shakespeare’s History Plays (Newark, 1983), p.139.

¹⁰⁵ “Writing goes beyond whatever declining negativity might accompany a dialectical opposition. What counts in the final accounting and beyond what can be counted is a certain step beyond.” Jacques Derrida, “Otobiographies” in The Ear of the Other: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida, ed. Christine McDonald (London, 1988), pp.1-41, p.19.

¹⁰⁶ We should bear in mind here that Derrida often plays upon the series “mark-march-margin” [marque, marche, marge]: “the structure of the mark...is the same word as marche, as limit, and as margin.” Jacques Derrida, “Tympan” in Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton, 1982), ix-xxix, xxiv. Indeed, we are able to detect a similar kind of semiosis throughout Richard II, perhaps most explicitly in Bolingbroke’s claims of restitution that are to be conveyed to Richard:

Go, signify as much, while here we march
 Upon the grassy carpet of this plain.
 Let’s march without the noise of threatening drum,
 That from this castle’s tottered battlements
 Our fair appointments may be well perus’d
 [...]
March on, and mark King Richard how he looks.

(III.iii.49-53; 61)

Perhaps not entirely fortuitously a complicity between marking and this strange movement (what Derrida calls spacing)¹⁰⁷ may be glimpsed in the ubiquitous use of the term “spur” in Richard II, which occurs more often than in any other Shakespeare text. Mowbray, for example, laments how the king’s presence “curbs me/From giving reins and spurs to my free speech” (I.i.55-6); the Duchess of Gloucester inquires of Gaunt whether “brotherhood [finds] in thee no sharper spur?” (I.ii.9); Gaunt upbraids Richard’s impulsiveness by observing that “He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes” (II.i.36); Northumberland reports the advance of Ross and Willoughby who are “Bloody with spurring, fiery-red with haste” (II.iii.58); a Lord taunts Aumerle that he will “spur thee on with full as many lies/As may be hollowed in thy treacherous ear,” whereupon Fitzwater teases “How fondly dost thou spur a forward horse!” (IV.i.53-4; 72); in a race with his father to reach Bolingbroke, the Duchess of York implores Aumerle to “Spur post, and get before him to the king” (V.ii.112) and Richard reflects bitterly on how he was “Spurr’d, gall’d, and tir’d by jauncing Bolingbroke” (V.v.94).

I adduce this list of examples in order to suggest that the term “spur” condenses the enigma of that which is hastened, incited or impelled forward only in terms of a certain pre-emptive inscription or “marking.” Along with Derrida I would like to draw attention here to the “fascinating homonymy” of the English word spur which “is the ‘same word’ as the German Spur: trace, wake, indication, mark.”¹⁰⁸ It is in this sense that the scene of presence is shadowed by the paradoxical spacing of that which cannot accede to presence as such,

¹⁰⁷ “An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present...this interval is what might be called spacing.” Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton, 1982), p.13.

¹⁰⁸ Jacques Derrida, Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles, trans. Barbara Harlow (London, 1978), p.23.

marked as it is both protensionally and retentionally- “spur post” - by the irreducibility of the after-effect, of that which comes only in reversion, in the “wake” of presence.

More capriciously, however, this seemingly immobilizing drift of Richard II inevitably comes to question the very status of the Law itself. That is, the Law as the site of a problematic spacing or dis-position that has everything to do with the question of the feet, with a certain step [pas] that secretly “insitutes” the Law. We might bear in mind here that the “orthopaedic anxiety” of which we spoke earlier finds what is perhaps its most explicit expression in the various figures of paralysis to be found in the text. For example, Mowbray’s fantasy of being “tied to run afoot” (I.i.62) is implicitly referred to in Bolingbroke’s appeal that his accuser be freed from “the clogging burthen of a guilty soul” (I.iii.200) - a figure that resurfaces later in Percy’s reference to the Abbot’s “clog of conscience” (V.vi.20); a metaphor which, as the Arden editor also observes, derives specifically from the wooden weight used to keep animals from straying.

It is, preeminently, in the much neglected sub-plot concerning York, the Duchess and Aumerle that the text most emphatically discloses a bizarre preoccupation both with the feet and this implied threat to their mobility. Aumerle’s “conspiracy” having been disclosed, a race then ensues to see who will be the first to communicate this information to the king. Crucially, the specifically comical aspect of the scene is punctuated by York’s frustrated efforts to locate his boots, which only serves to diminish the apparent urgency of the situation: “Give me my boots, I say!” (V.ii.77); “Bring me my boots: I will unto the king”(ll.85); “Give me my boots, I say” (ll.88). Even when the three supplicants are finally

before the king, the entire dialogue is centred upon Bolingbroke's unsuccessful requests for the Duchess to "stand up":

Bol: Rise up, good aunt.
 Duch: Not yet, I thee beseech:
 Forever will I walk upon my knees.
 [...]
 Our knees still kneel to the ground they grow;
 [...]
 Bol: Good aunt, stand up.
 Duch: Nay, do not say 'stand up';
 Say 'pardon' first, and afterwards 'stand up.'
 [...]
 Bol: Good aunt, stand up.
 Duch: I do not sue to stand.

(V.iii. 89-91; 104; 108-10; 126-7)

After Aumerle has finally been granted pardon the Duchess reflects somewhat superfluously upon the "happy vantage of a kneeling knee" (V.iii.130).

That is to say, what this scene ironically brings into focus is a certain anxiety and hesitancy in the text more generally that pertains precisely to the (dis)position or posture that should be assumed by subjects that, especially in this text, are so routinely placed "before" the law. Although Aumerle avers meekly that "Unto my mother's prayers I bend my knee" (V.iii.95), elsewhere in the text the very efficacy of the Law itself is shown to depend crucially upon a necessary spatial equivocation, one that Maurice Blanchot has elsewhere

somewhat appositely referred to as the “knee of the law.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, Richard’s indignation toward Bolingbroke’s deputy as one who omits “the fearful bending of thy knee” and whose “joints forget/To pay their awful duty to our presence” (III.iii.73; 75-6) is met with Northumberland’s reassurance that Bolingbroke’s case is made “immediate on his knees” (III.iii.114). Even so, Richard’s subsequent ruminations upon what is, in all other respects, calculated as an “invisible” transfer of power, are concerned to ironize the very posture of a rectilinear attitude. Apparently resolved to the substitution of “My sceptre for a palmer’s walking staff” (ll.151) Richard nevertheless repeatedly makes deposition homologous to an inverted correspondence between the high and the low; a specifically orthomorphic (and anamorphic) displacement whereby “subjects’ feet/may hourly trample on their sovereign’s head’ (ll.156-7). Drawing attention to how even the making of “a leg” now signifies that “Bolingbroke says ‘ay’” (ll.175), this equivocal power of the knee is developed further in the next scene as the most salient reminder of Richard’s impoverished status: as a subject who is now placed implacably before the law:

Fair cousin you debase your princely knee
 To make the base earth proud with kissing it.
 [...]
 Up, cousin, up; your heart is up, I know,
 Thus high at least, although your knee below.

(III.iv.190-1;194-5)

In other words, these examples inevitably return us to a consideration of a certain spacing or radical de-positioning implied by Derrida’s discussion of the step (pas) as that (non)figure which bears crucially upon the enigma of every institution tout court. More specifically,

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Jacques Derrida, “Before The Law” in Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (London, 1992), pp.181-221, p.207.

for Derrida this step (pas) can only be thought in terms of an essential vacillation, a non-dialectizable movement that “does not belong to position (thesis) or to deposition (privation, subtraction, negation).”¹¹⁰ By so consistently drawing attention to the way that any “relation” to the Law is both contingent upon and produced by a step that in fact institutes the Law, Richard II also urges the suspicion that “the Law [does] not stand up, which is perhaps again why it would be difficult to place oneself before it.”¹¹¹

If, in fact, the text is itself so frequently bent upon consideration of the “vantage of a kneeling knee” (V.iii. 130) it also illuminates how there is no unmediated access to the Law that is not already implicated in this restless equivocation of the step (pas), what Derrida describes as a “looming dominance or difference in height, which gradually alters itself [...] within the polarity of high and low, far and near (fort/da), now and later.”¹¹² Moreover, is not Derrida’s “literal” reading of Kafka’s short story “Before The Law,” where the entire sceneography inscribes “a drama of standing and sitting”¹¹³ strangely reminiscent of the increasingly sedentary positioning of Richard as a movement that, also quite literally, mimes his de-position? ¹¹⁴ Gaunt, for example, warns Richard that “A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown” (II.i.100); Northumberland somewhat portentously remarks that “We see the wind sit sore upon our sails” (II.i.265); Richard predicts that Bolingbroke’s

¹¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” trans. John P. Leavy Jr. in Derrida and Negative Theology (New York, 1992), pp.73-143, p.99.

¹¹¹ Jacques Derrida, “Before The Law” in Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge pp.181-220, p.207.

¹¹² Ibid., p.208.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.207.

¹¹⁴ We may also bear in mind here the Duchess of Gloucester’s wish that “sit my husband’s wrong on Hereford’s spear” (I.ii.47) and Gaunt’s advice to his son that “Woe doth the heavier sit/Where it perceives it is but faintly borne” (I.iii.281).

“treasons will sit blushing in his face” (III.ii.51); resigned to his fate Richard invites his followers to “sit upon the ground/And tell sad stories of the death of kings,” while referring to his crown as the place where “the antic sits”; while Carlisle remonstrates that “wise men ne’er sit and wail their woes” (III.ii.155-6; 162; 178). In this same vein, Carlisle later invites the conspirators to ponder “who sits here that is not Richard’s subject?” before the deposed king sarcastically invites Bolingbroke “in Richard’s seat to sit” (IV.i.122; 218). Richard asks that his queen “In winter’s tedious nights sit by the fire” to tell tales that mourn the “deposing of a rightful king” (V.i.40; 50). And, in what is perhaps the most dramatic image of his debasement, the former king compares himself to those who “sitting in the stocks, refuge their shame,/That many have and others must sit there” (V.v.26-7).

Arguing that “writing is nothing other than the continued demand of meaning for itself,” Jean-Luc Nancy offers the succinct observation that “differance is bidding.”¹¹⁵ In this dual sense of speculation and supplication Richard II may also be said to make repeated demands upon itself precisely insofar as any reference to presence gives way to bidding as a “repetition and supplication of presence coming.”¹¹⁶ In a suitably tautologous statement early in the text Gaunt tries to becalm his son by imploring that “Obedience bids I should not bid again” (I.i.163) and is later echoed in Richard’s command to the combatants to “Throw down we bid” (II.164); the Duchess bids Gaunt that he “bid” York to meet her at Plashy (I.ii.65); Gaunt appeals to Richard that he be permitted to “Bid like a father”

¹¹⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Elliptical Sense” in Derrida: A Critical Reader, ed. David Wood (Oxford, 1992), pp.36-51, p.38, 39. Moreover, Derrida argues that at the scene of writing “There will always have been something to bet. It gives to be rendered. To be put back/put off,” “Restitutions,” p.382.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.42. We may also refer profitably here to Maurice Blanchot’s reminder that “the proper sense of the Greek word that we translate by “suppliant” is “he who comes.”. The suppliant is thus the man who is coming, always on the move because without a place and of whom one must therefore ask the most mysterious of questions, that of the origin.” Maurice Blanchot, “Measure, the Suppliant,” trans. Susan Hanson in The Infinite Conversation (Minneapolis, 1993), pp.93-5, p.94.

(I.iii.238) whereupon Richard requests that Gaunt “bid” farewell to his son (ll.252); Richard “bids” Bushy to repair to Ely house (II.ii.136); the Queen ponders whether her grief is a result of “bidding farewell” to Richard (II.ii.8); York “bids” his wife to send him a thousand pounds (ll.91) before characterising his conflicting loyalties between Richard and Bolingbroke as a contest in bidding: “Both are my kinsmen:/The one is my sovereign...And duty bids defend; th’ other again/Is my kinsman...Whom conscience and my kindred bids to right” (ll.111-15); for Richard news of the rebellion, “Bids me speak of nothing but despair...Oh call back yesterday, bid time return” (III.i.66; 69) and promises to hate everlastingly anyone who “bids me be of comfort anymore” (ll.267-8).

In a text where the Law is so frequently incarnated around an entire scenography of coming and going, of that which is placed before it, such bidding also registers this very gap that postpones any return of the identical to itself. “Bidding,” that is, as a species of the differant, of that which announces “there will have been something to bet..[which] gives itself to be rendered. To be put back/put off.”¹¹⁷ It is in this precise sense that Richard II also routinely destines itself only in so far as it enters into a contract with itself, to the extent that, somewhat more enigmatically, it might be said to reckon and speculate with itself, with its own metastasis.

“Throwing Up”

¹¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Restitutions,” p.382.

This vacillating movement of coming-and-going, the alternating distance between the high and the low, is also echoed in the bizarre choreography of “throwing down and taking up” that is such a prominent feature of the play. Indeed, the examples of “throwing” in the text do not so much amount to an activity or initiative than as a sort of leitmotif for the equivocal syntax, or what we may now call an immanent force of reversion and de-positioning, that comes to contaminate the text’s signifying structures. Not only is Richard referred to as one who has been “quite thrown down” (III.iv.66), the recently deposed king (who has had “dust thrown upon his sacred head” [V.ii.30]) also departs from Anne with the conceit that “Our holy lives must win a new world’s crown/Which our profane hours here have thrown down” (V.i.24-5). In fact Richard himself, playing characteristically with the negating power of speech, at one point invites his enemies to “throw away respect,/Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty” (III.ii.172).¹¹⁸ How are we to account for this strange though no less urgent preoccupation of the text?

According to Derrida every accession to presence depends upon a “throw” that, paradoxically, not only exceeds the very bounds of figurality, but also the alternatives of activity or passivity, of presence and absence. In this respect, the very surfeit of examples of throwing and being thrown in Richard II would appear particularly apposite for a text that so consistently speculates on the basis of a strange return (revenge), on the departure of that which owes itself to return (fort: da). Crucially, for Derrida there is no writing that does not suppose such a disseminal “throw,” the Da of Dasein as something that is thrown. Thrown, that is, before all the modes of throwing that will later determine it:

¹¹⁸ Other examples include the Duchess of Gloucester’s hope that Mowbray’s horse will “throw the rider headlong in the lists” (I.ii.52) or Richard’s criticism of Bolingbroke for the “reverence he did throw away on slaves” (I.iv.27).

project, subject, object, abject, trajectory [...] There is a being-thrown of Dasein even 'before' the appearance appears - in other words, 'before' the advent for it there - of any thought amounting to an operation...And that being-thrown is not a throw in space, in what is already a spatial element. The original spatiality of Dasein depends on the throw.¹¹⁹

The disseminal and disjunctive da of both the fort: da and Da-sein then, inscribes a movement or "throw" whose destination is entangled (engaged) in a recursive trajectory that both posits and deposits simultaneously.

It would have to do, once again it seems, with the nature of that toward which, in the step back, one must retrocede. Most explicitly so in the scenes of royal appeal, Richard II persistently draws attention to this dual movement of "throwing" and "engaging"- a throw that engages, and an engagement that finds its condition of possibility in a moment of dispersal.¹²⁰ In the quarrel between Aumerle and Fitzwaters, for example, Aumerle throws down "my gage" while Bolingbroke commands that Bagot "shalt not take it up" (IV.i.25; 30). Undeterred, Fitzwaters then offers "my gage, Aumerle, in gage to thine," prompting Percy to "throw my gage" (ll.33; 46), whereupon two bystanders also become entangled in the dispute, twice urging Aumerle to "ingage it to the trial if thou darest" (ll.56; 71).

This movement of the fort: da - of throwing-down-and-taking-up, of engaging and dis-engaging - is no less difficult to follow in the text's initial dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. Having "thrown my gage" (I.i.69), Gaunt appeals to Bolingbroke to "throw

¹¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference" in A Derrida Reader: Between The Blinds, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York, 1991), pp.380-402, p.396.

¹²⁰ For some particularly apposite comments by Derrida on this question of the "gage" and "engagement" see "Signsponge" in Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge pp.347-9 and Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression, tans. Eric Prenowitz (London, 1996), pp. 15-19.

down” and that Mowbray “throw down his” who subsequently “throws” it at Richard’s feet (ll.161-2; 165). It is, however, in Richard’s request that Bolingbroke “throw up [his] gage” (I.i.186) that we encounter a more problematic spatial torsion, one that moves the Arden editor of the play to speculate that “‘throw up’ might mean ‘relinquish,’ and might indicate that this new connotation for ‘throw up’ was current before 1678.”¹²¹

While perhaps compounding further the risk of anachronism, a more contemporary if unsavoury gloss on this phrase invites consideration of how a certain “throwing up” or failed interiorization remains the immanent necessity of every accession to presence.

According to Derrida differance pulsates around the figure of that which “never letting itself be swallowed must therefore cause itself to be vomitted” (author’s emphasis).¹²² Indeed, is not the entire confrontation between Bolingbroke and Mowbray variously negotiated around this threat? Bolingbroke’s charge that “with a foul traitor’s name stuff I thy throat” (I.i.44), is just as swiftly countered by Mowbray’s confession that, were it not for the presence of Richard, he “would post until it had return’d/These terms of treason doubled down his throat” (ll.55-7). Even at the close of the scene a recalcitrant Bolingbroke claims that “my teeth shall tear/ The slavish motive of recanting fear,/ And spit it bleeding in his high disgrace” (ll.192-4). In other words, we could say that the text’s paralyzing syntax of throwing down and taking up cannot avoid confronting the necessity of a certain “throwing

¹²¹ Richard II, ed. Peter Ure , p.15 n.186.

¹²² Jacques Derrida, “Economimesis,” trans. Richard Klein , Diacritics, (1981)11, 2, pp. 3-25, p.21.

up”: that which encodes, perhaps most succinctly, how the text’s ambivalent spacing (de) posits exteriority as something that is never completely outside.¹²³

Give and Take

The step (pas) has to bear an essential equivocation within itself; a kind of transcendental disequilibrium that, precisely insofar as it escapes the surveillance of dialectics and ontological decidability, also gives rise to the possibility of every destination and to “positionality” in general. It is in this respect that we may wish to consider, as several commentators have pointed out, the unusually large number of negative or privative terms in the text: of that which is “given” in the very gesture of being taken back. Gaunt wishes to “undeaf” the ear of Richard (II.i.16); Bolingbroke accuses Bushy and Green of causing Richard’s marriage to be “unhappied” (III.i.10); Scroope counsels Richard to “uncurse” the souls of defectors (III.ii.137); Richard is referred to as one who has been “unking’d” (IV.i.220) and whose vows are “unbroke” (II.215) and Richard wishes to “unkiss” the oath that he made with Northumberland. Indeed, John Jones has drawn explicit attention to the infelicitous use of the word “not” in the text. Drawing attention to the clumsy grammatical constructions in the text, Jones (in a metaphor of debasement that should not go unremarked) contends that they “drive [Shakespeare’s] syntax into the mud of awkward and ugly negative constructions.”¹²⁴

¹²³ While these issues will be developed further in the next chapter, a superlative analysis of this aspect of Derrida’s thinking is provided by Mark Wigley, The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida’s Haunt (London, 1995), pp. 123-49.

¹²⁴ John Jones, Shakespeare At Work (Oxford, 1999), p.40.

Indeed, throughout the text there is a surfeit of figures which bear upon the strange syntax involved here as one that inscribes a grasping movement of denegation. Most emphatically in the text's numerous references to "plucking" "seizing" and "gripping"¹²⁵ the power of detachment that is at issue here, like the exemplary moment of the fort da, do not have at their disposal the unified space of a figure: they inscribe a movement that is not, strictly speaking, detachable from their very detaching operation. This enigma is perhaps most powerfully condensed in Richard's ironic invitation to Bolingbroke: "Here, cousin, seize the crown" (IV.i.181) where, as Harry Berger Jr. points out, "Richard...offers a gift and then immediately retracts it."¹²⁶ Does not this essential ambivalence illuminate how the text is itself similarly impelled toward a destination whose possibility inheres in this secret obligation of a retraction or detour that is implied by the step? That is, the enigmatic spacing of that which gives and takes in the same gesture, positing and depositing itself in terms of what we have been discussing as the immobile emplacement of the pas? As Derrida argues, "the very idea of the retreat (proper to destination), the idea of the halt, and the idea of the epoch in which Being holds itself back, suspends, withdraws, etc., all these ideas are immediately homogenous with postal discourse."¹²⁷ Crucially, it is in the deposition scene proper that Richard's rhetorical strategy implicitly turns upon a meditation on the logic of the gift:

¹²⁵ Not entirely coincidentally, Richard II contains more references to the idea of plucking than any other Shakespearean play. See for example I.iii.211; II.228; II.i.205; II.iii.121; II.iii.167; III.ii.10; III.ii.45; III.iv.52; V.i.65; V.ii.92; V.iii.17. York counsels Richard against the temptation to "seize and gripe into your hands" the property of Bolingbroke (II.i.189); abandoning the the principle of "fair sequece and succession," York reminds the King that he would "wrongfully seize Hereford's rights" (II.201); later in the play Richard also reminds Bolingbroke of the damnable offence of trying to "gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre" (III.iii.80).

¹²⁶ Harry Berger Jr., "Richard II: An Exercise in Imaginary Audition," English Literary History, 55, 4 (1988), pp.755-797, p.759.

¹²⁷ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.65.

Bol: Part of your cares you give me with your crown.
 Rich: Your cares set up do not pluck my cares down.
 My care is loss of care, by old care done;
 Your care is gain of care, by new care won.
 The cares I give, I have, though given away,
 They 'tend the crown, yet still with me they stay.
 Bol: Are you contented to resign the crown?
 Rich: Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be.
 Therefore no "no", for I resign to thee.

(IV.i.194-202)

What we find in this vertiginous circuit of negation is not so much an oppositional logic of presence and absence as an exigency of profit and loss, proximity and distance that confounds the very logic of position as such. De-position here is inextricably tied to a problematic of giving and taking precisely insofar as language carries within itself (counting and discounting) the process of its own erasure and annulation, while at the same time marking what "remains" of this erasure:

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;

What more remains?

(IV.i.204-10; 222)

As Jonathan Goldberg has argued, the entire speech is so characterised by an immanent textual duplicity that the word "resign" is used as though it "meant both to give away and to

write again.”¹²⁸ More particularly it is possible to discern in Richard’s speech, both rhetorically and idiomatically, an expression of how

giving-taking in general a priori folds back on language and writing as giving-taking. Giving would come back, come down to taking and taking to giving, but this would also come back to fold itself over not only a language or writing but toward the text in general.¹²⁹

Bearing in mind Derrida’s frequent assertions that the question of the gift is “indissociable [from the] motifs of speculation and destination,”¹³⁰ Richard’s speech also appears to be impelled by a displacement that is not, curiously, assignable to the simplicity of a place. Still less can we say that Richard’s determination to “resign” takes place in writing: rather, “this dislocation (is what) writes/is written.”¹³¹

If, for Derrida, the opposition of to give and to take, of to possess and to be possessed is nothing more than a kind of transcendental snare that is an effect of writing, the much remarked upon solar metaphors¹³² in the text have a more immediate bearing on this enigma. As both Derrida and Bataille argue, the sun is, preeminently, that which both gives and takes in the same gesture: the aneconomic, self-consuming figure par excellence, the sun constitutively eats away at the scene of its own inheritance : “The very opposition of

¹²⁸ Jonathan Goldberg, “Rebel Letters,” p.5.

¹²⁹ Jacques Derrida, Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money, trans.Peggy Kamuf (London, 1994), p.81.

¹³⁰ Ibid., x.

¹³¹ Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, p.134.

¹³² We should remain vigilant about this strain of imagery in the play which, receiving its first sustained commentary by Oscar Wilde, has long been the focus of critical discussion. See Peter Ure’s introduction to the Arden edition of the play, pp.lxxi-ii. According to Derrida, however, the sun, strictly speaking, is not so much a “metaphor” as that which announces a certain plus de metaphore : that which betokens simultaneously “more metaphor” and “no more metaphor.”

appearing and disappearing, the entire lexicon of the phainesthai, of aletheia, etc., of day and night, of the visible and the invisible, of giving and taking, of the present and the absent - all this is possible only under the sun.”¹³³ Richard’s well-known epithet as the “Sun King” is strangely appropriate then for a character who demonstrates considerable expertise at this level of hyper-phenomenology, as one who will “undo myself.”

Moreover, it is precisely this constitutive tension between identity and obliteration, this paradox of something that is “disfigur’d clean” (III.i.8), which also announces the “general economy”¹³⁴ of writing as a (non)place where production stands in necessary relation to the energy of its erasure. Indeed, Richard’s exhortation to “mark me how I will undo myself” (IV.i.203) demonstrates how every erasure is contingent upon the expedient of a “mark” in this Derridean sense: an exigent that, paradoxically, must insinuate itself minimally in-the-place-of an absence in order to make it legible. That is, the very assumption of identity occupies a necessary relation to the ignominy of being “Mark’d with a blot” (IV.i.236) precisely insofar as every identity constitutively inheres in this accession to the period of its own erasure.

¹³³ Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology” in Margins of Philosophy, Alan Bass trans., (Sussex, 1982), pp.207-71, p.251. For a now classic “dialogue” between Derrida and Bataille on the question of expenditure, see Jacques Derrida, “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve” in Alan Bass trans., Writing and Difference (London, 1978), pp.251-77. I am similarly concerned to analyse those ways in which Richard II might be said to conform to a “general economy” insofar as it so consistently takes into account the non-reserve, of how, if we can say such a thing, the text somehow keeps in reserve the non-reserve.

¹³⁴ For a now classic discussion of these issues see Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1978), pp.251-278.

Ultimately, these speculations should alert us to the crucial significance of the so-called “deposition scene” in a way that has hitherto largely been ignored in criticism of the play.¹³⁵ While, classically, the term “position” announces a form of constitution whereby something comes to be what it is through its relation to something other, according to Rodolphe Gasche deconstruction (and Richard II it seems) announces “a (non) relation to an alterity that is itself the ground of possibility of positing itself.”¹³⁶ Supplementing Marjorie Garber’s insight that Richard finds himself in the bizarre predicament of “deposing at his own deposition,”¹³⁷ we could say that the text also repeatedly imposes the necessity of de-position as something that both gives rise to and is caught, irreducibly, in the paradoxes of the “postal principle.” This is also the concern of Paul de Man who asks “How a positional act, which relates to nothing that comes before or after, becomes inscribed in a sequential

¹³⁵ We might refer here, for example, to a recent article by Barbara Hodgdon. While commenting ostensibly on the dis-position of identity as it is performed in the deposition scene, Hodgdon simultaneously intuitively and then fails adequately to address the very rhetoric of positionality that the scene in fact foregrounds: “[Richard’s] self-dispossession primarily is in relation to Bolinbroke’s still, silent figure - a sign of power around which Richard stages a series of posturings or positionalities [...] the motive for interiority is most at risk [...] when the subject position of the king has been, or is being, both un-personed and re-personed.” (emphasis added). Barbara Hodgdon, “Early Modern Subjects, Shakespearean Performances, and (Post)Modern Spectators,” Critical Survey, 9, 3 (1997), pp.1-11, p.4.

¹³⁶ Rodolphe Gasche, The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection (London, 1986), p.158. For Derrida, crucially, ‘position’ is not simply something addressed by discourse but is a dissimulation produced by discourse. To rethink position is therefore to rethink discourse: “As you know, deconstruction means, among other things, the questioning of what synthesis is, what thesis is, what a position is, what composition is, not only in terms of rhetoric, but what position what positing means. Deconstruction questions the thesis, the theme, the positionality of everything [...],” Jacques Derrida, “Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: A Conversation,” Journal of Advanced Composition, 19 (1990) pp.1-21, p.8. “The very idea of a thetic presentation, of Setzung or Stellung....was one of the essential parts of the system that [is] under deconstructive questioning.” Jacques Derrida, “The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations,” trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, in Philosophy in France Today, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge, 1983), pp.34-50, p.42. One last example should suffice: “[...] the deconstructive jetty in itself is no more propositional than positional; it deconstructs precisely the thesis, both as philosophical thesis and as theme.” Jacques Derrida, “Some Statements and Truisms about Neo-logisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms’ [sic] trans. Anne Tomiche in The States of ‘Theory’: History, Art and Critical Discourse, ed. David Carroll (New York, 1990), pp.63-94, p.86.

¹³⁷ Marjorie Garber, Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality (London, 1986), p.8.

narrative?”¹³⁸ For Derrida every attempt to adduce history as a synonym of sequentiality inevitably provokes this “question of the position, the question of positionality in general, of positional (oppositional or juxtapositional) logic.”¹³⁹ These repetitive erasures, by means of which Richard II performs the erasure of its own positions, is precisely what is referred to by Paul de Man as “disfiguration.”¹⁴⁰ In the concluding section I wish to pursue these associations in the text a little further, especially in the light of de Man’s claim that the very “positing” power of language is inseparable from the way that it “irrevocably loses the contour of its own face or shape.”¹⁴¹ In this respect, we will consider how the text’s alternating polarities of the high and the low come to organize the movement of quite an other category of the “fall” – that of the fall into writing itself.

“Disfigur’d Clean”

Richard’s determination to locate a glass “where all my sins are writ” (IV.i.275) culminates in a rhetorical set piece that locates the mirror less as a medium of self-reflection than the very figure of prosopopeia. What Richard in fact sees can no longer be named “present” except through indirect discourse, in the implied quotation marks of a citation:

¹³⁸ Paul de Man, “Shelley Disfigured” in The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York, 1984), pp.93-123, p.117.

¹³⁹ Jacques Derrida, The Post Card, p.259.

¹⁴⁰ De Man’s concern here appears particularly apposite in the light of our discussion of Richard II insofar as he addresses the paradox where “The positing power of language is both entirely arbitrary, in having a strength that cannot be reduced to necessity, and entirely inexorable in that there is no alternative to it.” Paul de Man op. cit., p.116.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.119.

[...]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 Bolingbroke?

(IV.i.281-86)

Insofar as prosopopeia involves the fiction of an apostrophe to a voiceless entity that “posits the possibility of the latter’s reply and confers upon it the power of speech,”¹⁴² Richard’s speech also bears out de Man’s definition of prosopopeia as that which “deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, figure, figuration and disfiguration.”¹⁴³ Inviting Bolingbroke to “Mark...How soon my sorrow hath destroy’d my face” (ll.290-91), the face here becomes not so much the locus of presence as something that (re)marks the site of “a double face, an overwritten erasure.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, Richard discloses how the reflective interplay of apparently identical images is based on an inevitable disunity that already defines the first image: what is reflected is split in itself and not only as an addition to itself of its image. Richard’s double, as it were, splits what it doubles so that, according to Derrida, the very “origin of speculation becomes a difference.”¹⁴⁵

Conflating the king’s glorious face and its effacement, sovereignty and its negation, the

¹⁴² Paul De Man, “Autobiography As De-Facement,” in The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York, 1984) pp. 67-83, p. 76. We may also wish to bear in mind here Gregory Ulmer’s reminder that “the apostrophe....is the mark of possession in English, representing thus the gap that both requires and makes possible self-reflection, the gap of the postal relay.” Gregory L. Ulmer, Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys (London, 1992), p.130. Arguing how the etymological root of prosopopeia derives from that which seeks to “gives a face,” Paul de Man describes the “function” of the face “as the relentless undoer of its own claims;” that is, as something that cannot be reconciled with “the meaning of the face, with its promise of sense and of filial preservation.” Paul de Man op. cit., p.92.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.76.

¹⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, p.13.

¹⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, p.36.

radically indeterminate glass reflects back from the outset nothing more than Richard's marking of it.

Richard II's frequent references to the face,¹⁴⁶ as that which might act as a scene of presence, are particularly ironic in a text whose own disseminating pas de contact threatens to eliminate the availability of any surface that could act as a site of filial preservation. Indeed, despite its frequent references to the breath as a diaphanous medium of presence, the question of authority in Richard II increasingly comes to invoke the earth as the element which most competently retains the mark of inscription. Following Derrida we could say that, in this precise sense, it is the earth that the text comes to privilege as the elemental condition of history itself: "heavy, serious, solid earth. The earth that is worked upon, scratched, written upon. The...universal element in which meaning is engraved so that it will last."¹⁴⁷ Time and again in Richard II it is the earth that implicitly becomes a scene of both inscription and violence, of force and signification. Bolingbroke, for example, warns that if his lands are not restored he will

¹⁴⁶ Richard calls Mowbray and Bolingbroke "face to face" (I.i.14); Mowbray bids that Richard "turn away his face" (II.111) while Bolingbroke accuses that "shame doth harbour, even in Mowbray's face" (II.195); Richard instructs the appellants to "never look upon each other's face" (I.iii.185); Aumerle relates that on his parting from Bolingbroke the wind "blew bitterly against our faces" (I.iv.7); York remarks on his reluctance to "bend one wrinkle on my sovereign's face" (II.i.170); Richard predicts that Bolingbroke's "treasons will sit blushing in his face" (III.ii.51) and is fearful of the prospect of how "the blood of twenty thousand men/Did triumph in my face" (II.76-7); Richard counsels Northumberland that "Ten thousand bloody crowns of mother's sons/Shall ill become the flower of England's face" (III.iii.96-7); Bagot demands that Aumerle be "set before my face" (IV.i.6); Richard asks for a mirror so that "it may show me what face I have" (II.266); York describes Richard's deposition as a "face still combating with tears and smiles" (V.ii.32); York demands of his son whether in his visit to the king he will "speak treason to thy face?" (V.iii.44) whereupon the Duchess implores Bolingbroke to "Look upon his face" (II.98); Richard's groom confesses joy "To look upon my sometime royal master's face" (V.v.75).

¹⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference (London, 1979), p.9, n.23.

use the advantage of my power
 And lay the summer's dust with showers of blood
 Rain'd from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen -
 [...]
 ...such crimson tempest should bedrench
 The fresh green lap of fair King Richard's land

(III.iii.42-4; 46-7)

It is, however, in Scroope's reassurance to Richard that his enemies will soon "lie full low, grav'd in the hollow ground" (III.ii.140) that the play most explicitly opens onto the scene of writing itself. Bearing in mind that the term "grav'd" is not to be found elsewhere in Shakespeare, Derrida's description of the earth is also notable for this kind of linguistic over-determination. For Derrida the heaviness of the earth is associated with the word "grave" which, apart from its abstract and moral sense, also retains the older resonance of something that is "weighty" and "heavy."¹⁴⁸ Indeed, what we find here is a slippage between "grave" and the verb "graver" which (as Derrida argues) depicts the action of inscription upon the earth. The grave "en-graves" precisely insofar as both terms communicate a weighty earthward movement of force that Derrida makes synonymous with the scene of writing. These associations are perhaps made most explicit in Richard's

¹⁴⁸ The Duchess of Gloucester characterises her grief as that which is "Not with empty hollowness, but weight" (I.ii.59); the gardener observes how the apriocks "Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight" (III.iv.31); removing his crown, Richard invites Bolingbroke to observe how "I give this heavy weight from off my head" (IV.i.204). Even more ubiquitous, however, are the references to heaviness throughout the text. The Duchess of York hopes that "Be Mowbray's sins so heavy in his bosom/That they may break his foaming courser's back" (I.ii.50-1); Mowbray laments Richard's "heavy sentence" (I.ii.154); the queen admits to feeling "heavy sad" (II.ii.30) which "Makes me with heavy nothing faint and shrink" (II.32); Salisbury reflects on Richard's fortunes "with the eyes of heavy mind" (II.iv.18); Richard fantasizes that "heavy-gaited toads" (III.ii.15) will obstruct the path of his enemies; reporting Richard's dwindling military fortunes, Scroope remarks that it is with a "dull and heavy eye/My tongue hath but a heavier tale to say" (II.196-7); York laments the "heavy day" (III.iii.8) of Richard's fall from grace; the queen inquires of her ladies how she can "drive away the heavy thought of care" (III.iv.2); disputing Aumerle's charges of treason, Surrey responds "That lie shall lie so heavy on my sword" (IV.i.66); Richard bemoans the "heavy day" (II.257) of his deposition; Richard recommends the "heavy accent of thy moving tongue" (V.i.47) in the queen's accounts of his deposition; Richard describes his departure from Anne as an effort to "piece the way out with a heavy heart" (V.i.92).

determination to “talk of graves....Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes/Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth” (III.ii.145-7). The closing pages of Derrida’s essay on “Force and Signification” also rest precisely upon these associations between the homonymous “grave-grave(r)” and the conceptual relations (gravity, heaviness, descent, inscription) which derive from such verbal play. The grave is the true destination of every inscription: it is gravity (gravitas, weight) that occasions the fall to earth (inscription). As the more commonplace understanding of the term implies, the grave is a site both of mourning and memorization the grave as something that maintains the scene of presence as the simulation of life’s preserved inscription. Indeed, this is precisely the focus of Mowbray’s fear of disgrace at the hands of Bolingbroke:

Myself I throw, dread sovereign, at thy foot;
My life thou shalt command, but not my shame:
The one my duty owes, but my fair name,
Despite of death, that lives upon my grave,
To dark dishonour’s use thou shalt not have.

(I.i.165-9)

It is, quite literally, only through the agent of the “fall” that history is begun. Responding to the enquiry of whether the king has in fact been deposed, the Gardener muses that “Depress’d he is already, and depos’d/’Tis doubt he will be” (III.iv.68-9). The notion that the king is “depress’d” here condenses the image of both that which is brought down by force, Bolingbroke literally “weighs King Richard down” (II.89), and also that which becomes suggestive of a dynamic relief of force. The Gardener’s remark, then, plays upon the dual sense of “deposition” as that which “falls” and also that which testifies to or bears witness to the “mark” of this fall. In other words, it is possible to detect here how the moment of the “fall” entertains a certain proximity to the scene of writing as that which condenses

simultaneously the “incidence and insistence of inscription.”¹⁴⁹ Resolved, for example, to exchanging “my large kingdom for a little grave,” Richard also requests that it be “a little little grave, an obscure grave” (III.iii.153-4). In short, what the grave amounts to here is, quite literally, a trace that simultaneously registers and threatens to annul even the most impoverished mark of authority. Indeed, Richard’s use of “rainy eyes” as the agent of inscription implicitly relates depth and dynamic relief to the pressure of liquidity: force as a flow. More particularly it is the force of tears that accompanies this fall into writing. Where the Queen did “fall a tear” the Gardener plants a bank of rue “In the remembrance of a weeping queen” (III.iv.104;107) and Richard muses whether he will “play the wanton with our woes,”

And make some pretty match with shedding tears?
 As thus to drop them still upon one place,
 Till they have fretted us a pair of graves
 Within the earth, and therein laid - there lies
 Two kinsmen digg’d their graves with weeping eyes!

(III.iii.164-9)

Mark and loss, memory and erasure: a scene of inscription and divisibility where “one place” becomes a “pair of graves.” Water both here and elsewhere in the text articulates rhythmically what is in fact a dis-articulation. It is, pre-eminently, this enigmatic pulsion that Richard II encodes most memorably as the paradoxical moment of that which is

¹⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, p. 30. See also Maurice Blanchot who argues that “Everything must fall, and everything that falls must drag into the fall, by indefinite expansion, all that means to remain.” “The Fall: Flight,” trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg in Friendship ed. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellerby (California, 1997), pp.201-8, p.208. We might also recall profitably here a curious metaphor employed by the Duchess of York in her early exchange with Gaunt. Comparing her words to the gravitational force of a ball, for the Duchess meaning literally gains its impact through the weighty descent of force that renders possible “yet one word more - grief boundeth where it falls,/Not with empty hollowness, but weight” (I.ii.58-9).

“disfigured clean”.¹⁵⁰ This seemingly implausible collusion between water and marking, of a force of inscription that is rendered possible only at the site of its threatened erasure, is perhaps appropriate to a text that routinely discloses how signification is constitutively indebted to this step (pas), this “double force of repetition and erasure, of legibility and illegibility.”¹⁵¹

While Bolingbroke seeks revenge on those who have “Rac’d out my imprese” (III.i.25), according to Derrida a mark that resists erasure is not a mark. Indeed, from Bolingbroke’s early conceit that “the more fair and crystal is the sky,/The uglier seem the clouds that in it fly” (I.i.41-2), Richard II increasingly comes to dwell upon numerous (non)figures of blotting, staining and spotting: Mowbray extols the virtues of a “spotless reputation” (II.178); Bolingbroke bemoans the “stain’d beauty of a fair queen’s cheeks” (III.i.14); Richard condemns the “spotted souls” of his adversaries (III.ii.134); York responds to Bolingbroke’s threat that he will “stain the track” of Richard’s glory with the plea that no harm “should stain so fair a show!” (III.iii.66;71); Aumerle is indignant at the prospect of “mine honour soil’d” and having to “stain the temper of my knightly sword” (IV.i.23; 29).

Insofar as we have been concerned to discuss the movement of “reversion” in Richard II with reference to the analytic of the fort:da as that which is charged with this double movement, the text’s overarching dispute of property rights inevitably comes into contact with a certain

¹⁵⁰ Insofar as the text so frequently appears to be shaped by the undoing of shapes, Paul de Man also makes the point that this is the immanent necessity of all signification:

“Water, which has no shape of itself, is moulded into shape by its contact with the earth, [...] it generates the very possibility of structure, pattern, form or shape by way of the disappearance of shape into shapelessness.” Paul de Man, The Rhetoric of Romanticism, p.107.

¹⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, p.226.

axiomatics of the “proper” as that which, according to Derrida, “is itself founded on the value of properness or property, and of the appropriation or reappropriation of self. It is the making proper (clean) of the proper itself (propriation de propre meme), in as much as the proper is opposed to the heterogeneity of the im-proper...”¹⁵² That is to say, for Derrida the question of the proper is always implicated with the related questions of self-proximity and of self-possession. In French the propre is not merely proper but also clean, and for Derrida there exists a strange kinship between propriete (property, propriety) and proprete (cleanliness).¹⁵³ Time and again in Richard II the relationship between the sign and presence is ineluctably tied to the paradoxical function of the signifier as that which is simultaneously both an agent of erasure and of cleanliness, that which maintains the scene of presence only insofar as it is “mark’d with a blot.” Eluding the very category of the “face-to-face” to which it so routinely aspires, the scene of presence in Richard II announces, rather, the site of an original torsion, a double conjugation of annulment and a (re)turn that turns only toward that from which it is obliged to turn away. Following Maurice Blanchot we could say that what is at issue here is less “writing” itself than a difference that writes through what Blanchot somewhat appositely describes as the clandestine operations of “inversion” and “re-version,”: “a turn of the turning, [a] ‘version’ that is always in the process of inverting itself and that in itself bears the back and forth of a divergence [...] a vertigo wherein rest the leap and the fall.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Jacques Derrida, Points..., p.241.

¹⁵³ It is, of course, in Gaunt’s playful meditation on his name that the text’s anxious preoccupation with naming first enters into a play of textual inscription that confounds all standard ideas of a “proper” or proprietary name.

¹⁵⁴ Maurice Blanchot, The Infinite Conversation, trans. Susan Hanson (London, 1993), p.30.

If, like its tragic protagonist, the text can never successfully “ravel out/[its] weaved up follies” (IV.i.228-9) it is perhaps because the text itself can arrive at itself, can destine itself only at the limit of a strange power of folding that enfolds it and which, ultimately, cannot be unfolded. Insofar as critical speculations about the subversive import of Richard II perennially return to the occasion of Queen Elizabeth’s exchange with William Lambarde, we might end here with Lambarde’s particularly resonant description of how this discussion of Richard II was in fact initiated. Previously hidden from view at the “back” of a door, the Queen then chanced upon this file bearing the name of Richard II in the “Pandecta of all her rolls, bundells, membranes and parcells that be reposed in the Tower.”¹⁵⁵ In a text that evidences such intractable difficulties in constituting a relationship to an exterior that is revealed never to be completely “outside,” it is perhaps strangely appropriate here that, at the very moment when Richard II might be said to open onto the very contexts of its own historical possibility, the intangibility of an edge once more becomes a problem. As I argue in the next chapter, Hamlet is a text that (perhaps more explicitly) comes to negotiate the question of subjectivity around a similar topological paradox, frequently displacing the issue of the play’s “theatricality” onto the very problem of interiority itself.

¹⁵⁵ John Nichols (ed) The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth Volume 3 (New York, 1823), pp.552-53.

Chapter Three

Rewriting The (S)cript: *Hamlet's Interiors*

The Purpose of Praying

“The closet,” Angel Day wrote in 1599, is not only for the “reposement of secrets,” it also constitutes “the most secret place in the house.”¹ In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, however, the closet also becomes the site at which secrets can be revealed, a place where Claudius can finally “confront the visage of offence” (III.iii.47). Claudius’ lengthy ruminations upon his fitness for prayer are, in fact, not untypical of a dilemma that was encountered frequently by the Reformation subject. For example, in one of the last of his sermons John Donne recalls the predicament of Claudius’s “stubborn knees” (III.iii..70) as merely one of the difficulties in maintaining a spiritual regimen:

I talke on, in the same posture of praying; Eyes lifted up; knees bowed down; as though I prayed to God; and if God, or his Angels should ask me when I thought last of that prayer, I cannot tell: Sometimes I find that I had forgot what I was about, but when I began to forget it, I cannot tell.²

¹ Angel Day, *The English Secretary: Part Two* (Gainesville, 1967), p.103.

² Quoted in Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: 1603-1690* (Princeton, 1975), p.68.

Effectively, Donne (like Claudius) rehearses anxieties that are also to be found in the writings of Protestant divines who were particularly concerned with those prayers that for some reason go amiss: those occasions when words would fly up while thoughts remained below. Laurence Chaderton, for example, is especially critical of those who have “outward shewe” but are “voide of inward synceritie and true belief.”³ In fact, this rhetoric of surface and depth finds its most sustained treatment in Luther who, in “Secular Authority,” makes some remarks that have a particular bearing on Claudius's difficulties. Disdainful of those who “force people to do more than obey by word and outwarde deed,” for Luther there is little point in “trying to force people with weak consciences to lie, to perjure themselves, saying one thing while in their hearts they believe another.”⁴

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debates on “the purpose of praying” are marked by a profound ambivalence as to the level of participation that is required by the supplicant.

Whereas William Hardwicke, Anglican curate of Reigate, was of the opinion that he would “never be brought to believe a man seldom uncovering his head, seldomer bending the knee, or saucily lolling on his elbows,”⁵ John Robinson, on the other hand, was typical of many Puritan apologists who were of the conviction that “We pray without any prompt to us, because we pray from the heart.”⁶ Similarly, William Perkins instructs against “babbling a few words either in morning or evening, without understanding or affection,”⁷ while others

³ Quoted in R.T. Kendell, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979), p.45. By far the most illuminating study of the intellectual context of Chaderton's remarks is provided by Cynthia Garrett, “The Rhetoric of Supplication: Prayer Theory in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Renaissance Quarterly* (1993), XLVI, 2, pp.328-357.

⁴ Martin Luther, *On Secular Authority*, ed. Harro Hopfl (Cambridge, 1991), p.26.

⁵ Quoted in Moore *op. cit.*, p.606.

⁶ Quoted in Horton Davis, *Worship and Theology in England: 1603 – 1690* (Princeton, 1975), p.155.

⁷ Ian Brennard (ed) *The Works of William Perkins* (Appleton, 1975), p.322.

were to anticipate the arguments of Pascal in disputing the need for the praying subject's complete sincerity. As one writer puts it, reverent gestures can beget reverence on the part of even the half-attentive: "the affection of the heart antecedent to the doing of these gestures, by the doing of them gathers strength."⁸

Protestantism's often contradictory distinctions between an implied interiority and a putatively "external" authority were never satisfactorily resolved so that the praying subject was, in Claudius's words, irrevocably bound to "this twofold force" (III.iii.48). To the extent that we can discern any "self-fashioning" of the Reformation subject here, it is played out precisely in terms of a conflict that involves "submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self" and "some effacement or undermining, some loss of self."⁹ The penitent, as Claudius's entire speech makes clear, is particularly adept at this rhetoric of self-relating disavowal, where "like a man to double business bound/I stand in pause where I shall first begin/And both neglect" (III.iii.41-43).

What I would now like to suggest is that this conflict, which has only briefly been sketched out here, presents a more complex dialectic of self and other, inside and outside, than can be accounted for solely in terms of Louis Althusser's influential account of religious ritual. In short, Althusser argues that "interpellation" consists in the way that the symbolic machine of ideology comes to be "internalised" as a seemingly spontaneous experience of meaning and

⁸ Horton *op. cit.*, p.207.

⁹ Stephen J. Greenblatt, Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (London, 1984), p.9.

truth.¹⁰ Indeed, we may consider the text's opening exchange as a strangely articulate comment on this dynamic:

Bernardo: Who's there?
 Francisco: Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.
 Bernardo: Long live the King!
 Francisco: Barnardo?
 Barnardo: He.

(I.i.1-5)

In other words, Hamlet itself begins with an encounter that appears to evoke the terms of Althusser's "highly concrete example" of interpellation:

..we all have friends who, when they knock on our door and we ask, through the door, the question 'Who's there?,' answer (since it's obvious) 'It's me!' And we recognize that 'it is him,' or 'her.' We open the door, and 'it's true, it really was she who was there.'¹¹

What may be discerned in Claudius's predicament, however, is a dynamic where internalisation never fully succeeds: i.e. where the subject maintains a kind of ironical distance from the very rituals that seek to confer a symbolic mandate. We may refer here to Alan Sinfield who has argued that the Reformation subject was involved in a "contradictory production of interiority," which emerges "not in the accomplishment of domination or negation, but in the thwarting of harmony, cogency, common sense" (author's emphasis).¹² Crucially, for Slavoj Žižek this failure of the subject's complete submission to the Law indexes the incursion of the Lacanian real into the field of ideology, and in a way that is constitutive of subjectivity tout court. If the notion that the subject can, in a sense, pre-exist

¹⁰ Louis Althusser, Essays on Ideology (London, 1984), p.45.

¹¹ Ibid, p.46.

¹² Alan Sinfield, Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading (Oxford, 1992), p.174.

its modes of subjectivization is a recurring motif in the debates between Protestant divines, it also crucially informs Žižek's radical reworking of the relationship that obtains between subjectivity and ideology. According to Žižek, in every so-called interpellation

there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it...this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it: it is precisely this non-integrated surplus..which confers on the law its unconditional authority.¹³

Bearing in mind our discussion of Richard III, do we not again encounter here the intrusion of enjoyment into the socio-symbolic edifice; a traumatic stain of jouissance which both assists and ultimately impedes the subject's complete accession to the public Law? This seemingly idealist claim, that the subject maintains an "inner distance" towards the apparatuses and rituals in which ideology acquires material existence, finds a particularly succinct form of expression in the work of Fulke Greville. With a candour that is quite disarming given the politically charged nature of his topic, in his Treatise of Monarchy Greville relates how it is certainly the monarch's role to have his subjects "kept in awe," even if this strategy is productive of a certain disavowal on the part of a subject who "if not the inward, keeps the outward law."¹⁴ Here it is possible to read the interpellative gesture of authority as something that is closely umbilicated with Jacques Lacan's well worn dictum that "desire is the desire of the Other," i.e. where the subject is nothing other than the radical perplexity that persists as to the Other's desire, "to what the Other sees (and finds worthy of

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London, 1992), p.43. In an article which, ironically, invokes Hamlet as its initial point of departure, Judith Butler also makes reference to Žižek in a thorough review of current debates surrounding the Althusserian account of interpellation. Judith Butler, "Conscience Doth Make Subjects Of Us All," Yale French Studies (1995), 88, pp.6-26.

¹⁴ Fulke Greville, The Remains: Being Poems of Monarchy and Religion, ed. G.A. Wilkes (Oxford, 1965), p.112.

desire) in me.”¹⁵ Effectively, Claudius is confronted by this question (the Lacanian “Che vuoi?”) and his speech concludes with a deeply ambivalent confirmation of identity precisely to the extent that it cannot be answered:

What then? What rests?
 Try what repentance can. What can it not?
 Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?
 O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engag'd!

(III.iii..64-69)

The conflict that is at stake here is not so much concerned with conscience, than the slightly more menacing agency of the Lacanian superego as a senseless bearer of enjoyment. Insofar as Claudius “submits” to the law, it is articulated in terms of a constitutive self-hindrance, as a contradictory production of interiority insofar as subjectivity is irreducible to the materiality of the prayer ritual.

That there is “something in the subject more than himself” is, of course, redolent of that unspecularizable “thing” which Hamlet alludes to famously as “that within which passes show” (I.ii.85). Here too Hamlet refuses to internalise the symbolic determinations of “forms, moods, shapes of grief” in an affirmation of identity that cannot be accounted for solely in terms of what he is for others, in those “actions that a man might play”(I.ii.84).

While this remark has often been singled out as evidence of the text’s inveterate “theatricality,” it is also in keeping with the text’s no less frequent preoccupation with those things that escape capture in the intersubjective economy of self and other. Indeed, as in

¹⁵ Slavoj Žižek, Metastasis and Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality (London, 1994), p.60.

many ways the psychoanalytical archetype of the mourner who enfolds the lost object, Hamlet also offers here a strangely eloquent gloss on the structural paradox of Lacan's object a as an inclusion within the subject of the negation of what he is not or – to borrow Jacques-Alain Miller's formulation - an extimate¹⁶ relation of that within "Hamlet" which is not "Hamlet."

If, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues, the closet mediates "the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit,"¹⁷ my concern in this chapter is to suggest that the topological paradox of the closet is no less implicated with another secret treasure, a surplus kernel of being which Lacan makes homologous to the object a. Indeed, the critical history of Hamlet, which has variously, if not always explicitly, been concerned with the text's ability to enclose or exclude, often turns upon this more convoluted relation between the visible and invisible, with the text's strategies of concealment. We need look no further here than the comments of A.C. Bradley who is particularly indignant toward those critics (among them Coleridge) who disputed the greatness of the play. Bradley's characteristically imperious objection is concise: "Seeing, they saw not."¹⁸ Not perhaps coincidentally we find another imputation of blindness in the remarks of one of the play's detractors. Famously, T.S. Eliot diagnoses Hamlet's problem as a certain opacity that haunts the text's efforts of representation: "Hamlet...is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light."¹⁹ For those who are familiar with Lacan, of course, it is impossible not to detect an

¹⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller, in his unpublished seminar on "Extimite" (1985-1986), develops the term extimite, which appears only a few times in Lacan, into a central theoretical concept.

¹⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Epistemology of The Closet (London, 1991), p.3.

¹⁸ A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, 1967), p.91.

¹⁹ T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London, 1974), p.107.

echo of that other “stuff” which Lacan associates with the sublime object, the non specularizable substance of the object a .²⁰

In short, Eliot's comments here, which locate the text's problems in some curiously unspecified agency that is caught between shadow and substance - of that which is in the text but which passes show - in a sense unwittingly colludes with the disjunctive relation between the eye and the gaze that is so often the theatrical focus of the text itself: time and again what Hamlet shows is an unwillingness to show. Claudius and Polonius' recondite observation of Hamlet and Ophelia, Hamlet's bungled encounter with Claudius at prayer or Polonius' untimely demise behind the arras are only a few of the sites from which Hamlet regularly solicits the gaze of its audience. Confessionals, makeshift stages, bedchambers, veiled recesses, battlements and even gravesides cumulatively come to provide the topographical structure of the text.

According to Sedgwick, secrecy, spectacle, truth, interiority, self-knowledge, space, and privacy are just some of the categories that are mobilised through a discussion of the closet's versatile, and deeply contradictory, epistemology. The remainder of this chapter offers a reading of Hamlet that is concerned to pursue the often sinuous trajectory of these relations in an analysis of how the text variously seeks to negotiate the problems of authority and

²⁰ Famously, Lacan defines the object a as that which has “no specular image, or, in other words, alterity. It is what enables it to be the ‘stuff’, or rather the lining, though not on any sense the reverse, of the very subject that one takes to be the subject of consciousness [...] A substance caught in the net of the shadow, and which, robbed of its shadow swelling volume, holds out once again the tired lure of the shadow as if it were substance.” Jacques Lacan, “Subversion of the subject and dialectic of desire” in Ecrits: A Selection, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977), pp.292-326, p.315-16.

interiority.²¹ Drawing once again upon the work of Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, I am concerned to suggest how the text engages with the question of epistemology at irresistible points of rupture that give rise to a much more problematical kind of savoir: the unconscious.

²² In a way that is perhaps no more effectively illustrated than in the example provided by “The Murder of Gonzago,” Hamlet's interiors yield only to a cryptic accessibility. If they elude capture by the gaze, it is precisely because vision itself is routinely implicated in the catachrestic spacing of the signifier, where the space of every interior can only ever be contradictory.

Inside/Out

By the beginning of the seventeenth-century what came to be called the “closet prayer” was a formally recognized mode of worship for the Reformation subject. In an account of the arduous efforts employed by the then Lord Harrington to meet the demands of this discipline, one contemporary observer writes how

after prayers Lord Harrington withdrew himself, and there in a book which he kept for the account of his life he set down what he had done all that day; how he had either offended or done good, and how he was tempted and withstood them, and according to his account he humbled himself.²³

²¹ Without wishing to diminish the specificity of Sedgwick's very sophisticated arguments about the construction of sexual identity, I will take as axiomatic her assertion that “The epistemology of the closet has also been, however, on a far vaster scale and with a less honorific inflection, inexhaustibly productive.” Sedgwick, op. cit., p. 68.

²² In Lacanian psychoanalysis savoir can be roughly translated as symbolic knowledge which is another name for the “unknown knowledge” that is the unconscious. In short, as Dylan Evans has defined it, “a 'knowledge' which the subject does not know that he knows.” An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis (London, 1996), p.94.

²³ Quoted in Everett H. Emerson (ed) English Puritanism from John Hooper to John Milton (Durham, 1968), p.196.

The emergence of the closet prayer is illustrative not only of Protestantism's efficacious impetus to internalize authority; the example of Lord Harrington here also discloses a set of over-determined relations which, I have argued, problematizes the very conditions under which this mandate could be met. In what is, effectively, a displacement of the praying subject by the writing subject, this incursion of textuality implicates the closet in a complex production of secrecy that Francis Barker identifies with "the Pepysian moment" of a specifically bourgeois subject, where "the text itself rehearses the situation it discloses as it inlays seclusion within seclusion."²⁴ The closet is not only the site where Harrington meditates upon his transgressions, the act of writing is coterminous with quite another kind of transgression insofar as

its epistemological principle grasps the outer world as an accessible transparency, recedes from that world towards an inner location where the soul - or, as the modern terminology has it, positionality in discourse - apparently comes to fill the space of meaning and desire [sic].²⁵

If we turn our attention here to an explicitly "literary" example, we find that a similar conjunction of writing and transgression is the focus of a poem by George Herbert that is, appropriately, entitled "Confession." As the following lines illustrate, Herbert's poem also "rehearses the situation it discloses" by locating the closet as the space for a literary excavation of the sinful subject:

O what a cunning guest
Is this same grief! within my heart I made
Closets; and in them many a chest;
And like a master in my trade;
In those chests, boxes; in each box a till:

²⁴ Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London, 1984), p.9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9.

Yet grief knows all, and enters when he will.

.....

We are the earth; and they
 Like moles within us, heave and cast about:
 And till they foot and clutch their prey
 They never cool, much lesse give out.
 No smith can make such locks but they have keyes:
 Closets are halls to them; and hearts, high-wayes.²⁶

In terms of the poem's metaphors and its subterranean networks of secrecy and depth, the similarities to Hamlet are indeed striking. Here, the closet becomes the site at which the subject attempts to fortify itself against the inexorable advance of guilt: figured simultaneously as the site both of its containment and disclosure. Moreover, in figuring the agent of this guilt as the mole, the poem inevitably recalls how in Hamlet it is also the "Vicious mole of nature in men" which leads those who are "not guilty" to "take corruption/From that particular fault" (I.iv.24, 25, 35-36). Hamlet's subsequent reference to the ghost as the "old mole" explicitly relocates the function of his father as the agent through which the prince will also seek to compel a confession of guilt, not least from his mother in the closet.

Near the close of Herbert's poem, however, the speaker also ventures into quite a different space: that of the literary work itself. Acknowledging that "Smooth open hearts no fastning have," the speaker finds succour in the fact that "fiction/Doth give a hold and handle to affliction." When the confession inevitably comes in the final stanza it does so only in the very public expression of, precisely, a "fiction" which, like the closet, ruptures the space of a

²⁶ F.E. Hutchison (ed) The Works of George Herbert (Oxford, 1964), p.126.

pristine interiority that it can only provisionally “contain.”²⁷ In other words, Herbert encounters that border which, according to Blanchot, the specifically writing and “written” subject of modernity is destined to endlessly rediscover as “proximity, the errant intimacy of the outside from which he can not make an abode.”²⁸

Francis Barker, of course, argues that Hamlet is finally unable to yield up the mysteries of its interior because it is possessed of an incipient, not fully extant modernity that it can only anticipate through failure.²⁹ In Herbert's poem, however, Hamlet itself is interiorized at the very space of writing: as both the hiding of a secret and the hiding of that hiding. Sustaining the topography that it fractures, Hamlet “inhabits” Herbert's text in a way that disrupts the logic of inhabitation, both enfolding and enfolded by a text which can only locate the depth of subjectivity at the site of an uninhabitable outside on the inside.

Indeed, not least axiomatically, Herbert's poem bears more than a passing resemblance to Jacques Derrida's discussion of the literary object as a crypt, “a secret interior within the public sphere, but, by the same token, outside it, external to the interior.”³⁰ In part adducing the paradoxical spacing of the crypt as a species of “writing,” Derrida develops the implications of the work of the post-Lacanian Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok whose “cryptonymy” is crucially concerned with this question of failed interiorization. Reworking

²⁷ As Patricia Fumerton has argued, the closet was never an entirely satisfactory guarantor of privacy so that even “within the 'innermost' recesses of Elizabethan subjectivity...further recesses, cabinets, or cases kept opening up.” Patricia Fumerton, Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament (London, 1991), p.69.

²⁸ Maurice Blanchot, The Space of Literature, trans. Ann Smock (London, 1989), p.24.

²⁹ Famously, Barker argues that “At the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing.” Barker, op. cit., p.37.

³⁰ Quoted in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy (Minneapolis, 1986), p.86.

the standard Freudian model of incorporation in mourning, Abraham and Torok argue that the refusal to mourn the lost object involves its “incorporation” precisely in order to preserve it: "It is to avoid 'swallowing' the loss, that one imagines swallowing, or having swallowed, what is lost, in the form of an object [sic]."³¹

I would like to leave these issues in suspense for the moment to consider how Hamlet's complex interarticulation of identity, interiority and loss has also been the focus of textual bibliography. A crucial point of interest here has been the question of Q1's “authority” in terms of its putatively derivative representation of some primordial event: namely, as an ineluctable reminder of separation, defect and loss. If, like the primitive ego, Hamlet refuses to mourn – disavowing an originary plenitude that constitutes the grounds of its own precarious authority - the narrative relating to Q1's (re)discovery further implicates the text within both a drama of filial piety and this strange architecture of the crypt.³² Soon to become what is now referred to as the Huntington copy, Q1 was in fact the result of a chance encounter by Sir Henry Bunbury who claimed that it was

³¹ Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, “Introjection-Incorporation: Mourning or Melancholia” in Serge Lebovici (ed) Psychoanalysis in France (New York, 1980), pp. 3-16, p.5.

³² Derrida's interest in cryptonymy is to a large extent motivated by a desire to reconsider the relationship between mourning and interiority which, pace classical psychoanalysis, stresses “the impossibility of completing one's mourning...this terrible fatality of mourning: semi-mourning or double mourning. The psychoanalytic discourse, despite its subtlety and necessity, does not go into this fatality, this necessity: the double constraint of mourning.” Jacques Derrida, “Dialanguages,” trans. Peggy Kamuf in Points...Interviews: 1974-1994, ed. Elizabeth Weber (California, 1995), pp.132-56, p.152. Cryptonymy like Derridean differance complicates classical assumptions about the relationship that obtains between the inside and the outside, and any notion of expenditure that posits the possibility of a pure loss or expense. Throughout much of his recent work Derrida returns to this constitutive paradox of mourning where the subject must and must not take the other into itself in an act of what he calls “ex-appropriation,” Points, p. 321. Although many discussions of Hamlet return to the question of mourning, the present chapter seeks to engage Derrida's heuristic concern with the crypt in a broader analysis of how the text is continually worked upon by its own exteriority.

found by me in a closet at Barton, 1823....It probably was picked up by my grandfather, Sir William Bunbury, who was an ardent collector of old dramas.³³

Leaving aside for the moment the semiotic inflection that both Bunbury and Huntington bring to the archaeological event of Q1's disclosure, at one level this serendipitous "outing" of Q1 offers an example of the strange phenomenality of presence without a present that, for Derrida, is peculiar to the literary object. Indeed, Bunbury's discovery was to initiate a tradition of seemingly endless critical speculations surrounding the status that should be accorded to Q1 in the light of what ostensibly are its two antecedents: the Q2 and Folio copies.³⁴ It is from within this particular nexus that Hamlet most explicitly finds itself implicated in a cryptonymic topography J. Hillis Miller describes as that which "can only be reached in one or another of its embodiments in some copy of the text in question."³⁵ The crypt, in other words, always encodes a phenomenality associated with the spectral space of the phantom:

'Tis here.

'Tis here.

'Tis gone.

(I.i.145-147)

Insinuating itself on that similarly evanescent border that seeks to separate the model from the copy, simultaneously a repetition and a singularity, Q1 has become notoriously difficult to pin down in terms of adducing evidence of its primacy. Hamlet, it seems, both

³³ Quoted in Thomas Clayton (ed) The Hamlet First Published (London, 1992), p.21.

³⁴ Such is the sheer volume of work that has been generated, either directly or indirectly, through consideration of Q1, that to give a comprehensive account of its critical history would merit a separate study. The contributions and the bibliography contained in the volume by Clayton do, however, serve to highlight how ubiquitous is the problem that Q1 has posed for critics of the play.

³⁵ J. Hillis Miller, Topographies (California, 1995), p.310.

internalizes and is haunted by the traces of its own primal scene. At one time regarded as an earlier version of the text that Shakespeare subsequently revised or rewrote, contemporary scholarly wisdom now maintains that, in the words of the Arden editor of the play,

the opposite is the case: Q1 is not a prior but a posterior version, not an original of Shakespeare's play but a reconstruction of it; and its great difference from the later-published texts is due not to their expansion but to its abridgement, not to their revision but to its corruption.³⁶

What are we to make of this preposterous turn of events which argues that the putatively First Quarto of the text is actually derivative, that, paradoxically, the simple precedes the model as a first time that is produced retroactively through its copies?

Freud, memorably, argues that the “primal” scene encodes a search for origins that ultimately comes to problematize the very notion of primacy through a corrupting structural complicity between “explanation” and “description.” In other words, every primal scene can only ever be the product of an intertextual process, as an event that becomes graspable only at the site of its erasure. Indeed, the difficulties surrounding Q1 relocates both Hamlet and psychoanalysis within what Ned Lukacher, in another context, describes as the insurmountable

dilemma into which the modern critic is invariably coerced. The task of accounting for a textual event demands that the critic venture, whether intentionally or not, into a zone between the conventional subject-object opposition, a zone where “truth” has become a differential notion that is constituted somewhere between pure construction and historicity.³⁷

³⁶ Harold Jenkins (ed) Hamlet (London, 1995) p.19.

³⁷ Ned Lukacher, Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis (London, 1988), p.31.

Nevertheless, we still find that Stanley Wells, a long-standing supremo of Shakespearean bibliography, encourages the nostalgia for “the text that gives us the play closest to the form in which it was acted in Shakespeare's time [as] preferable to one that represents it in less finished form.”³⁸ Bearing in mind that this claim is made in a study addressing itself to the question of “Revision in Shakespeare's Plays” it is worth commenting on the optical fantasy that inform such “speculations.” More than mere nostalgia, the recuperation desired here is that of the theatrical genesis proper to the text's “production”: i.e. authority is implicitly linked with the desire to revisit the scene of an original and originating creativity. Indeed, what is envisioned is a quite radical effort of re-vision that has much in common with what Slavoj Žižek calls a fantasy gaze: like the trauma of parental coitus, such a gaze seeks the impossible witnessing to some factum brutum of conception that is prior to symbolization itself.³⁹ Recalling Herbert's poem, the secret of Hamlet's mystery is once more articulated in terms of a disruption from within by that which the text can incorporate only partially, something whose “survival,” I would now like to argue, is in fact rendered thinkable through the haunting traces of the crypt.

³⁸ Stanley Wells, “Revision in Shakespeare's Plays” in Richard Landon (ed) Editing and Editors: A Retrospect (New York, 1985), pp.67-97, p.95.

³⁹ I am borrowing this term from Slavoj Žižek who defines the fantasy gaze as that which “reduces [the subject] to an object-gaze observing reality from which he is missing.” For Žižek it is a fantasy equivalent to that represented by the Cartesian Cogito which “is also reduced to a non existing gaze acquiring distance from its own bodily presence, i.e., observing reality from 'behind its own retina.” Slavoj Žižek, Tarrying With The Negative (Durham, 1993), p.65.

Upon What Ground?: Hamlet's Indigestion

To borrow a formulation that Jacques Lacan never tired of repeating, it is not so much alienation that constitutes the ego as it is the denial of that very process of alienation.⁴⁰ The only ground of identity, of meaning and representation, is in fact the non-ground of the play of difference (and differance) that constitutes the signifier. If the text's subterranean imagery of mining, burying, digging, burrowing, mousetraps and moles is so pervasive that Hamlet may literally be viewed in Lacan's terms as "a tragedy of the underworld,"⁴¹ it is in fact the ghost who is the most frequent harbinger of an abyss, leading Hamlet to "the dreadful summit of the cliff" (I.iv.70). According to Freud the uncanny power of the haunted house resides, precisely, in an inability to "find ourselves on familiar ground."⁴² Moreover, at Elsinore, that most famous of haunted houses, the "ground" is also riddled with cavities. Here, it becomes almost a recreational pastime to "mine within" and "'tis the sport to have the engineer/Hoist with his own petard" (III.iv.209-210).

⁴⁰ That is to say, insofar as the ego emerges in the process of imaginary identification with its mirror-double who is at the same time its rival and its potential paranoid persecutor, the frustration generated from the side of the mirror-double is constitutive of the ego: what first appears as an external hindrance frustrating the ego's striving for satisfaction is thereupon experienced as the ultimate support of its being.

⁴¹ Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of desire in Hamlet," in Shoshana Felman (ed) Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise (London, 1982), pp.11-53, p.39. In fact, in 1609 Hamlet made a cameo appearance in Thomas Dekker's play of the Jacobean underworld, the suitably noiresque Lanthorne and Candle-Light. Paul S. Conklin, A History of Hamlet Criticism. 1601-1821 (London, 1957), p.19. Indeed Ned Lukacher traces the use of the image of the mole in Hamlet to argue that the true underworld in the play is that of feminine desire: "...the play itself seems to repress or bury precisely that which is necessary to its interpretation. The very dynamic of the play...is caught in the structure of repression it sets out to analyze." Later he makes the point that "One is always either burying or unburying things in Hamlet." Lukacher, op. cit., p. 216, 218.

⁴² Quoted in Mark Wigley, The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt (London, 1995), p.251.

It is not so much that the ghost is merely an agent of repetition but that it is, in Jacques Derrida's account at least, always a revenant. If the ghost "revisits" (I.iv.53), the text itself in this more complicated sense is also constitutively out of joint precisely insofar as it too "begins" by coming back.⁴³ The revenant not only disrupts presence as a ghostly effet de realite produced through repetition, this logic of doubling is further compounded by the title of the text itself. That is to say, to perpetuate someone by calling a child after him, as Freud said, also makes the child a revenant, an ineluctable reminder of the spectral dimension of naming which essentially consists in this de-synchronizaton of time. In terms of Derrida's logic of the spectre then, the very question as to who or what Hamlet "names" (something that Freud was to speculate upon on more than one occasion) also takes the form of a paradoxical incorporation: "It becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other."⁴⁴ Derrida's discussion of how this paradox of naming installs a duplicitous relation between the text and its title also has a particular bearing on Hamlet's ironic observation that "The body is with the King, but the King is not with/the body" (IV.iii.26-27):

⁴³ Under the rubric of what he mischievously identifies as "hauntology," Derrida also discusses the revenant in Hamlet as exemplary of the paradoxical logic that pertains to repetition and the event. See Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London, 1994), pp10-13. Commenting more specifically on the semiotics of dramatic performance, Malcolm Evans has compared Hamlet to "a Mobius strip in which end and beginning, 'inside' and 'outside' are not fully distinguishable." Signifying Nothing: Truth's True Contents in Shakespeare's Text (London, 1986,) p. 130. Similarly, Terence Hawkes also offers a suggestive, if slightly more generalised, reading of the recursive trajectory of the text in an article that is wittily entitled "Telmah" in Geoffrey Hartman and Patricia Parker (eds) Shakespeare and the Question of Theory (London, 1985), pp. 310-333. Also of relevance here is R.L. Kessler's discussion of "Time and Causality in Renaissance Drama" where plot is discussed in terms of how the text "constructs a space between beginning and closing, through which the play exists, but exists primarily as a space." Locating his discussion within wider historiographical concerns, Kessler makes the slightly more contentious argument that "Hamlet marks a crucial point in the function of Renaissance drama as a pedagogy of causality and time." R.L. Kessler, "Time and Causality in Renaissance Drama," The University of Toronto Quarterly (1990), 59, 4, pp.472 -501, p 489, 490.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx, p.6.

it is as if the text did nothing but play with its title - which would be its object; it is as if the body of the titled text became the title of the title that then becomes the true body, the false-true body, so to speak, of the text, its false-true corpus, its body as ghost of a fiduciary sign, a body on credit.⁴⁵

Haunting, the crypt and the uncanny collaborate in this logic of supplementarity: of that which is expelled over the line in order to hold the line. We might recall here that it is at the battlemented platform, that most violent line of demarcation, where the text begins and that the ghost makes its initial haunt. Significantly, old Hamlet's homecoming is prefaced by a recounting of how he

Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a seal'd compact
Well ratified by law and heraldry
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
Which he stood seiz'd of to the conqueror

(I.i.89-92)

The interarticulation of writing, authority and spatiality here, which Derrida associates with the parasitic ruses of the crypt, also (dis)locates Elsinore as the very figure of the liminal, as that which variously seeks to institute

the relation to a border, country, house, or threshold, as any site, any situation in general from within which, practically, pragmatically, alliances are formed, contracts, codes and conventions established...⁴⁶

Indeed, it is precisely such "codes and conventions" that are also a focus in the next scene when it is recalled how Fortinbras forfeited lands "with all bonds of law" (I.ii.24), and where

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London, 1994), p.97.

Claudius also writes to Norway, instructing his courtiers not to extend beyond “the scope/Of these dilated articles” (II.37-38). If this complex articulation of writing, space and authority implicitly relates the text's imperialist concerns to Derrida's claim that there is no space without violence, Derrida's discussion of the crypt also reveals how this violence is by the same token hidden by the space that it institutes, “buried,” so to speak, within the very sense that there is a space. If the question that Derrida asks of institutional structures is “What do they desire to vomit?....The neither-swallowed-nor-rejected, that which remains stuck in the throat as other,”⁴⁷ in *Hamlet* the ghost is similarly vomited from a crypt that “Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws/To cast thee up again” (I.iv48-50).

Even before the ghost makes its initial haunt, Horatio reassures an anxious Francisco that he is a “friend to this ground” (I.i.16). Yet the ghost haunts precisely because it problematizes the very logic of grounding. It leads Hamlet either “to a more removed ground” (I.iv61) or to “shift our ground” (I.v.164), it “will not stand” (I.i.144), it is exhorted to “stand and unfold” itself, it “stands dumb” (I.ii.206). Indeed, concerned with the ghost's possible duplicitousness Hamlet resolves to seek “grounds/More relative than this” (II.ii.599). Appropriately, it is by a graveside that this logic of grounding itself becomes the focus of a witty exchange between Hamlet and the gravedigger:

Ham: How came he mad?
 Grave: Very strangely they say.
 Ham: How 'strangely'?
 Grave: Faith, e'en with losing his wits
 Ham: Upon what ground?

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Shibboleth: For Paul Celan” in Derek Attridge (ed) *Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature* (London, 1992), pp.370-414, p.407.

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavy and Richard Rand (London, 1986), p.214.

Grave: Why, here in Denmark.

(V.i.151-157)

We might bear in mind here that, as an “old mole” that is both a household pest and a parasite, the ghost is bound to the notion that space is haunted by that which exceeds it, by that which is supplementary to the site. In fact, this association between haunting and parasitism is to be found in Claudius's determination that Hamlet

Should have kept short, restrain'd and out of haunt

.....

We would not understand what was most fit,
But like the owner of a foul disease,
To keep it from divulging, let it feed
Even on the pith of life.

(IV.i.18-23)

Indeed, according to Derrida, parasitism and the law of the phantom are both crucially concerned with the mystical “foundations” of authority, with how “the undecidable remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost.”⁴⁸ Freud's argument in Totem and Taboo that it is the cannibalistic gesture which grounds the tribal totem also informs Derrida's claim that it is “carnivorous sacrifice” which founds the law. In this respect, we might recall how Hamlet contains a surfeit of metaphors that have a particular bearing on this enigma. For example, Gertrude “feeds and batters” on Claudius (III.iv.66-67), Claudius is reminded how Denmark “feeds upon your majesty” (III.iii.10); Hamlet even taunts Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about how they are exploited by Claudius, claiming that they are kept “like an/ape, in the corner of his jaw - first mouthed, to be/ last swallowed” (IV.i.16-18).

In short: there is no official text or institutional practice that is not marked by the faint traces of both the folds that encrypt the indigestible and the way that “violent property fordoes itself” (II.i.103). Everywhere, it seems, Hamlet suffers from a constitutive indigestion, that messy realm of confusion that produces the sense of an interior in the first place. Horatio, for example, characterizes the young Fortinbras's imperial ambitions as

..food and diet to some enterprise
 That hath a stomach in't, which is no other,
 As it doth well appear unto our state,
 But to recover of us by strong hand
 And terms compulsory those foresaid lands
 So by his father lost.

(I.i.102-107)

The text's economies of expulsion and consumption, which centre around the ghost's efficacious injunction to remember, frequently come to digest the problems of how “the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog” (II.ii.181) or how “region kites” may be “fatted” with Claudius's offal (II.576). No inside is ever simply severed from an outside in Hamlet; space, rather, becomes an elaborate effect of the spacing that appears to haunt it, so that what we may call the “indigestible” is disseminated cryptically throughout the text. If what we call “structure,” as Mark Wigley has argued, is actually “forgetting and the crypt is nothing more than the structure of forgetting, the perverse structure of structure,”⁴⁹ Hamlet also gestures toward this strangely carnivalesque discourse of internalization and memory.

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority,” trans. Mary Quaintance Cardozo Law Review, 11, 5-6 (1990), pp.919-1046, p.965.

⁴⁹ Wigley, op. cit., p.156.

Indeed, in the Genealogy of Morals Nietzsche adumbrates the fate of the modern subject of memory, a subject who can participate only in a carnivalesque forgetting where those “things which are experienced or taken in are as unlikely to reach our consciousness in the process of digestion as in the myriad processes by which physical nourishment, so called incorporation takes place.”⁵⁰ Although Hamlet makes his most emphatic claims to interiority by accommodating his father's injunction to remember within the “table of my memory” (I.v.98), more often than not it is the food table which displaces the writing table in Hamlet, providing an alternative metabolism for the function of memory through a recurrent metaphoric of digestion. Promising to abide by the ghost's commandment, this connection is suggested, at least homonymically, in Hamlet's return to “My tables. Meet it is I set it down/That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain” (I.v.107-8). Earlier Hamlet makes the sardonic observation of how “the funeral bak'd meats/Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables” (I.ii.180-1). Indeed, a little later in the play the prince opines “Heaven and earth/Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him/As if increase of appetite had grown/By what it fed on” (I.v. 142-145).

“The Murder of Gonzago” is not only the site of a cryptic accessibility which “comes near the circumstance” of the old King's death, the speech that is “inserted in't” (II.ii.536) is also the locus of a phantasmatic act of magical ingestion in “an excellent play, well digested in/the scenes” (II.435-436). Hamlet extends the gastric metaphors even further to insist that there be “no sallots in the/lines to make the matter savoury” (II.437-438). Here, perhaps most powerfully, we find once again that at the very heart of the text is a seclusion of other texts, folding upon each other in a parasitical economy of “internal pockets larger than the whole.”

⁵⁰ Quoted in Helga Geyer-Ryan, Fables of Desire (London, 1994), p.44.

In a strange disposition of space that we will have more to say about later, the interiorizing motif of the “play-within-the-play” announces this principle of a constitutive “excess” which comes to violate the very “boundary” it polices.⁵¹

Breaking Out

In Hamlet incorporation is not merely a contingent pathology of subjectivity, but its very possibility. This disruptive spatiality, which Abraham and Torok understand in terms of miming the offensive-defensive strategies of the ego, also relates to a more familiar narrative of how the text seeks to inscribe borders and identity within the field of vision. Hamlet, I would like to suggest, recalls the lamella, a myth which Lacan locates at the genesis of human desire as an amoeba-like state of Otherness that is prior to intersubjectivity:

Whenever the membranes of the egg in which the foetus emerges on its way to becoming a new-born are broken, imagine for a moment that something flies off, and that one can do it with an egg as easily as with a man, namely the hommelette.⁵²

Indeed, this is not the only occasion where Lacan exploits a similarity between the ego and the egg; elsewhere, for example, he argues that the ego moulds itself into the “protective shell” of the subject.⁵³ You cannot make a Hamlet or a hommelette, it seems, without breaking eggs. Not only, famously, is Hamlet “bounded in a nutshell,” the text regularly

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” trans. Avital Rovell Glyph, 7, (1980), pp. 202-229, p.206.

⁵² Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1997), p.197.

⁵³ Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, trans. John Forrester (Cambridge, 1988), p.17.

focuses on the notion of hatching⁵⁴: Polonius tutors the departing Laertes on the dangers that arise from “new-hatch'd, unfledged courage” (I.iii.65); Claudius fears that with Hamlet's impending madness “the hatch and the disclose/will be some danger” (III.i.168-169); Laertes rages against his father's unceremonious internment, “No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones” (Iv.vi.211). Similarly, Hamlet seeks inspiration from the example of Fortinbras who exposes “what is mortal and unsure/To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,/Even for an eggshell” (IV.iv.51-53); Hamlet even characterizes Osric's exit as similar to the way that a “lapwing runs away with the shell on his head” (V.ii.183). In *Hamlet* a birth is in the offing, even though the text often appears to be “unpregnant of its cause” (II.ii.663).

We might turn profitably here to Norbert Elias who, in his seminal study of the early modern psychogenesis of the ego, argues that subjectivity became linked to “the detachment of the thinking subject from his objects in the act of cognitive thought.”⁵⁵ Distancing was conceived as “an eternal condition of spatial separation between a mental apparatus apparently locked “inside” man...and the objects “outside” and divided from it by an invisible wall.” Elias argues that “from the Renaissance onward” the individual ego was characterized as “a locked case, the “self” divided by an invisible wall from what happens outside.”⁵⁶ Crucially, for Jacques Lacan imaginary captation similarly inscribes identity within a succession of increasingly aggressive phantasies that attempt to reinforce this spatial separation. Famously, Lacan claims that the “mirror stage” initiates a drama “that extends

⁵⁴ For a brilliant analysis of the figure of “hatching” more generally as implying a spaciousity or “eventness” that is ineluctably tied to writing, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (California, 1993), pp.9-20.

⁵⁵ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners* (Oxford, 1978), p.256.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.257.

from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic - and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity.”⁵⁷

Remarking to Rosencrantz that “Denmark's a prison” (II.ii.243) Hamlet defends the sovereign status of the cogito, only to find that the threat of captivity arises from quite a different source: “I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space - were it not that I have bad dreams” (II.254-256).⁵⁸ For both Lacan and Hamlet, however, it is a quite specific dream that comes to pose a threat for the imaginary ego:

the formation of the I is symbolized in dreams by a fortress, or a stadium - its inner arena and enclosure, surrounded by marshes and rubbish-tips, dividing it into two opposed fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle.⁵⁹

Dreams, fortresses, rubbish tips and castles: these sites also constitute much of the imaginary geography of Hamlet. Indeed, fortresses become particularly vulnerable to attack: Horatio's “ears that are so fortified” (I.i.34-35) are “assailed” by news of the ghost; Hamlet is accused by his mother of possessing “a heart unfortified” (I.ii.96); at Elsinore even a mole can break down “the pales and forts of reason” (I.iv.28). It is even tempting to consider “Fort-in-bras” within this constellation of images. Although Hamlet characterizes himself as “a dull and muddy-mettled rascal” (II.ii.562), it is Fortinbras who acts as a projected site of identification for the prince, who seeks to emulate this warrior of “unimproved mettle” (I.i.99). That is to

⁵⁷ Jacques Lacan, “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I” in Jacques Alain-Miller (ed) Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977), pp. 1-8, p.4.

⁵⁸ Michele Le Doeuff has also given an account of how the Renaissance is marked by this drive toward individual containment. Particularly in Shakespeare, she argues, we discover examples of how “each individual becomes a closed space in relation to their fantasmagoria: their desires and dreams are their business.” Venus et Adonis suivi de genese d'une catastrophe (Paris, 1986), p.83.

say, Fortinbras's name provides an ironic gloss on Lacan's notion of how an "armour of an alienating identity" contributes to this construction of the ego-ideal, where the subject spatially identifies with the specular image to "unite the I with the statue in which man projects himself."⁶⁰

At a more general level, these spatializing dynamics may be read alongside an historical development beginning with the Renaissance that Teresa Brennan has called "the ego's era." Brennan's influential argument, which like Lacan takes account of how the physis of space in the environment and the psyche are codependent, maintains that fantasy has a physical force in history. Central to Brennan's argument here is her discussion of the development of what she calls the "aggressive territorial imperative" which

involved making the other into a slave, or object, will lead to spatial expansion (territorial imperialism). This is because the objectification of the other depends on establishing a spatial boundary by which the other and the self are fixed. But this fixing of the other leads to the fear that the other will retaliate, which in turn leads to a feeling of spatial constriction.⁶¹

With its recurrent economies of expansion and constriction, we may also wish to consider how Hamlet gestures towards this continuous labour of Gestalt and subjectivity that, for Brennan, is also the foundational fantasy of modernity itself. Indeed, the protracted territorial dispute between Denmark and Norway not only provides political intrigue in the text, at various points this crisis is reticulated within the text in ways that are strangely

⁵⁹ Lacan, op. cit., p.5.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.5. Indeed, 'The Mirror Stage' in part argues that the specular image is inextricably caught up in "the lure of spatial identification." This relationship, which Lacan calls "orthopaedic," relates to the subject's attempts at optical erection. Elsewhere Lacan insists that the "dialectic" of psychoanalysis is crucially concerned with this "ortho-dramatization of the subjectivity of the subject."

⁶¹ Teresa Brennan, History After Lacan (London, 1993), p.8.

redolent of this Lacanian parabola of psychogenesis. For example, although Hamlet taunts Osric that he has procured the King's favour through being "spacious in the possession of dirt" (V.ii.88-89), in *Hamlet*, as we have seen, dirt and space are possessed of a more phantasmatic measure of consistency. Perhaps the most bizarre example is to be found in the confrontation between Hamlet and Laertes that takes place over the corpse of Ophelia who becomes the focus for increasingly aggressive, and explicitly masculine, fantasies of territorial expansion. After Laertes invites the gravedigger to bury him "Till of this flat a mountain you have made/To o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head/Of blue Olympus" (V.i.247), Hamlet lays down a wager which once again deflects into the vertigo of the domination of space, that threatens to lead him to the point of his own annihilation:

Be buried quick with her, and so will I.
And if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
Make Ossa like a wart.

(V.i..274-278)

It is not until later, when Hamlet apologizes for literally making mountains out of molehills, that the agency of the visible again becomes implicated in this aggressive relation: "For by the image of my cause I see/The portraiture of his.../But sure the bravery of his grief did put me/Into a tow'ring passion" (V.ii.77-80). Although he reassures Laertes that "his semblable is his mirror" (ll.118), Hamlet's subsequent use of the foil metaphor (which, we might recall, simultaneously refers to an instrument of combat and a reflective medium of identity) encapsulates even more explicitly this essentially rivalrous structure of the specular:

I'll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance
 Your skill shall like a star i'th'darkest night
 Stick fiery off indeed.

(V.ii.252-254)

In his seminar “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet” Lacan argues that the rivalry between Hamlet and Laertes is a paradigmatic example of the very “master-slave” dialectic that crucially informs his model of imaginary identification:

The playwright situates the basis of aggressivity in this paroxysm of absorption in the imaginary register, formally expressed as a mirror relationship, a mirrored reaction. The one you fight is the one you admire the most. The ego ideal is also, according to Hegel's formula which says that coexistence is impossible, the one you have to kill.⁶²

Where Truth Is Hid

In the topology of the crypt, however, this relationship between spatiality and vision also secretes the disruptive spatiality of the signifier. Indeed, it is the very idea that there is an interior that encloses the secret. As I have argued, at Elsinore the most secure hiding place is the representation of an interior that is rendered possible by an ongoing repression. Indeed, Lacan argues that “The value of Freud's texts..in which he is breaking new ground, is that like a good archaeologist, he leaves the work of the dig in place.”⁶³ Indeed, the archaeological metaphors associated with Hamlet probably find their apotheosis in Freud's own typically immodest claim that “the conflict in Hamlet is so effectively concealed that it

⁶² Jacques Lacan, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet,” p.31.

was left to me to unearth it.”⁶⁴ In the text itself, however, it is Polonius who arrogates to himself these excavatory powers of detection in his determination that “I will find/Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed/Within the centre” (II.ii.156-158). In his reading of Poe's “Purloined Letter,” however, Lacan elaborates a far more paradoxical relation of truth and secrecy:

In the real, the very idea of a hidden place is insane - however deep into the bowels of the earth someone may go bearing something, it isn't hidden there, since if it were, so can you. Only what belongs to the order of truth can be hidden.⁶⁵

It is precisely by leaving “the work of the dig in place,” so to speak, that psychoanalysis argues that there can be no truth that is ontologically prior to the “search” that putatively aims at its disclosure. Indeed, the “play-within-the -play,” where the text constructs its most emphatic claims to interiority, provides a properly theatrical context for this notion that the repressed and the return of the repressed are the same thing. For it is precisely here where, if

⁶³ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.182.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Harold Bloom, “Freud: A Shakespearean Reading,” Yale Review, 82, 3 (1994), pp.1-21, p.12. In “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression” Jacques Derrida offers an extended reading of the psychoanalytic “scene of excavation” in terms of Freud's ubiquitous use of “archaeological parables,” Diacritics, 25,2 (1995), pp.9-65, p.58. Moreover, in the light of the constellation of images with which we are concerned here, there is a point in “Freud and the Scene of Writing” where Derrida, Freud and the spatio-temporal enigmas of Hamlet implicitly come into a strange kind of proximity:

The metaphor of pathbreaking, so frequently used in Freud's descriptions, is always in communication with the theme of the supplementary delay and with the reconstitution of meaning through deferral, after the mole-like progression, after the subterranean toil of an impression. This impression has left behind a laborious trace which has never been perceived, whose meaning has never been lived in the present.

Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1978), p.214.

⁶⁵ Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book Two: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (Cambridge, 1988), p.202.

we can say such a thing, that Hamlet is faced with its exterior at its own interior.⁶⁶ In fact, the Arden editor succinctly observes a peculiar fact of the text's strange topography which, as he puts it, centres upon "a crime which is already past when it begins but which is re-enacted in its central scene."⁶⁷ In other words, what is ostensibly the text's "primal" scene only acquires its centrality in terms of its belated arrival as a secondary effect. In this respect the play-within-the-play conforms precisely to what Lacan calls the Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz, "the representative representative."⁶⁸ In particular, the dumb show acts as a place holder in the symbolic which, quite literally, according to Žižek's reading of the Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz, "gives body to the 'unspeakable' - its inert presence testifies that we are in a domain where 'words fail.'"⁶⁹ In other words, the play-within-the-play represents precisely an attempt in Hamlet to integrate into the symbolic order its constitutive outside, the very surplus that eludes its field of representation. Indeed, the meta-theatrical dimension of this effect is inseparable from its constitutive disfiguration of the interiorizing exegetes of form and content, so that "The Murder of Gonzago" becomes in many respects

the umbilical link by means of which the diegetic content functions as an allegory of its process of enunciation. The place of this figure [the Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz] is acousmatic: it never simply partakes in diegetic reality, but dwells in an intermediate space inherent to reality yet 'out of place' in it.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Alenka Zupancic has recently discussed the status of the play-within-a-play in terms of how "fiction is established through the disjunction regarding the Real, sustaining itself through something that it cannot show - with the essential postscript: that it can show only by duplicating itself" (author's emphasis). "A Perfect Place to Die: Theatre in Hitchcock's Films" in Slavoj Žižek (ed) Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid To Ask Hitchcock) (London, 1992), pp. 73-105, p. 82. In other words, once again we encounter the paradox of the Real as that which is manifested as the retroactive product of its own effects.

⁶⁷ Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p.123.

⁶⁸ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.217.

⁶⁹ Slavoj Žižek, in Slavoj Žižek (ed) Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid To Ask Hitchcock), p.239.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.244.

The logic of the play-within-the-play itself as a theatrical device serves to reinscribe what Joan Copjec has called “deep space” as an effect of sutured space that consists of “a foregrounding display of the performative.”⁷¹ Suture provides the logic of a paradoxical function whereby a supplementary element is added, or in Hamlet's words “inserted” (II.ii.536), to the series of signifiers in order, precisely, to mark the lack of a signifier that could effect closure.⁷²

It is, however, largely through a consideration of trauma that psychoanalysis affords paradigmatic significance to this strange dialectic of excess and lack, with its attendant paradox of a cause that does not pre-exist its effects. Indeed, at one point in Hamlet Polonius unwittingly encounters the logical confusions that arise when one blithely undertakes the task of locating “the cause of lunacy” (II.ii.49). With all the audacity of an amateur Freudian Polonius announces confidently to the Queen that “Your noble son is mad” (II.ii.92). His subsequent ruminations, however, are a little less assured:

And now remains
That we find out the cause of this effect,
Or rather say the cause of this defect,
For this effect defective comes by cause.
Thus it remains; and the remainder thus.

⁷¹ I am positing a relationship between the Vorstellungs-Repräsentanz and Miller's classic elaboration of suture at the level of a familiar Lacanian reflexive reversal: i.e. where the “lack of the signifier” becomes “the signifier of the lack.” In an inspired analysis of the paradoxical production of interiority in detective fiction, Copjec employs Miller's notion of suture to suggest a relationship between the symbolic and the real that is particularly illuminating in the context of a discussion of Hamlet: “If the locked room is always breached, this is not because every private space has always already been intruded upon by the public power of the symbolic, but because within the symbolic the real always intrudes, limiting the symbolic from within and producing its infinite commodiousness.” Joan Copjec, Read My Desire: Lacan Against The Historicists (London, 1994), p.176.

⁷² For a now classic analysis of this logic, see Jacques-Alain Miller, “Suture: Elements in the Logic of the Signifier,” Screen, (Winter 1977) pp.8-39, p.27.

(II.ii.100-104)

Unable to posit any remainderless demarcation between cause and effect, Polonius' rhetorical impasse also stumbles upon the antagonistic relationship that obtains between the cause and symbolic determination (which Lacan characterizes as the law). Indeed, Polonius' somewhat sinuous formulation that "effect defective comes by cause" comes very close to an awareness of the signifier's synchronic role in establishing this paradoxical coincidence between past and present. As we argued in relation to Richard III, for Lacan causality is only possible through the operation of some "defective" agency: "Cause is to be distinguished from that which is determinate in a chain, in other words, the law...there is cause only in something that doesn't work."⁷³ Traditionally, the speech (if it is mentioned at all) is dismissed as yet another characteristic example of Polonius' bombastic self-importance. In a footnoted commentary the Arden editor offers the view that "He [Polonius] loses the thread of his argument and non-sensically repeats himself."⁷⁴ In fact, for psychoanalysis, this is also the conclusion to be drawn from Polonius' futile search for the traumatic conditions of Hamlet's madness. For it is precisely through such "non-sensical repetition" that the cause retroactively becomes what it always-already was. In the symbolic domain it is always the case that, in Hamlet's words, "anticipation prevents discovery" (II.ii.293-294). As John Forrester has argued, Lacanian psychoanalysis is crucially concerned with how "the traditional dialectical categories of temporality are organized around waiting/haste."⁷⁵ The

⁷³ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.22.

⁷⁴ Harold Jenkins, op. cit., p.241.

⁷⁵ John Forrester, The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida (Cambridge, 1990), p.176.

symbolic order always has this anticipatory, hastening character (similar to the anticipatory recognition in the mirror stage).

In Hamlet it is this temporal scission (organized around waiting and haste) which provides a convenient shorthand to characterize the prince's dilemma.⁷⁶ In fact, the protracted nature of Hamlet's much remarked upon delaying tactics becomes all the more remarkable in the light

⁷⁶ The implied notion here that the subject is a "virtual" image is the proper context within which to approach Lacan's reading of the future anterior where "what is realized in my history is not the past definite of what it is, since it is no more, or the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming," Ecrits, p.86. In fact, it is precisely the phenomenon of hesitation that most fully attests to this redoubling of reflection. This is the occurrence of what Lacan calls le mot me manque, "the word escapes me," which Russell Grigg has translated as "I am missing the word," Freud's Papers on Technique, p.115, n.20. Indeed, it is this kind of subreption which discloses, literally, how the subject constitutively lacks its own place. At a diegetic level much of the drama of Hamlet is propelled through a series of interruptions: two examples will suffice for the present discussion. Recall Polonius's advice to Reynaldo, where his long exhortation suffers an unexpected interruption:

Pol: And then, sir, does a this - a does - what was I about to say? By the mass, I was about to say something. Where did I leave?

Rey: At 'close in the consequence.'

Pol: At 'close in the consequence,' ay, marry. (II.i.50-54)

Here, meaning is doubly articulated: as anticipated on the one hand, since its a question of its suspension, and as repeated on the other since Polonius refers it to an impression of having already heard it. A similar, though slightly more complicated example occurs when Hamlet tries to persuade the players to a recitation of Aeneas' tale to Dido:

If it live in your memory,
Begin at this line - let me see, let me see -
The rugged Pyrrhus, like th'Hyrceanian beast-
'Tis not so. It begins with Pyrrhus-
The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,

(II.ii.444-448)

In a remark that bears strikingly upon this ironic relation between theatre and memory, Lacan figures the hesitation as "an indirect discourse, isolated in quotation marks within the thread of narration, and, if the discourse is played out, it is on a stage implying the presence not only of the chorus, but also of spectators," Ecrits, p. 47. Lacan's point here, as I understand it, is not simply the fact that hesitation testifies to the subject's domination by the symbolic, but that it is in the future anterior of the non-imaginary viewpoint of the Ego-Ideal, a symbolic determination that consists in the way that I see the others seeing me, that the subject is to be located. Much of the present chapter is largely concerned to show how Hamlet is haunted by precisely this kind of "virtual" space without which, and this is the most radical import of the Lacanian object, there can be no subject.

of the fact that the text is continually traversed by numerous references to the word "haste": Barnardo urges his Francisco to "make haste" (I.i.12); Marcellus remarks upon the ghost's return in terms of "this sweaty haste" (II.80); Horatio refers to "post-haste and rummage in the land" (II.110) and, in recounting the ghost's appearance to Hamlet, he describes how "it shrunk in haste away" (I.ii.219); enquiring after the duration of the ghost's stay Horatio responds that "one with moderate haste might/tell a hundred" (II.237); eager to hear the ghost's tale Hamlet urges "haste me to know't" (I.v.29); Rozencrantz and Guildenstern are victims of "hasty sending" (II.ii.4); the Queen diagnoses Hamlet's behaviour as concern about her "o'er hasty marriage" (II.ii.57); Hamlet bids "the players make haste" (III.ii.50); Rozencrantz reassures Claudius that "we will haste us" (III.iii.27); sending them on another errand Claudius urges them "I pray you to haste in this" (IV.ii.37), and offers similar advice to Laertes: "Pray you make haste" (IV.iv.60).

Indeed, in Polonius's lengthy exposition to Reynaldo, spying becomes not so much an undertaking that involves subterfuge or reconnaissance missions as a heightened sensitivity to this dual movement of delay and precipitation: to the subject's relation to the signifier.

Tutoring him on how to arrive at a knowledge of Laertes' exploits by "drift of question," Polonius posits a relationship between truth and misrecognition by which means the truth, literally, arises from misrecognition. At the level of pedagogy at least, his peroration is as eloquent a summary of transference as we are likely to find:

Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth;
 And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
 With windlasses and with assays of bias
 By indirections find directions out.
 So by my former lecture and advice

Shall you my son.

(II.i.63-68)

In Lacan's seminar on transference, the transferential encounter with truth is described in similarly eccentric terms as "inadequate modes of operation, taken by indirect and roundabout ways."⁷⁷ As Denmark's state-appointed confidant who is very adept at interposing himself "in the ear /Of all...conference" (III.i.186-7) Polonius shares with the psychoanalyst an awareness that, in the register of speech, Truth inheres not at the level of fact but at the level of meaning, as something that is an effect of intersubjective relations. In this sense, the secretary is the arch-cryptonomist who embodies the fact that the secret, in a Derridean schema, "is not a deprived interiority that one would have to reveal, confess, announce...the secret is not phenomenalizable."⁷⁸ In fact, in the end, Polonius' demise is occasioned by overlooking the fact that this "third place" is a strictly symbolic determination.

For Lacan, it is the Big Other which designates the fact that in non-psychotic speech the addressee is always beyond the imaginary relation. Truth finds its consecration in speech by presupposing recognition by a third term, the symbolic order, where the subject is recognised by it only because it is recognised first. In the transference, it is what Lacan has called "the subject supposed to know" that occupies this place marked for a third. That is to say, truth is always the truth of the symbolic "big Other," it does not occur in the intimacy of self-experience, but results from the way that the subject's activity is inscribed in the field of

⁷⁷ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.147.

⁷⁸ Jacques Derrida, On The Name (California, 1996), p.25.

intersubjective relations. Similarly, Claudius reminds Rozencrantz and Guildenstern that their inquiries into Hamlet's madness must be conducted through "drift of conference" (III.i. 21). In the case of Ophelia, who bears "A document in madness: thoughts and remembrance fitted" (IV.V.176), such vicissitudes attending signification also become the cause of political anxiety. Exhorting the Queen to talk to her, one courtier advises that

Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts

(IV.v.7-10)

Indeed, we might recall here Robert Weimann's account of the way that Protestantism rearticulated the relationship between truth and representation so that authority was "no longer given, as it were, before the writing and reading began, the act of representation was turned into a site on which authority could be negotiated, disputed, or reconstituted."⁷⁹ Protestant divines regularly meditated on this matter. Jeremy Taylor, for example, in a metaphor that finds some resonance in *Hamlet*, argues in *Ductor Dubitantium* that there is greater moral value in the search for truth than in its discovery, therefore "it is not necessary it should be searched for. It may be, it cannot be hit, but it must be aimed at."⁸⁰

Hamlet's traumatic searching out of the place where truth is hid extends beyond the prince's wistful commentary on the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," employing variously inflected metaphors of aiming and shooting which substitute a topology of curved space for a

⁷⁹ Robert Weimann, *Authority and Representation in Early Modern Discourse*, ed. David Hillman (Baltimore, 1978), p.5.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Meg Lota Brown, "The Politics of Conscience in Reformation England," *Renaissance and Reformation*, 15 (1991), pp.101-114, p.105 n.24.

model of subject-centred linear determinism. While Laertes counsels Ophelia that in her dealings with Hamlet she “keep in the rear of your affection/Out of the shot and danger of desire” (I.iii.33-34), Polonius is similarly perplexed by Hamlet's perspicacious reply “that often madness hits on” (II.ii.208-210). Claudius seeks to ensure that the rumours of political instability “may miss our name/And hit the woundless air” (IV.ii.40-44). Later he agonizes that his “arrows..have reverted to my bow again,/But not where I had aim'd them” (IV.vii.21-24). At one point Hamlet even laments to Laertes that “I have shot my arrow o'er the house/And hurt my brother” (V.ii.238-239).

In the context of a discussion on apophatic theologemes Derrida has discussed the movement of deferred action in terms of, precisely, this recursive trajectory:

But an arrow is only an arrow; it is never an end in itself. It is everything save what it aims for, save what it strikes, even, indeed, save what it wounds; this is what makes the arrow miss even that which it touches, which thereby remains safe.⁸¹

Indeed, Lacan's obsession with topological models of “curved space,” those occasions where “the arrow always comes back toward the subject,”⁸² in part argues that subjectivity is a structural effect of the convoluted folds of the signifying chain. To be a subject is always to read the message that that returns in its inverted form; where knowledge is, like Hamlet's letter, “folded up in the form of th'other” (V.ii.51). Hamlet's tale of “accidental judgements” and “purposes mistook/Fall'n on th' inventors heads” (V.ii.387, 389-90) may be read as almost an epigrammatic account of Lacan's insistence that the letter always arrives at its destination precisely on account of this surplus of result over intention. That is to say, it is

⁸¹ Jacques Derrida, Aporias, trans. Thomas Dutoit (California, 1994), p.36.

⁸² Quoted in Slavoj Zizek, Tarrying With The Negative, p.196.

part of the malevolent sport of the signifier to involve the subject in this perpetual drama of self-undermining. “[T]o have the enginer/Hoist with his own petard” (III.iv.208-209) encapsulates the structural antagonism that is a consequence of the non-coincidence between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the statement. Lacan's theory of curved space which, Moebius-like, loops back around to its source does so only because of this breach which, constitutively, is the subject. In other words, what we refer to as subjectivity is this structural paradox, a missing link in the signifying chain (S) or cryptic effect of the signifier which Lacan has appropriately defined as “an object that cannot be swallowed, as it were, which remains stuck in the gullet of the signifier.”⁸³ As we shall see in the concluding section, Lacan's choice of metaphor here is not altogether inappropriate for a text like Hamlet.

Object Voice

Awaiting the disclosure of Claudius's hitherto “occulted guilt” during the play-within-the-play, Hamlet promises to “observe his looks;/I'll tent him to the quick. If a do blench,/ I know my course” (II.ii.592-594). As the Arden editor points out “a tent was an instrument for examining or cleansing a wound.”⁸⁴ Not only does the original meaning of “trauma” itself, of course, mean “wound,” Cathy Caruth draws attention to the apocryphal tale of Tancred in Freud's Beyond The Pleasure Principle . Here, Freud relates trauma to a voice that is, quite literally, released through the wound:

⁸³ Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, p.207.

⁸⁴ Harold Jenkins, op. cit., p.214, n.18.

The figure of Tancred addressed by the speaking wound constitutes, in other words, not only a parable of trauma and its uncanny repetition but, more generally, a parable of psychoanalytic theory itself as it listens to a voice that it cannot fully know but to which it nevertheless bears witness.⁸⁵

I would also like to argue that in Hamlet the “voice” increasingly comes to be articulated around a certain void in the text’s intersubjective relations.

The dislocating telephony of the ghost's disembodied cries from “under the stage” (I.v.157 S.D.) is, perhaps, most redolent of the text’s cryptic topology of a “no place or non-place within space, a place as no-place” that enables the “ghost” to “haunt with all kinds of ventriloquism.”⁸⁶ Indeed, this is not the only example of the text's ghostly ventriloquism. If, as I have argued, space is but an elaborate effect of the spacing that appears to haunt it, the voice also “haunts” Hamlet by encrypting itself in those spaces from which it appears to withdraw. That is to say, the status of the “voice” in the text more properly conforms to its role as the Lacanian object: as something that cannot itself be present, although the whole notion of presence and unalloyed interiority is constructed around it and can be established only by its elision. To establish itself as separate, the subject has to have something to be separate from: this much is foreshadowed by Lacan's object a. Indeed, we may even suggest here that the decidedly “paranoid” atmosphere of Elsinore is accountable partly to the fact that, to recall Lacan’s definition of paranoia, this constituting lack has ceased to remain “virtual,” that is, the object a appears to be included within the frame of reality itself. Time

⁸⁵ Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (London, 1996), p.6.

⁸⁶ Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy (Minneapolis, 1986), xlviii.

and again at Elsinore speech is regulated through the presumed presence of some imaginary auditor who is located “in the ear/Of all conference” (III.i.186-187).⁸⁷

This suspicion, of course, also underlies the deployment of Hamlet's improvisational skills with regard to The Murder of Gonzago when he instructs an actor to “study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines, which I would set down and insert in't” (II.ii.535-536). “Authority in the Shakespearean text,” Jonathan Goldberg has argued, “is a matter not of having a voice but of voicing.”⁸⁸ Similarly, in Hamlet the status of the voice becomes less a marker for the plenitude of an unalloyed interiority so much as a certain trace of alterity that has always already dislocated the origin. Although Hamlet uses the conceit of the recorder to confound attempts to “pluck out the heart of my mystery” (III.ii.356-357) and Reynaldo is instructed by Polonius to “sound” Laertes (II.i.43), Horatio is also characterized as “a pipe for Fortune's finger/To sound what stops she pleases” (II.70-71). Moreover, not only does the prince deliver a long excursus on how the players should “mouth” their play, he also teases Ophelia by suggesting that he could supply the verbal accompaniment to the dumb show “if I/Could see the puppets dallying” (III.ii.241-2).

⁸⁷ Indeed, Elsinore becomes a particularly resonant example of the great houses of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which, as Lawrence Stone has argued, were largely “constructed of interlocking suites of rooms without corridors, so that the only way of moving about was by passing through other people's chambers...Always, at all times of day or night, servants were spying through cracks in the wainscoting, peering through keyholes, listening at doors to hear the rhythmic creaking of beds, and carefully inspecting the bed-linen for tell-tale stain.” Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 (New York, 1979), pp.169-70. For an exemplary reading of contemporary theoretical elaborations of Lacanian “paranoia” see Jerry Anne Flieger, “Postmodern Perspective: The Paranoid Eye,” New Literary History, 28 (1997), pp.87-109.

⁸⁸ Johnathan Goldberg, Voice, Terminal, Echo: Postmodern Theory and Renaissance Texts (London, 1985), p.119.

This notion of the voice as object, which cannot be attributed to any subject and thus hovers in some indefinite interspace, is an example of what Michel Chion has called la voix acousmatique.⁸⁹ Old Hamlet becomes the most conspicuous marker in the text of the way that the relationship between voice and the body is always at some level spectral. From Horatio's first anxious inquiry as to whether the ghost "has any sound or use of voice" (I.i.131) the text dwells obsessively upon this "phantomization"⁹⁰ of the voice; that is to say, a voice that is without support in a subject that serves as its source: Claudius reassures Laertes that his departure from Denmark will not lose him his voice (I.ii.45); Laertes urges Ophelia not to succumb to Hamlet whom "the main voice of Denmark goes withal" (I.ii.28); Polonius tutors Laertes to "give every man thy ear, but few thy voice" (I.iii.68); Hamlet offers advice on the actor's use of voice (II.ii.423/550); Rozencrantz tries to persuade Hamlet that he has the voice of the king (III.ii.332); Laertes seeks "a voice and precedent of peace" (V.ii.245); Hamlet nominates Fortinbras as the one who has his "dying voice" (V.ii.361). At the graveside Hamlet broods over a skull that "had a tongue in it, and could sing once" (V.i.74) and fantasizes how it might have belonged to a courtier "which could say 'Good morrow, sweet lord. How dost thou, sweet lord?'" (ll. 80-81).

Indeed, the text ends, as it begins, with another example of prosopopeia, the master trope which Paul de Man has described as the solicitation of a "voice-from-beyond-the-grave,"⁹¹

⁸⁹ Michel Chion, La Voix au cinéma (Paris, 1982), p.12. In a more recent elaboration of this concept, Chion explicitly relates this effect to the phenomenality of the ghost: "A ghost is traditionally one who went unburied or was badly buried. Precisely the same is true of the acousmetre, when the voice of a person not yet seen is involved, for here too there is something which can neither enter the frame in order to attach itself to one of the bodies which revolve there...and is therefore doomed to wander on the surface" (Chion 1992, 195).

⁹⁰ Derrida has argued that the voice "makes itself heard because its place of emission is not fixed - phantomization occurs when it has no assignable place" (Derrida 1994, 135).

⁹¹ Paul de Man, The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York, 1984), p.77.

when the suitably named (H)oratio becomes the repository of Hamlet's voice by appointing himself ventriloquist to the prince's corpse: "I shall have also cause to speak/And from his mouth whose voice will draw [on]more" (V.ii.392).⁹² In an act which links explicitly the process of interiorization with commemoration, what is hinted at here is a macabre encrypting of Hamlet as the "living dead" that will "continue to lodge...like something other and to ventrilocate through the 'living.'" ⁹³ The "voice can betray the body to which it is lent, it can make it ventriloquize as if the body were no longer anything more than the actor or the double of another voice, of the voice of the other.." ⁹⁴ In Elsinore, the possibility that the voice can become attached to the wrong body can have fatal consequences. It is precisely because Hamlet takes him "for thy better" (III.iv.32) - in other words Claudius - that the disembodied cries of Polonius from behind the arras are the cause of his demise.

In Lacan's "graph of desire" the voice is the remainder of the signifying operation, that is, the meaningless piece of the real which stays behind once the operation of quilting [capitonnage] is performed. It is this cut in the signifying chain that, for Lacan, "verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity in the real," ⁹⁵ and argues that it is precisely because of a constitutive impossibility of embodiment that the object a is strictly homologous to the void

⁹² Adopting a more rigorously Freudian approach which focuses almost exclusively upon the prince's exchanges with his father, Marjorie Garber's discussion of Hamlet makes reference to prosopopeia as an Oedipalised structure of memory and mourning. Marjorie Garber, Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality (London, 1987), p.145.

⁹³ Jacques Derrida, "Roundtable on Autobiography," Peggy Kamuf trans., in Christie McDonald et. al. eds., The Ear of the Other: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida (London, 1988), pp.41-93, p.57-8.

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Voice II," Andermatt Conley trans., in Elizabeth Weber ed., Jacques Derrida: Points....Interviews, 1974-1994 (California, 1995), pp.156-71, p.161.

⁹⁵ Jacques Lacan, "The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire," in Ecrits: A Selection, p.299.

of the subject: it is the object cause of desire insofar as the failure of symbolization opens up the “nothing” within which the very process of symbolization takes place:

[objectal status] is applicable not because they represent only partially the function that produces them...These objects have one common feature in my elaboration of them - they have no specular image, or, in other words, alterity. It is what enables them to be the 'stuff,' or rather the lining, though not in any sense the reverse, of the very subject that one takes to be the subject of consciousness. For this subject, who thinks he can accede to himself by designating himself in the statement, is no more than such an object (emphasis added). ⁹⁶

Indeed, Slavoj Žižek has described the voice as something which “acquires a spectral autonomy, it never quite belongs to the body we see, so that even when we see a living person talking, there is always some degree of ventriloquism at work.” ⁹⁷ “Speak, I am bound to hear” (I.v.6) is Hamlet's response to the ghost's request that he “lend thy serious hearing/To what I shall unfold” (II.4-5). “To listen to words,” Lacan insists, “is already more or less to obey them.”⁹⁸ Also arguing how the commanding authority of the voice is always already inscribed in the very posture of listening, Mladen Dolar makes the important point that

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.315.

⁹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, “I Hear You With My Eyes”; or, The Invisible Master” in Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (eds) *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (London, 1996), pp.90-129, p.92. While I am attempting to posit some kind of similarity between Lacan and Derrida in terms of their understanding of the spectral nature of the voice, Žižek is correct to emphasize how this intrusion of the Real also marks significant differences between the two thinkers: “In the antagonistic tension between signifier and object, voice is thus on the side of the object: voice in its fundamental dimension, is not the ideal (totally transparent, pliant, self-effacing) signifier, but its exact opposite, the opaque inertia of an objectal remainder.....Perhaps therein resides the abyss that forever separates the Real of an antagonism from Derrida's differance: differance points towards the constant and constitutive deferral of impossible self-identity, whereas in Lacan, what the movement of symbolic deferral-substitution forever fails to attain is not Identity but the Real of an antagonism.” Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder* (London, 1996), p.100.

The verb to obey stems from French obeir, which in turn stems from Latin oboedire, to listen. One can find the same etymological connection in German, where Gehorsam, obedience, comes from horen, to listen, and in a considerable number of other languages.⁹⁹

Indeed, if Hamlet is in many respects the articulated confrontation between “two fathers,” this very doubling in the text is transposed into the psychoanalytical split between the father as the agent of the Law and the “(un)dead” father as the bearer of a surplus enjoyment that Lacan associates with the obscene superego. In this respect the difference between Law and superego coincides with that between writing (Claudius) and voice (Old Hamlet) in the play. As Slavoj Žižek argues, public law is essentially written – precisely and only because “it is written,” our ignorance of Law cannot serve as an excuse; it does not exculpate us in the eyes of the Law. The status of the superego, in contrast, is that of a traumatic voice, an intruder persecuting us and disturbing our psychic balance.”¹⁰⁰ What we call the “Law,” in its pure form, before commanding anything specific, is epitomized by a voice that “commands” although it is senseless in itself – being that remnant of the dead Father who is not quite dead.¹⁰¹ Ultimately, in terms of Hamlet’s paradoxical interiors, this object voice bears witness to the primal father’s terrible jouissance that cannot be absorbed by the Law but is that which encrypts itself within the Law: haunting it, quite literally, as its unacknowledged

⁹⁸ Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III: The Psychoses, trans. Russell Grigg (London, 1993), p.137.

⁹⁹ Mladen Dolar “The Object Voice” in Gaze and Voice as Love Objects (London, 1997), pp.7-32, p.28, n2.

¹⁰⁰ Slavoj Žižek, The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality (London, 1994), p.57.

¹⁰¹ For an expert account of the ambivalent relationship between ‘voice’ and ‘authority’ in sixteenth-century England, see Bruce R. Smith, The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending To The O-Factor (London, 1999), pp.222-45.

obscene support. It is this paradoxical relationship between subjectivity, the Law and enjoyment that will be given more extensive consideration in the concluding two chapters.

Chapter Five

“Strange Forms”:

Subjectivity and Metastasis in *Antony and Cleopatra*

“We base the assurance of the subject in his encounter with the filth that may support him”¹

“Vilest Things”

Returning from a second exploration to the Hudson Straits in 1576, Martin Frobisher relates an event that took place soon after completing his voyage. Having witnessed the death of five of his crew members, Frobisher then chanced upon a “piece of dounge” that appeared initially to be a “thing of no account.” Upon his return home this strange object was thrown accidentally by his wife onto a fire that, miraculously, revealed it to be “a bright marquesite of gold.” Taking advantage of this apparent discovery, Frobisher then embarked upon a third voyage and returned home with 1,700 tons of his secret treasure. Upon closer inspection of this strange substance, however, and much to Frobisher’s despair, the haul was revealed to be nothing other than what Julia Briggs politely refers to as “fool’s gold.”²

¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1994), p.258.

² Quoted in Julia Briggs, *This Stage-Play World: Texts and Contexts, 1580-1625* (Oxford, 1997), p.85-6.

In many ways, Frobisher's experience here may be read as a particularly vivid illustration of the way that early modern "writers and travellers grappled with ways of making use of the foreign materia 'produced' by colonialism."³⁴ Many contemporary accounts of the New World are marked by the gnawing anxiety that, as one commentator puts it, the "rich Stuffe" imported from the colonies were possessed of a strange materiality that threatened either to "vanish away in smoake, or be consumed and brought (as it were) unto dounge."⁵ Frequently referred to in terms of an oscillating dialectic between surplus and lack, the dispositif of anamorphosis provided a particularly serviceable metaphor for the way that the colonial encounter threatened to exceed the cognitive grasp of early modern writers. In the epistle to Microcosmus, for example, Peter Heylyn reminds readers that his narrative should be viewed "as in some magical perspective."⁶ Similarly, John Fletcher's account of the exotic wonders to be found on The Purple Island cautions that the nature of his subject matter calls for a dual perspective to be assumed by the reader:

As some optick-glasses, if we looke one way, increase the object; if the other, lesser the quantity: such an Eye that looks through Affection it doubles any good, and extreminates what is amisse - such is that eye whereby you must view these wonders. ⁷

³ Kim Hall, Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England (London, 1995), p.4.

⁵ Quoted in Patricia Fumerton, Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament (London, 1996), p.174. According to Roland Barthes while the visible evidence of colonial expansion was to be found in an 'empire of things,' it also ushered in an entirely new relationship between the object and matter insofar as there occurred a "real transformation of the object which no longer has an essence, but takes refuge entirely within its attributes." "le Monde-object," in Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France ed. Richard Howard and Norman Bryson, (Cambridge, 1988), pp.107-15, p.110.

⁶ Peter Heylyn, Microcosmus, (1598) STC No. 13276

⁷ John Fletcher, The Purple Island, (1602) STC No. 11543

Indeed, it is this lack of any unmediated access to the New World that prompts John Gillies to remark that alongside colonial exploration was the persistent anxiety that “if the New World was there, it was [so] only in an arbitrary and phantasmal way.”⁸ In his Atlas of 1595, Gerard Mercator even confesses that, far from reconstituting the world into an object of rational comprehension, the “globe” as it was disclosed through colonial exploration “is rather an object of the secret conception of humane understanding, than of the sharp-sightedness of our eyes.”⁹

Frobisher’s predicament then may be read as a paradigmatic example of a certain excess that clings to the colonial scene: a radically “foreign” remainder that, I would like to argue, simultaneously opens access to desire and also that which persists as the excremental dross that exceeds symbolic mediation. Lacanian psychoanalysis argues that in the passage to modernity proper there evolved two ways of coping with this excess: Humanism avoided confrontation with it through its gentrification or idealization in fantasy; on the other hand, paradoxically, an emergent capitalist economy put it into to use, manipulating it in order to keep its productive machinery in perpetual motion. In short, I would like to suggest here that the fate of Frobisher’s secret treasure encapsulates neatly what kind of “transubstantiation” underpins both desiring subjectivity and colonial discourse in particular.

We might begin then by considering the last scene of Antony and Cleopatra, a text where subjectivity is routinely negotiated around a similar incursion of alterity. Apparently resigned to her fate at the hands of Caesar, the queen of Egypt prepares for suicide in a

⁸ John Gillies, Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference (Cambridge, 1996), p.42.

⁹ Ibid., p.63.

speech that has proved to be both perplexing and disturbing for modern editors of the play. Famously, Cleopatra remarks that she is looking forward to a time “Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,/The beggar’s nurse, and Caesar’s” (V.ii.7-8). M.R. Ridley has argued that Cleopatra’s reference to “dung” here is so “repulsive to modern refinement” that many editors have chosen “to read dug for dung.”¹⁰ Even the most recent editor of the play urges that these lines be read merely as ‘expressing a contempt for earthly life.’¹¹ What such editorial glosses are powerless to evade, however, are those other occasions in the text which, to varying degrees, are similarly connotative of what Ridley refers to obliquely as an “unpleasant idea.”¹² More specifically, in the light of Cleopatra’s metaphor how are we to read Antony’s seemingly innocent observation that “our dungy earth alike/Feeds beast as man” (I.i.35-6)? Indeed, things become even more problematical when Caesar celebrates his general’s former manly prowess by recalling how Antony “didst drink/the stale of horses, and the gilded puddle/Which beasts would cough at.” (I.iv.61-3). To be blunt: in a text that, I will argue, repeatedly questions the economics of any pure loss or expense, this dilemma of what to do with shit variously becomes the focus of some anxiety.¹³

In a way that would no doubt prove equally offensive to modern refinement, psychoanalysis offers a productive point of departure for negotiating this problem. At one level, according to Lacan, coprophagy may be called a perversion insofar as it disorders the relationship

¹⁰ *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. M.R. Ridley (London, 1971), p.194, n.7-8.

¹¹ *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders (London 1998), p.276, n.7.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ In this precise sense object a is the anal object. Prior to its symbolic status as a “gift” to the Other as Freud remarks, the excrement is object a in the sense of the non-symbolizable surplus that remains after the body is symbolized, inscribed into the symbolic network: the problem of the anal stage resides precisely in how the subject is to dispose of this leftover.

between desire and drive.¹⁴ The pervert, rather than accepting the fundamental objectlessness of the drive, seeks to fill in the lack, uncovered in the erogenous zone of the mouth, with a real object. Coprophagy, in other words, implies a confusion between a real object and the object of the real (the object a); the latter, as we know, being necessary as a “cause” of desire. The potentially traumatic consequences of coprophagy, however, turns upon the seemingly elementary observation that once the subject consumes something it is not there for the subject to have a relationship with it.

For there to be any relationship tout court something has to be left over, something must not be consumed. What must not be consumed is, for Lacan, precisely those “objects” that he refers to as the object a: the breast, faeces, urine, all the waste products and discharge that fall from the body. It is through this primal separation that the subject constitutes itself through a rejection of the Thing, i.e. by way of assuming a minimal distance toward the excremental substance of enjoyment itself. Coprophagy, in other words, is a perversion in the clinical sense precisely insofar as it attempts a reversal of this process: one way for the subject to be sure that it has the “lost” faeces back is to ingest them again.¹⁵ Even more pointedly, for Lacan “shit” is the object par excellence: the subject exchanges his being (condensed in the object a) in return for a place in symbolic exchange; i.e. for a signifier which represents him for another signifier.¹⁶ According to Lacan this object is phantasmal

¹⁴ See Jacques Lacan, Joan Copjec ed., Television, Denis Holier et. al. trans., (New York, 1990), p.56.

¹⁵ Freud, of course, argued that faecal matter is something from which the child separates itself out of love for the other and which subsequently comes to acquire a phantasmatic “value” in compensation for the sheer exorbitance of this loss.

¹⁶ This is how the subject qua $\$$ emerges from the structure of exchange: it emerges when “something is exchanged for nothing,” that is to say, it is the very “nothing” the subject gets from the symbolic structure, from the Other, in exchange for sacrificing its pathological particularity, this kernel of being which Lacan refers to as the object a. It is from within this context that we should

insofar as it is possessed of no “positive” properties as such: its role, rather, is to fill out a void in the symbolic order that constitutively is the subject qua S (~~A~~).

Indeed, we might recall here one critic’s revealing summary of Antony and Cleopatra as “a hypostasis which at one moment shall seem to be compounded of mere dross and at another of purest gold; a hypostasis where the dross shall be miraculously transformed.”¹⁷ It is, in a slightly more problematical sense, precisely this power of “miraculous transformation” that is also hinted at in Cleopatra’s outraged response to the news of Antony’s impending marriage to Octavia. In what is, effectively, another example where a precious object is about to find its way back to the mouth, Cleopatra warns the messenger that “The gold I give thee I will melt and pour/Down thy ill-uttering throat” (II.v.34-5). There is, I would argue, a form of oral displacement at work here that is not unconnected to the coprophagic imagery of the text. The punishment fantasized by Cleopatra is perhaps the most vivid illustration of how the boundary that inheres between waste and transcendent value throughout the play is, ultimately, a purely formal one: the object-Thing generates its value phantasmatically in accordance with the position it comes to occupy in a particular fantasy space. In other words, “mere dross and purest gold” are intimately related to each other qua the object a as that which acquires consistency only when it is invested with desire: i.e. as an element that simultaneously opens up a void that it ostensibly tries to replenish.

Antony and Cleopatra variously recalls this psychoanalytical association between the primordial “interest in gold and of defecation” which Freud claimed to “be the most

understand Lacan’s repeated assertions that there is no subjectivity without the reduction of the subject’s positive-substantial being to a disposable piece of shit.

extensive of all” in the phantasies that regulate the psychic life of the subject.¹⁸ For example in an image that ironically recalls the “gilded puddle” from which Antony did drink the stale of horses” (I.iv.62), a messenger is greeted by Cleopatra with the remark that her lover “hath/with his tinct gilded thee” (I.v.36-7). The use of both “tincture” and “gilded” here again implies a power of transubstantiation that remains ambiguous. While the term “gilded” earlier referred to a surface that is made iridescent by accumulated scum, “tincture,” as M.R. Ridley notes, is also a Renaissance term that “was supposed to turn the basest metal into gold.”¹⁹ Having “transform’d” Antony into a “strumpet’s fool” (I.i.8) Egypt appears to be possessed of a strange power of transformation.²⁰ In many respects the text locates Egypt as the archetypal colonial phantasm: suffused with an aura of unreal wealth the colonial scene can only be glimpsed obliquely in a fetishizing dialectic of surplus and lack.²¹ In a text that has often been praised for the plasticity of its poetic invention,²²

¹⁷ Robert Speaight, Nature in Shakespearean Tragedy (London, 1964), p.56.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, “Character and Anal Eroticism” in On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works, ed. Angela Richards ed. (London, 1991), p.213. In “Anxiety and Instinctual Life” Freud argues that “faeces were the first gift that an infant could make, something he could part with out of love for whoever was looking after him...this ancient interest in the faeces is transformed into the high valuation of gold and money.” New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, ed. James Strachey (London, 1997), pp.113-144, p.134.

¹⁹ M.R. Ridley, op. cit., p.40, n.37.

²⁰ Grieving the loss of Fulvia, for example, Antony is reassured by Enobarbus that “your old smock brings/forth a new petticoat” (I.ii.166-7).

²¹ Contemporary accounts of the Orient frequently alight upon this unreal wealth. Thomas Herbert, for example, finds the dress of the natives “loathsome and abominable” which “for all their lustre thwarting the face makes that which is an ornament to them to us seem very deformed.” Quoted in Early Modern Tales of Orient: A Critical Anthology, ed. Kenneth Parker (London, 1999), p.198. Similarly John Cartwright remarks upon how “The walls glitter with red marble, and pargetting of many colours. Yea, all the place is paved with chequered and tesselled work; and on the same is spread carpets wrought with silk and gold, the windows of alabaster. White marble, and much other spotted marble, the posts and wickets of massy ivory checked with glittering black ebony, so curiously wrought in winding knots, as may easier stay than satisfie the eyes of the wondering beholder.” Ibid., p.115.

²² According to F.E. Halliday, for example, the text is evidence of Shakespeare’s artistic maturity insofar as its language comes to resemble “a plastic substance to be modeled into forms of any shape or size.” The Poetry of Shakespeare’s Plays (London, 1954), p.78.

Norman Holland also observes how Antony and Cleopatra is variously concerned with “working precious metals, burnishing them, beating them, forming them into tissue, precious metals in the presence of fire and water, as they might be in a goldsmith’s shop.”²³ In fact gold is mentioned twelve times in the play, always associated with Egypt, and nine times out of the twelve with Cleopatra herself. Far from crystallizing the animating “pathological” source of her pleasure, however, the cumulative effect is one of an excessive iridescence that in fact renders any access to Cleopatra increasingly opaque.²⁴ Indeed, Enobarbus’s conviction that “vilest things become themselves in her” situates Cleopatra as the very principle of transformative activity itself where, through a kind of logical inversion, the wealth of her substantial content can only be grasped through those things that ostensibly merely “represent” her. Whether she is referred to by Rome either as Antony’s “precious queen” (I.iii.32) or as “this foul Egyptian” (IV.xii.10) Cleopatra stubbornly remains a superfluity that is either too little or too much. Is it not also here, precisely, that we encounter the Freudian/Lacanian paradox of a jouissance “beyond the pleasure principle,” whose contours can be discerned only negatively, as the contours of an invisible void? In other words, Cleopatra increasingly comes to be negotiated in the text at the level of what Lacan punningly calls plus-de-jouir (surplus enjoyment), which in French is a phrase that plays between the two notions of “excess of enjoyment” as well as “no longer any enjoyment.”

²³ Norman N. Holland, “The Barge She Sat In’: Psychoanalysis and Syntactic Choices,” <http://w.w.w.clas.ufl.edu/users/nnh/barge.htm>, pp.1-13, p.8.

²⁴ This feature of surplus visuality has not gone unnoticed by critics of the play. Charles Knight remarks of the play that “we cannot gaze upon it steadily,” Studies of Shakespeare (New York, 1971), p.320; and M.R. Ridley also cautions that for all Cleopatra’s “splendour,” “we should not allow our eyes to be so dazzled by it.” M.R. Ridley op. cit., xlii.

This rhetoric of transubstantiation in the text, with its incessant foregrounding of the permeability and labile quality of substance, locates matter less as a brute positivity than pure potentiality: as the very “stuff” of enjoyment itself.²⁵ Time and again Antony and Cleopatra hints that the most original enjoyment would be that of the fusion of the human with the non-human, or even more primal, that of matter with matter itself: the realm of matter enjoying itself with matter is, according to Lacan, the ultimate deadly pleasure. Indeed, Lacan argues that this is the scene proper to an eroticism that poses a threat to every effort of rational mediation: “transformation of matter into another matter, which engenders itself, [so] that traditionally this perpetuity of matter has become the site of evil.”²⁶

Throughout Antony and Cleopatra it is, of course, the Nile which becomes this mythical source of generation that constitutively “overflows” every measure. Antony, for example, observes of the Nile that “Much is breeding,/Which like the courser’s hair, hath yet but life” (I.ii.190-1). The Nile is, simultaneously, an agent of both life and death that persists, rather, as an undead Thing that nothing can resist. Referred to as the vivifying source of the

²⁵ We might bear in mind here Elias Crooke’s contention that “All bodies are Transpirable and transfluxible...so open to the ayre that it may passe and repasse through them.” Quoted in Gail Kern Paster, The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England (New York, 1993), p.9. This is also precisely what Cleopatra imagines will be her fate at the hands of her Roman captors, within whose “thick breaths,/Rank of gross diet, shall we be encloued,/And forced to drink their vapour” (V.ii.210-12).

²⁶ Jacques Lacan. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, p.122. Not perhaps entirely coincidentally, Antony and Cleopatra contains more references to the word “matter” than any other play by Shakespeare: unimpressed by reports of Antony’s alliance with Caesar, Pompey witheringly remarks that “I could have given less matter/A better ear” (II.i.32-3); assessing the political impact of Antony’s speech Caesar remarks that “I do not much like the matter” (I.ii.12); Charmian asks the soothsayer to provide a “matter/of more weight” (II.ii.65); praising Antony and Caesar’s reconciliation, Maceneas confesses he is “glad that matters are so well digested” (II.ii.176); Cleopatra invites a Roman messenger to “Pour out the pack of matter to mine ear” (II.v.54); feigning indifference to the news Antony’s marriage, Cleopatra exclaims that “’tis no matter” (II.v.111) and later silences Charmian’s description of Octavia with the same remark (III.iii.45); resigned to his military defeat, Antony dismisses it as “No matter” (III.xi.39-40); incredulous of a plot of political insurrection Pompey responds “I think th’art mad. The matter?” (II.vii.55); when she is asked by Dolabella if she knows him, Cleopatra respond “No matter, sir, what I have heard or known” (V.ii.72).

serpent of Egypt that is “bred now of your mud by/the operation of your sun” (II.vii.26-7), Cleopatra also decides that her grave should be “a ditch in Egypt” or “rather on Nilus’ mud/Lay me stark-nak’d, and let the water-flies/Blow me into abhorring” (V.ii.58-60).

Egypt’s festive predisposition to gender-bending finds its proper phantasmatic support in a Nile which, as a Thing that exceeds the laws of biological generation and corruption, operates, rather, as a mute witness to some primal condition of non-differentiation. Both fecund and phallic, a place of bounty and dearth, the Nile is the bearer of that lethal jouissance Lacan refers to in his myth of the lamella: i.e. a pure life force that is deprived of support in the symbolic order.²⁷ As the site of an acephalous movement of pure auto-affection where matter reforms itself, the Nile is redolent of that asexual organ-without-body that, in Lacanian terms, retains access to lost enjoyment.²⁸ Indeed, we might recall here that the only “clue” to the cause of Cleopatra’s death is condensed in fig-leaves that “Have slime upon them, such as the aspic leaves/Upon the caves of the Nile” (V.ii.349-51). Is not the obscure erotic charge of this image at some level evoked by reference to that similarly “slimy” substance which (in Lacanese) also represents the congealed leftover of a mythical, primordial enjoyment? Various referred to in terms of a palpitating life substance, that which “swells” and “as it ebbs, the seedsman/Upon the slime and ooze scatters his

²⁷ Alternatively, we could say that the Nile is that which remains of reality after reality is deprived of its support in fantasy. The Nile belongs to the category of the Sublime here precisely insofar as it designates a purposeless energy, an expenditure of force that does not serve anything: the Nile is that in “nature” which “doesn’t know” and where “it doesn’t know,” Lacan argues, it also enjoys. And, as I will argue in greater detail later, do we not also find a strange kind of homology with Cleopatra here insofar as she is so frequently arraigned for her “useless” expenditure of energy? For example, criticized by Antony for her “idleness” Cleopatra responds in a way that contradicts the economics of any pure loss or expense: “Tis sweating labour,/To bear such idleness so near the heart/As Cleopatra this” (I.iii.93-5).

²⁸ Lacan explicitly refers to the lamella as a monstrous undead object-libido that “represents part of a living being that is lost when that being is produced through the straits of sex.” “Position of the Unconscious” in Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, ed. Bruce Fink et. al. (New York, 1994), pp.221-248, p.234.

grain,/And shortly comes to harvest” (II.vii.20-24), the Nile becomes perhaps the most conspicuous example in the text of how this excremental dross of jouissance bears a power of “transubstantiation” that simultaneously gives rise to and threatens to overflow the text’s strategies of representation.

In the following pages I would like to develop further some of these questions in order to suggest that the dialectics of excess and lack in Antony and Cleopatra enter into a relationship that is much more enigmatic than, traditionally, the criticism of the text would appear to suggest. Focusing particularly on those temporal and spatial metastases in the play that are productive of its invincibly “strange forms,” my analysis will again make use of Lacan and Derrida to argue that Antony and Cleopatra is repeatedly and variously impelled forward under the obligation to acquit itself of a remainder, a foreign kernel of jouissance that both sustains and threatens to suspend the internal consistency of the symbolic Law itself.

“Behold and See”

The word “behold,” as Barbara Freedman has observed, “occurs more in Antony and Cleopatra than in any other of the tragedies.”²⁹ While this fact is certainly related to the text’s overtly “theatrical” quality, the sheer ubiquity of the term’s use also suggests a persistent anxiety in the play about the very limits of vision as that which impels the Gestalten of Rome’s imperial enterprise. Commenting upon Caesar’s sadness at Antony’s

death, for example, Maecenas remarks that “When such a spacious mirror’s set before him,/He needs must see himself” (V.i.33-4). Indeed, with its numerous figures of immobile statues and hieratic forms, *Antony and Cleopatra* is uncannily reminiscent of the scenography of the ‘ego-world’ Lacan associates with the ‘alienating armour’ that is assumed by the subject of mirror stage. Insofar as the “mirror stage” involves the anticipation of bodily unity and mastery in an image whose stature or commanding presence fascinates the subject, the emergence of empire, what Antony refers to as “the wide arch/Of the rang’d empire” (I.i.33-4), is also implicitly made homologous in the text to the erection of the phallic “I”: the colonizer undergoes a passage through an historical/cultural mirror stage which also confers the illusory image of autonomy, unity, integrity and identity.³⁰ Grieved by Cleopatra as a colossus whose “legs bestrid the ocean” (V.ii.82), Antony is variously described as “The triple pillar of the world” (I.i.12), a “Herculean Roman” (I.iii.84) or “demi-Atlas of this earth” (I.v.23) whose “pine...overtopp’d” (IV.xii.23-4) his political enemies. Similarly, Lepidius is referred as “the third part of the world” (II.vii.89) while Octavia is described to Cleopatra as more “A statue than a breather” (III.iii.21) and even Enobarbus is somewhat incongruously referred to as “considerate stone” (II.ii.110).

In contrast to the “discandying” images routinely associated with Egypt, then, Rome in the play emphasizes the stability of substance, the “measure” of that which holds itself straight, raised, erected in the light, just as, imaginarily, is the case with the infant before the Lacanian

²⁹ Barbara Freedman, *Staging The Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca, 1991), p.232.

³⁰ For an interesting study of Shakespeare that reads the cartographic paradigm of the early modern in relation to Lacan’s model of ego construction, see Philip Armstrong, “Spheres of Influence: Cartography and the Gaze in Shakespearean Tragedy and History,” *Shakespeare Studies*, 23 (1995), pp.39-71. We might also bear in mind here that Lacan suggests a homology between what he calls the “ego’s era” and an acceleration in the imperial project of “conquest, rape of nature, transformation of nature, hominisation of the planet.” Jacques Lacan, Jacques-Alain Miller ed., *The*

mirror: “The stability of the standing posture, the prestige of stature, the impressiveness of statues [are what] set the style for the identification in which the ego finds its starting-point and leave their imprint in it forever.”³¹

As Lacan was to assert time and again, however, there is a hole at the centre of the Imaginary that indexes the incursion of something that cannot yield to presence, although the whole notion of presence is constructed around it and can be established only by its elision. This elusive object, of course, is what Lacan was to call the gaze-as-object *a*: a blind spot in the field of the visible which is the structuring point of lack that, literally, allows every image in the mirror to “hold.” Indeed, it is in precisely this respect that we may read Antony’s famous commentary upon his own loss of identity in those anamorphic and annihilating forms that render him unable to “hold this visible shape’ (IV.xiv.14). In other words, Antony articulates the danger posed for identity when the gaze *qua* object *a* is no longer the blind spot in the field of the visible, but is included in the field of “reality” itself, in those labile forms that “mock our eyes with air’ (ll.7). The gaze as object, cleft from the eye, is precisely what is dissimulated by the image in which one recognizes oneself. As soon as the gaze appears as the pivotal point of self apprehension it introduces a rupture at the core of self presence:

Sometime we see a cloud that’s dragonish,
 A vapour sometime, like a bear, or lion,
 A tower’d citadel, a pendent rock,
 A forked mountain, or blue promontory
 With trees upon’t, that nod unto the world,
 And mock our eyes with air.

Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book I: Freud’s papers on Technique 1953-1954, trans. John Forrester (Cambridge, 1988), p.265.

³¹ Jacques Lacan, “Some Reflections on the Ego,” International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 34 (1953), pp.22-45, p.36.

[.....]
 now thy captain is
 Even such a body: here I am Antony,
 Yet cannot hold this visible shape...

(IV.xiv.1-7; 12-14)

The strange forms recounted in this speech are “objectal” in the Lacanian sense, precisely insofar as they exceed the possibilities of specular reflection, Antony comes across the excess presence of some Thing that should not be present in reality. If, for Lacan, this pure semblance is ultimately nothing but another name for the subject, this too is the horrifying discovery made by Antony, who constitutively is “even such a body” (ll.13).

Throughout Antony and Cleopatra Romanitas is anxiously aligned with a desired mastery of the scopic field so that ideally, in the words of Caesar, being and knowing should coincide: “You may see...and henceforth know” (I.iii.1). Indeed, the charismatic force of authority consists partly in a Roman scopophilia that comes to suggest more than a casual connection between theatricality and power. Caesar, for example, regards Octavia’s unceremonious return to Rome as a violation of the necessary “ostentation of our love; which, left unshown,/Is often left unlove’d” (III.vi.52-3). Not only is this viewed as an egregious failure in the protocols of Roman statecraft, throughout the text Rome is haunted by a more particular threat to the coherence of male subjectivity, which is given its most concise expression in a servingman’s observation that “To be called into a huge sphere, and not to

be/seen to move in't, are the holes where eyes should be, which pitifully disaster the cheeks"
(II.vii.14-16).³²

Time and again, then, Roman authority is shown to entertain a precarious relationship between the gaze and power. Suspicious of a still fashionable tendency within "culturalist" criticism that too precipitately conflates the categories of theatricality and power, Slavoj Žižek argues that "the dialectic of the gaze and power is far more refined: the gaze does connote power, yet simultaneously, and at a more fundamental level, it connotes the very opposite of power – impotence – insofar as it involves the position of an immobilized witness who cannot but observe what goes on."³³ Indeed, is this not precisely the fear that is articulated by Enobarbus when he is met with the spectacle of Antony's military defeat?:

Naught, naught, all naught, I can behold no longer:
The Antoniad, the Egyptian admiral,
With all their sixty fly, and turn the rudder:
To see't, mine eyes are blasted.

(III.x.1-4)

Commenting later upon his own humiliation at the hands of Cleopatra, Antony also uses an image that hints implicitly at the figures of castration in the text: "my good stars, that were my former guides,/Have empty left their orbs, and shot their fires/Into the abysm of hell"
(III.xiii.145-7).

³² Caesar, for example, is particularly opprobrious of Antony's dispensing of royal titles in the marketplace precisely because it is "in the public eye," "I'the common show-place" (III.vi.12-13), and is anxious that Cleopatra's failure to submit to his demands will not "let the world see/His nobleness well acted" (V.ii.42-3).

³³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p.73. We might recall here that Enobarbus is horrified that Cleopatra's retreat from Antony's naval campaign was tantamount to "leaving his navy gazing" (III.xiii.11).

It is, however, Cleopatra who is most frequently located at this rupture in the scene of presence, as that which extends beyond the dyadic exchange of mirror images. Indeed, Antony's desire for Cleopatra, as Philo's opening speech suggests, is articulated at the level of an ocular repositioning of an implicitly masculine viewing subject:

his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front...

(I.i.2-6)

In other words, Philo's indignation at such unmanly behaviour is implicitly linked to Antony's decentred status in a scopic field that is entirely given over to the spectacle of Cleopatra. Antony, in effect, becomes "feminized" through occupying a position that is capable of bearing only an oblique and "sideways" glance. Such a predicament, as Cleopatra's account of Pompey's seduction reveals, holds potentially fatal consequences for male subjectivity. To surrender the look to the Other is also to risk contact with the void that is opened up in the interval of difference that the gaze is meant to conceal. Pompey, in other words, encounters the gaze in the potentially lethal dimension of a subject who, in Lacan's words, "sees himself seeing himself":

Great Pompey
Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow,
There would he anchor his aspect, and die
With looking on his life.

(I.v.31-34)

Also not entirely coincidentally, in Enobarbus's account of the barge scene Cleopatra also indexes the presence of a surplus visuality that produces even a "gap in nature," that which can only be approached or "filled out" by an anamorphic gaze from aside:

Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
So many mermaids, tended her i' the eyes,
And made their bends adornings.

(II.ii.206-8)

Moreover, Enobarbus's reference to how even "vilest things" become themselves in Cleopatra must be taken literally here in the sense implied by Lacan's use of the term "Thing": i.e. as some thing which can only be imbued with consistency through the act of a sideways glance that constitutively gives body to or "incarnates" Cleopatra as the object of desire. For Slavoj Žižek, such "looking awry" is of paradigmatic significance in Lacan's account of the object:

The paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause, i.e., the object a is an object that can be perceived only by a gaze 'distorted' by desire, an object that does not exist, since it is nothing but the embodiment, the materialization of this very distortion.³⁴

At an exegetic level too Cleopatra makes the very lure of presence even more urgent through her characteristic strategy of engineering a series of "missed encounters." Antony's seemingly amorous conceit that "thou residing here, goes yet with me; /And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee" (I.iii.103-4) is a strangely eloquent gloss on the increasingly "extimate" kind of relation that Cleopatra comes to assume throughout the text: when

Antony arranges a rendezvous on land, she appears on the water; summoning Antony for a meeting, she leaves before his arrival; even Anthony's hope that he will be reunited with Cleopatra in death is thwarted by a "suicide" that is later revealed to be a hoax. Time and again, it seems, Cleopatra can be located only negatively, in relation to that which she is not:

See where he is, who's with him, what he does.
I did not send you. If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick.

(I.iii.3-6)

Crucially, in a text where the very question of location arouses deep political anxieties (most pointedly in response to Antony who, as Ania Loomba remarks, "oscillates between Cleopatra's territory and Caesar's, both literally and otherwise"³⁵), Cleopatra's "dislocatedness" embodies a certain structural impasse that, I would like to argue, also opens the very space of desiring subjectivity.³⁶ In this respect, the frequent metaphors of "overtaking" associated with Cleopatra in many ways recall Lacan's shorthand for the Real as a certain limit that is always missed, "we can overtake it, leave it behind us, but we cannot reach it."³⁷ Scarus, for example, wishes that "leprosy o'ertake" Cleopatra for abandoning Antony "I' the midst of the fight" (III.x.11); emboldened by the news of her "death" Antony resolves that "I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and/Weep for my pardon" (IV.xiv.44-5). For Dolabella too Cleopatra urges this strangely precipitate behaviour: "would I might

³⁴ Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture (London, 1997), p.12.

³⁵ Ania Loomba, Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama (London, 1988), p.126.

³⁶ In this respect Cleopatra has much in common with the femme fatale who is also crucially dependent upon perceptual ambiguity and ideas about the limits of vision in relation to knowledge.

³⁷ Quoted in Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London, 1989), p.173.

never/O'ertake pursued success, but I do feel,/By the rebound of yours, a grief that smites/My very heart at root" (V.ii.102-104).

We are in a better position here to provide a properly Lacanian gloss to Catherine Belsey's thesis that, as a deictic marker of deferred presence, Cleopatra is an "element that is by definition subtracted from what it is possible to say."³⁸ What I also wish to suggest here is that, as an "element" that simultaneously organizes and destabilizes the scopic field through the very fact of her surplus visibility, Cleopatra's deictic function is also especially redolent of Lacan's thesis that "The field of reality rests upon the extraction of the object a, which nevertheless frames it."³⁹ Cleopatra, qua Lacan's object a, frames the scene of presence only insofar as she so consistently eludes presence itself.⁴⁰

Not coincidentally, it is Cleopatra herself who provides the most articulate and, in some sense, characteristically Lacanian summation of this paradox in her conviction that "nature wants stuff/To vie strange forms with fancy" (V.ii.97-8). By itself, in other words, nature,

³⁸ In an argument that retains an allusive connection to Lacan, Belsey maintains that "Cleopatra's seductive strategy is to exceed the alternatives of presence and absence. The play locates her at a distance." Belsey, *op. cit.*, , p.43, 46.

³⁹ Lacan, *Ecrits*, (Paris, 1966), p.554.

⁴⁰ Jacques-Alain Miller defines the contours of this paradox in a diagram which illustrates how that which escapes the field of reality also constitutes the illusory frame of its accessibility, see fig.2 in the Appendices to this thesis. Miller maintains that "it is precisely because the object a is removed from the field of reality that it frames it. If I withdraw the surface....the piece represented by a shaded square, I get what we might call a frame: a frame for a hole, but also a frame of the rest of the surface." Quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry*, pp.94-5. As an index of "deferred presence," then, Cleopatra intimates presence insofar as she constitutively embodies a lack that precipitates desire around a residue of signification. Enobarbus observes that the opulence of the barge scene "yarely frame the office" (II.ii.211), feigning surrender to Rome, a messenger assures Caesar that "of thy intents desires instruction,/That she preparedly may frame herself/To the way she's forc'd to" (V.i.54-6). Moreover, Homi Bhabha has argued that "within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision," Bhabha maintains that the construction of subjectivities within colonialist relations must always return as a "persistent questioning of the frame (emphasis added)."

as the various references to the Nile's predatory excess imply, is in a sense too real: something has to intervene to appease or gentrify its brute reality. Cleopatra constitutively is this interval in the text: the syncope of a difference that stays marked. Like the Lacanian real, Cleopatra "can only be inscribed out of an impasse in formalisation."⁴¹ Variouslly animating the screen of fantasy, of making "defect perfection" (II.ii.231), she distances reality from a potentially traumatic encounter with the unassimilable "thing" that, paradoxically, gives rise to the very illusion of presence. Those readers who are familiar with Lacan cannot help but associate the "stuff" of Cleopatra's rhetoric with the phantasmatic "stuff" of enjoyment that simultaneously eludes and gives ontological consistency to so-called reality. Her sublime powers, we should recall, are in fact productive of "a gap in nature" (II.ii.218), literally causing something to "fall out" of the frame of reality, of that which can be rendered accessible at the level of vision. Indeed, with its scenography of squares, fronting and facing, Antony and Cleopatra bears a close affinity to what Derrida calls "the quadrature of the text"⁴² : i.e. figures that would intuit the presence of the present as that which forms a surface, enters squarely on the stage and institutes itself as something face-to-face. According to Derrida metaphysics routinely relates presence to

one of the four faces, the one that seems to be open for the perception of the spectacle, for the 'now' of consciousness faced with its object, for the present tense of discourse - belonging, in a word, to the face as what one faces, a surface of envisaged presence.⁴³

⁴¹ Quoted in Teresa Brennan, History After Lacan (London, 1994), p.69.

⁴² Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Spivak (London, 1981), p.299.

⁴³ Ibid., p.299.

What the square conceals, however, is the very paradox that Antony and Cleopatra foregrounds time and again: namely, that while characters are fascinated and glued to what presents itself, they are unable to see presence as such. “The word ‘square’ [carre],” Derrida reminds us, “is thus a square word...Because of its empty square, its open surface, its discounted face, it does not enclose but rather leaves the way open for the intersection of meanings. The square proliferates.”⁴⁴ Pompey remarks of Antony and Caesar that “they should square between/themselves” (II.i.43-4); Maecenas is suspicious whether “report be square” to the descriptions of Cleopatra (II.ii.184); Antony laments that he has “not kept my square” (II.iii.6) and pontificates on “the brave squares of war” (III.xi.40); Enobarbus hopes that “mine honesty, and I, begin to square” (III.xiii.41); Lepidius reassures Caesar that he will “front this present time” (I.iv.78); Cleopatra reflects upon her liaison with “broad-fronted Caesar” (I.v.29) while Caesar himself accuses Antony of instigating wars “Which fronted mine own peace” (II.ii.61).

In other words, it is possible to suggest along with Derrida that, despite its implicit scopophilia, Antony and Cleopatra cannot ultimately conceal the demand for “a certain squaring of the text, on the obligatory passage through an open surface, on the detour through an empty square.”⁴⁵ In the succeeding sections of this chapter I want to pursue further how the text variously indexes the proximity of the very “stuff” of jouissance as that which, simultaneously, procures an opening onto the space of representation and also that which poses a threat to the very coherence of the (Roman) Law itself.

“Here Is My Space”

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.349.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.351.

Despite the frequent shifts of location that have long been regarded as the most striking feature of Antony and Cleopatra, we might recall how this very aspect of spatial dynamism is denied Cleopatra who is characterized in the text by what can only be described as a profound inertia or, in Antony's words, as "idleness itself" (I.iii.92). While Granville-Barker's remark that Antony and Cleopatra is "the most spacious of the plays"⁴⁶ is echoed in much of the subsequent criticism, Terence Hawkes makes the shrewdly observed rejoinder that

..on another level, [the] sense of 'embracing,' of encircling in close physical contact, may be said to give rise to an opposite, claustrophobic effect. It is as if, despite the play's clamour, we and it remain no less obstinately tied down to this old earth..⁴⁷

Hawkes's observation that the text's apparent "amplitude does not prevent it from looking inward as much as outward,"⁴⁸ captures neatly the undulating forces of expansion and contraction in the play. He stops short, however, of addressing a related crucial paradox: isn't Cleopatra's apparent "elusiveness," which has become such a venerable point of focus

⁴⁶ H. Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, second series (London, 1930), p.111.

⁴⁷ Terence Hawkes, Shakespeare's Talking Animals: Language and Drama in Society (London, 1975), p.182.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 182. In this respect we might also bear in mind Jan Kott's assessment of the play as "a tragedy about the smallness of the world." Shakespeare Our Contemporary (New York, 1964), p.93.

for predominantly male critics of the play,⁴⁹ brought into stark contrast with the somewhat elementary observation that she is never in fact permitted to leave Egypt?⁵⁰

To adapt a Lacanian formulation that might assist in grasping the topological paradox that we are trying to get at here, we could risk the suggestion that, despite beggaring all description and consistently evading capture by a symbolic order that fails adequately to represent her, Cleopatra nevertheless always returns to the same place.⁵¹ In a text where references to the “universal” ambitions of imperial Rome are typically juxtaposed with the microscopic observation of “gnats” on the Nile, it is Cleopatra who is routinely placed on the side of contraction. If, as Emrys Jones observes, there is no remainderless access to a character who is so frequently “caught, unprepared, in the glance of a bystander,”⁵² this elliptical structure is informed more generally by the text’s problematic attempts to locate Cleopatra at-a-distance. Paradoxically, however, such distancing also takes the form of a minimal point of contraction in the various figures of incorporation that are routinely associated both with Cleopatra and Egypt throughout the text, and which, on occasion, threaten to abolish the very interval of distance as such. Referred to, for example, either as a mere “morsel for a monarch” (I.v.31) or “a morsel....a fragment of Gnaeus Pompey’s” (III.xiii.16-18) Cleopatra - a “wonderful piece of work” (I.ii.151) - is produced as a

⁴⁹ See, for example, Linda T. Fitz’s now classic study, “Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers: Sexist Attitudes in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” in John Drakakis (ed) *Antony and Cleopatra: Contemporary Critical Essays* (London, 1994), pp.182-212.

⁵⁰ Ania Loomba has also drawn attention to the Cleopatra’s physical stasis in the play: “However slippery, inconstant and variable Cleopatra may be, however she may threaten the boundaries between male and female, political and private worlds, she remains geographically stationary.” Ania Loomba, “Travelling thoughts’: Theatre and the Space of the Other” in *Antony and Cleopatra: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. John Drakakis (London, 1994) pp.279-308, p.289.

⁵¹ I am, of course, referring to Lacan’s well known maxim that “the real always returns to the same place.”

⁵² Emrys Jones, *op. cit.*, p.14.

remainder here in a more troubling sense: as the inert and impenetrable substance that risks becoming too close.

In many ways complicating the assumption that “woman seduces from a distance,” Cleopatra appears to frustrate the text’s efforts to locate her at a proper distance. Following Derrida, we might even go so far as to suggest that, rather than being “some thing which announces itself from a distance, at a distance from some other thing,” Cleopatra radically calls into question this very taxonomy of retreat and approach. In a paradoxical movement that the term itself implies, we can only “catch” at Cleopatra in an approach that coincides with the very gesture of retreat:

Perhaps woman - a non-identity, a non-figure, a simulacrum - is distance’s very chasm, the outdistancing of distance, the interval’s cadence; if we could still say such a thing, distance itself.⁵³

Constitutively announcing that which can only take place out of place,⁵⁴ it is perhaps not surprising to learn that Cleopatra has been the focus of enduring critical efforts to determine, precisely, the “place” that she should properly be assigned when assessing the text’s claim to greatness. For example, unable to resolve the question of whether she threatens to compromise the text’s authentic identity as tragedy, the editor of the New Cambridge edition of the play somewhat ambivalently concludes that although Cleopatra is “a matter that could not be fitted into the normal tragic scheme, [she] was yet of such surpassing interest and

⁵³ Jacques Derrida, Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles, trans. Barbara Harlow (London, 1978), p.49.

⁵⁴ We might also bear in mind here Luce Irigaray’s contention that historically ‘woman’ is “assigned to be place without occupying a place.” Luce Irigaray, “Place, Interval” in An Ethics of Sexual Difference, trans. Carolyn Burke (London, 1994), pp.34-56, p.52.

beauty as to compel incorporation.”⁵⁵ Does not this apparently “formal” difficulty presented by Cleopatra come perilously close to a Lacanian account of the topological paradox that is constitutive of all self-identity tout court? That is, when a seemingly “surpassing” foreign “matter” on account of which a text eludes self-identity also becomes the ultimate guarantee of its identity? In other words, the text’s alternating figures of expansion and contraction implicitly recall Lacan’s formula of fantasy $S \circ a$, which argues that there can be no subject ($\$$), no void of expansion and giving away, without a minimal contraction into an element where the positive support of meaning (i.e. the subject) is condensed.⁵⁶ Moreover, to this precise extent I would like to suggest that Rome and Egypt entertain a certain inverse symmetry to each other in the text: Rome is the site of expansion, of self-overtaking (desire) while Egypt is the phantasmatic region of a kind of inertia (drive) that frequently comes to exercise a threat to the very efficacy of the imperial project itself.⁵⁷ In other words, complicating the dialectic of presence and absence, Cleopatra is routinely

⁵⁵ Antony and Cleopatra, ed. John Dover Wilson (Cambridge, 1971), xxxii.

⁵⁶ We might also profitably refer here to Teresa de Lauretis who, in an analysis of the gendered and ‘imperialist’ semiotics of plot construction, remarks that “the single figure of the hero crosses [a] boundary and penetrates the other space. In so doing, the mythical subject is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.” Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington, 1984), p.119.

⁵⁷ The drive, as Lacan insists, represents “some manifestation of inertia in organic life.” The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.161. However, is not this correlation inherently misogynist? i.e where “man” stands toward “woman” as desire toward drive, as dynamic, self-transgressing movement against circular, repetitive inertia.? Rather we might bear in mind here Slavoj Žižek’s comments regarding this specious kind of dualism: “The political over-determination of the first commonplace is obvious: drive is reactionary and desire revolutionary; i.e., desire designates the dynamic force of subversion and change, while drive stands for the repetitive inertia of a closed circular movement. Is then the late Lacan who elevates drive over desire conservative? Is, however, the notion of drive as that which insists in its subterranean work of slowly undermining resistance not also the best exemplification of the logic of the revolutionary process?” Slavoj Žižek, The Abyss of Freedom, (Ann Arbor, 1997) p.93, n.29. In other words, we could say that what we call “desire” is in fact a compromise formation or defense against enjoyment. If the metonymy of desire is, in fact, something that tries to avoid the real of jouissance it is no surprise to find that for Lacan the only true ethics is that of the drive, of that which defines the contours of the subject’s relationship to enjoyment. Moreover, Elizabeth Grosz has also argued against reading the drive as that which implies a subordinate and quiescent position in relation to desire. See Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies (London, 1995).

placed on the side of the object in a strictly Lacanian sense. Indeed, we can refer here to Catherine Belsey's observation that "one of the strategies of Shakespeare's text [is] that our attention to Cleopatra is filtered."⁵⁸ Is not this also the kind of skewed, incarnating perspective of the Lacanian object a ? According to Joan Copjec this object quite literally "splits the subject from the external world insofar as this world will no longer be encountered directly, but will be 'filtered through' the object a."⁵⁹

Insofar as Cleopatra complicates the very question of location in the play we might recall Susan Snyder's illuminating remark that even Cleopatra's verbs are intransitive, like the movement of the winds and the waves and the fans that constitute the dominant strain of imagery in Rome's mythographic accounts of her activity. Hopping forty paces in the street (II.ii.232-3) in a seemingly unmotivated gesture that appears to have no "object" other than this very activity itself, Cleopatra's aptitude for self-consuming enjoyment can more properly be aligned with the drive in a strictly Lacanian sense. While Snyder is perplexed by the fact that Cleopatra appears to have no object beyond her activity, "it is surely in no way to arrive anywhere,"⁶⁰ for Lacanian psychoanalysis this is precisely the kind of acephalous movement that also characterizes the jouissance of drive: i.e. the vicarious pleasure that is provided by the potentially painful experience of repeatedly missing one's goal. Unlike desire, which Lacan famously described as the leftover that results when need is subtracted from demand, the drive persists at the level of an impossible demand.

⁵⁸ Catherine Belsey, "Cleopatra's Seduction" in Alternative Shakespeares: Volume 2, ed. Terence Hawkes (London, 1996), pp.38-62, p.45.

⁵⁹ Joan Copjec, "The Tomb of Perseverance: On Antigone," in Giving Ground: The Politics of Propinquity, ed. Joan Copjec (London, 1999), pp.233-67, p.255.

⁶⁰ Susan Snyder, "Patterns of Motion in Antony and Cleopatra," Shakespeare Survey, 33 (1980) pp.113-123, p.117.

And is this not also precisely the kind of unfathomable challenge that Cleopatra poses for Antony in her very first appearance in the play?: “If it be love indeed, tell me how much” (I.i.14). While this inquiry has generally been regarded as a characteristic example of her inveterate “playfulness,” Cleopatra also typifies one of the most disruptive features of the drive as the way in which “repetition..is turned toward the ludic.”⁶¹ It is this particular convergence that also informs the strangely idle forms of entertainment offered by Cleopatra, where time itself is marked not by progression but by repetition. Not only is Antony “barber’d ten times o’er” (II.ii.224) in his first encounter with her, Cleopatra is later prompted to recollect “That time? O times!/I laugh’d him out of patience; and that night/I laugh’d him into patience” (II.v.18-20).

In other words, Cleopatra’s self-reflexive postures throughout the text are a characteristic feature of the drive precisely insofar as they have no object other than this repetitive movement itself. Indeed, it is most obviously in her idiosyncratic gesture of contesting Roman discourse through mimicry that Cleopatra becomes an agent of repetition that threatens to alienate identity from essence. In the opening scene, for example, not only does Cleopatra delay the report of the “news from Rome,” she does so through a mocking anticipation of Caesar’s missive:

Hear them, Antony:
Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
if the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His powerful mandate to you, ‘Do this, or this;
Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that;

⁶¹ Ibid., p.61.

perform't, or else we damn thee.'

(I.i.19-23)

Moreover, later in the play Cleopatra is similarly unresponsive to the numerous petitions of a Roman messenger to "hear" what is finally revealed to be the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. Effectively, Cleopatra systematically delays its communication through a series of interruptions that repeats the fixed and empty presence of authority by articulating it syntagmatically within a range of differential knowledges and positionalities:

Mess: Madam, madam,--

Cleo: Antonius dead! - If thou say so, villain,
Though kill'st thy mistress...

.....

Mess: Will't please you hear me?

Cleo: I have a mind to strike thee ere thou speak'st:
yet if thou say Antony lives, is well,
Or friends with Caesar, or not captive to him,
I'll set thee in a shower of gold...

.....

Mess: But yet madam, -

Cleo: I do not like 'but yet,' it does allay
The good precedence, fie upon 'but yet,'
'But yet' is as a gaoler to bring forth
Some monstrous malefactor.

(II.v.25-7;31-5; 49-53)

In other words, through the very gesture of interruption here Cleopatra enacts performatively the way that "meaning" itself is produced through what we earlier referred to as capitonnage, i.e., where the metonymic sliding of the signifier is retroactively brought to a halt through being pinned to a privileged signifier that, paradoxically, "bring[s] forth" a

meaning that is always-already marked by precedence. Somewhat appositely in this respect

Lacan argues that

in an interrupted sentence, as such always subtly articulated grammatically, meaning is present in two ways - as anticipated on the one hand, since it's a question of its suspension, and as repeated on the other, since [the subject] invariably refers it to an impression of having already heard it.⁶²

It is, then, this very power of allowing interruption itself to speak, and in a potentially non-dialectical relation to alterity, that may be considered a species of what the Arden editor of the play obliquely refers to as Cleopatra's "perverse...forms of arrest."⁶³ Alternatively we could say that Cleopatra routinely contests the protocols of a specifically Roman (i.e. masculine) temporal modality that Julia Kristeva has elsewhere called "obsessional time": "time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression and arrival - in other words, the time of history."⁶⁴

⁶² Jacques Lacan, The Psychoses: Book III 1955-1956, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (London, 1993), p.114.

⁶³ Antony and Cleopatra, ed. M.R. Ridley (London, 1971), xxxi.

⁶⁴ Julia Kristeva, "Woman's Time" in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol.7, 1, (1981) p.17. Bearing in mind that the play has frequently been criticized for its apparent sluggishness in terms of plot development (most notable in this respect is the opprobrium of A.C. Bradley), it is perhaps not surprising to consider that the text discloses more of a generic affiliation to the archetypal love story than it does with tragedy; an observation that leads Coppelia Kahn to suggest that "as a 'love tragedy' the play is a generic oxymoron." Coppelia Kahn, Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women (London, 1998), p.110. Arguing how the love story contests normative (i.e. masculine) narrative paradigms, however, Mary Ann Doane offers the perceptive remark that the 'love story' posits "a thinning out of time, its expansion...Women in the love story witness departures and arrivals, but there is little, if any progression." Mary Ann Doane, The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s (London, 1987), p.107. Expert at contriving all kinds of entertainment designed to fill the "great gap of time" (I.v.5) that signals Antony's absence, Cleopatra is in many respects the archetypal beloved who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has the time to do so. Conversely, Antony is in a condition of perpetual departure, of journeying, and the fact that he too comes to occupy a sedentary position is one of the most frequent causes of Roman censure. For example, Enobarbus's account of how "Antony/Enthron'd I' the market-place, did sit alone,/Whistling to the air" (II.ii.214-160) while waiting for Cleopatra recalls Barthes' observation that "the man who waits and who suffers from this waiting is miraculously feminized." Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse: Fragments, trans. Richard Howard (London, 1991), p.14.

What is scandalous about these improvised moments is that Cleopatra's "perverse forms of arrest" simultaneously produce the effect of repeating the origin in a gesture that also threatens to displace the origin as origin. In other words, Cleopatra unleashes a power of repetition that is neither an enslavement to or a simple reiteration of the original, but is an insubordination that appears to take place within the very terms of the original. In this crucial respect Cleopatra's enunciative modality may more properly be identified as "performative" precisely insofar as it produces a potentially counter-hegemonic clash that, according to Homi Bhabha, forever haunts the colonial scene; "founded" as it is upon what he appositely describes as a "temporality of the 'in-between' which through the 'gap' or 'emptiness' of the signifier punctuates linguistic difference."⁶⁵ This gap or emptiness, that which is (strictly speaking) deprived of any "symbolic" content, simultaneously produces desire and also confers consistency upon the symbolic order. Lacan's name for this empty integer is, of course, enjoyment.

Crucially, what I wish to insist upon here is that this inveterate capacity for repetition not only brings Cleopatra into close proximity with the drive, what is also at stake concerns a certain relationship towards jouissance as that which remains the immanent possibility of Roman Law itself. To this extent, Cleopatra's potentially subversive appeal resides less in the alleged "power" of her sexuality than in her very suggestion that the power edifice of Rome is itself sexualized: i.e. realized by the incursion of a radical stain of non-sense that

⁶⁵ Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in Homi Bhabha (ed) Nation and Narration (London, 1990), pp.291-322, p.299. Jonathan Gil Harris, for example, makes the astute observation that Cleopatra's "very vividness is shown to be the effect of a Roman desire for her presence, prompted by the gaps and absences that repeatedly afflict the play's attempts to represent her." "Narcissus in thy face: Roman Desire and the Difference it Fakes in Antony and Cleopatra," Shakespeare Quarterly, 45, 4, Winter (1994), pp.408-25, p.417.

also provides its unacknowledged support. Briefly, according to Lacan, in order for the “public” law of symbolic ritual and mandates to remain efficacious, it has to be “shadowed” by an unacknowledged obscene underside that is smeared with a stain of enjoyment.⁶⁶ It is precisely insofar as Cleopatra publicly identifies with this dysfunctional, empty repetitious movement that she also threatens to disclose how the play’s much remarked upon sex/power nexus is overdetermined in a way that is unaccounted for by even the most rigorously Foucauldian approach to the text.⁶⁷

In other words, while Jonathan Dollimore is surely correct in his assertion that Antony’s “sexuality is informed by the very power relations which he, ambivalently, is prepared to sacrifice for sexual freedom,”⁶⁸ it also is necessary to add a properly Lacanian gloss to this thesis. Enobarbus’s remark that Cleopatra’s appeal provokes even priests to “bless her when she is riggish’ (II.ii.239-40) already implies a dialectical tension between prohibition and license that, throughout the text more generally, secretes itself as the obscene condition of Roman power. While recent criticism of the text has remained sensitive to those occasions when Egyptian excess threatens to violate the efficacy of Roman discourse through its putatively carnivalesque energies, Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a more

⁶⁶ In an argument that, perhaps surprisingly, is implicitly Lacanian in this respect Northrop Frye maintains that “Egypt is not hell; it is rather the night side of [Rome]; passionate, cruel, superstitious, barbaric, dissolute.” Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy (Toronto, 1967), p.110.

⁶⁷ I can only refer the reader here to Mladen Dolar’s extraordinary Lacanian analysis of power pace Foucault where he concludes that “One can only think power in the space between the necessary hypothesis about the ‘always already there’ of the Other, which opens the space of power relations, and the insight that ‘the Other lacks.’ The insight into its ‘non-existence’ cannot make the shortcut around its ‘existence’, its ‘always already there,’ and perhaps the difficulty of Foucault’s position – possibly its ultimate unsustainability – stems from his attempt to avoid and circumvent this paradox.” Mladen Dolar, “Where Does Power Come From?,” New Formations, 35 (1998), pp.79-92, p.92. See also Joan Copjec’s equally trenchant critique of Foucault in this regard in Read My Desire: Lacan Against The Historicists (London, 1994), pp3-8.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Dollimore, Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries (London, 1989), p. 217.

nuanced account of this relationship. It is not merely the case, as Antony impetuously remarks, that “pleasure...does become/the opposite of itself” (I.ii.121-3), jouissance also announces the paradox where, when ostensibly deprived of enjoyment, the subject in a sense enjoys this very deprivation. Enjoyment qua drive has very little to do with the procurement of an object that is somehow sufficient to desire; rather, a reflexive gesture occurs where it is the very circulation around the object itself that gives rise to enjoyment. Significantly, Antony reveals that it is not “love” per se that motivates his amorous exploits but a tautological “love of love” (I.i.44). It is not surprising that this relation tends toward the masochistic attitude where it is the very “pain of punishment” (I.i.38) that also implies a strange kind of surplus pleasure.⁶⁹

If, for Lacan, masochism accentuates the function of the drive in so far as “the subject makes himself the instrument of the Other’s jouissance,”⁷⁰ are not those occasions when Antony yields to Roman censure also conspicuously marked by this suggestion of residual enjoyment?: “My being in Egypt,/Caesar, what was’t to you?” (II.ii.35-6). Often it appears that Antony is both eloquently and passionately solicitous of rebuke:

Speak to me home, mince not the general tongue:
Name Cleopatra as she is call’d in Rome;
Rail thou in Fulvia’s phrase, and taunt my faults
With such full license, as both truth and malice
Have power to utter.

(I.ii.103-106)

⁶⁹ The trouble with jouissance qua enjoyment then is not that it is unattainable, that it always eludes the subject’s grasp, but, rather, that one can never get rid of it, that its stain drags along forever – therein resides the point of Lacan’s concept of surplus-enjoyment: the very renunciation of jouissance brings about a remainder/surplus of jouissance.

⁷⁰ Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, p.320.

In short, what is taking place here (and which may be read as a revealing variation on the text's putative "theatricality") is nothing less than an attempt by Antony to look at himself from the position of the Other. Crucially, it is precisely this reflexive moment introduced by the virtual point of the gaze that demonstrates how jouissance is constitutively and inescapably torn between the Symbolic and the Real: "On the one hand, jouissance is 'private', the kernel which resists public disclosure....on the other hand, however, jouissance 'counts' only as [it is] registered by the big Other."⁷¹ While the overtly "political" anxieties of the text are largely generated through a conflict between the seemingly contrasting domains of "private" pleasure (Egypt) and that of "public" duty (Rome), with its endless procession of Roman emissaries the text tragically reaffirms the Lacanian insight that private pleasure is never possible. That is, the intruder who appears to "spoil" the game effectively crystallizes its enjoyment: "private" pleasure is minimally exhibitionist precisely because it requires the intrusion of the big Other from which it is granted a degree of ontological consistency. Conversely, the spectre of Egyptian excess, of that which threatens both to overflow and overthrow public (Roman) Law actually constitutes the inherent moment of the Law itself. It is not simply the case then that – to recount a somewhat tired formulation – power produces subversion; Egypt, rather, transposes the tension between Law and transgression into the inner splitting of the domain of Roman Law itself – where the Law's external relationship to its transgression is internalized into the Law's relationship to its own traumatic founding gesture.⁷²

⁷¹ Slavoj Žižek, The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters (London, 1996), p.132.

⁷² It is not enough to say that the "repression" of some libidinal content retroactively eroticizes the very gesture of repression – this eroticization of power is not a secondary effect of its exertion on its object but its very disavowed foundation, its constitutive crime or founding gesture which has to remain invisible if power is to function normally.

Indeed, Slavoj Žižek maintains that this dialectical tension that obtains between prohibition and license more properly locates sexuality not as

a traumatic substantial Thing that the subject cannot directly attain; instead, it is nothing but the formal structure of failure that can in principle 'contaminate' any activity. Any activity that fails directly to attain its goal and thereby gets caught in a repetitive vicious cycle is automatically sexualized.⁷³

If, for Lacan, the function of the drive inheres in a compulsion to encircle again and again the site of loss as nothing but the retroactive embodiment of this loss, it is Cleopatra who announces this monstrous persistence of the drive in its degree zero: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale/Her infinite variety" (II.ii.235-6). Indeed, this strangely aim-inhibited (qua sexualized) activity of Cleopatra is recalled in another episode by Enobarbus which may be read as a more explicit comment on the drive as nothing other than the repetition proper to the "death drive" as such:

Cleopatra catching but the least
noise of this dies instantly. I have seen her die twenty times
[...] I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some
loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying.

(I.ii.137-142)

⁷³ Slavoj Žižek, "Love Thy Neighbour? No, Thanks!" in The Psychoanalysis of Race ed. Christopher Lane (Chichester, 1998), pp. 154-176, p.170. That is to say, any activity becomes "sexualized" when it fails to achieve its asexual goal and gets "caught" in the vicious circle of repetition. We enter the domain of sexuality proper when a gesture that "officially" serves some instrumental goal becomes an end in itself, i.e. when we start to enjoy the very repetition of this gesture and thereby suspend its "purposefulness."

Not only does the drive exceed the determinations of any subjective attitude it also designates “something in which the subject is caught, a force...which persists in its repetitive movement.”⁷⁴ Rome is not only dependent upon Egypt’s seemingly foreign and irrational drives, it has simultaneously to maintain a proper distance from them to avoid being similarly “caught” in its pre-predicative abyss. If Cleopatra succeeds in beggaring description it is because she so often signals the proximity of something that, strictly speaking, lies beyond both the wall of language and any naive notion of “intersubjectivity” as such. Enobarbus’s observation that “there is mettle in death/which commits some loving act upon her” (I.ii.149-51) is typical of the way that Cleopatra is not so much described throughout the text as “caught” unexpectedly in her moment of jouissance. Time and again Roman commentators alight upon some compulsive gesture or strange idiosyncrasy of the queen that merely inscribes this unfathomable intensity of the real of jouissance. According to Antony, for example, even her silent summons proves irresistible so that her “beck from the bidding of the gods/Commands me” (III.ii.60-1).⁷⁵

Significantly, not only does she “catch” the news of Antony’s departure for Rome, throughout the text it is Cleopatra who is most frequently identified with this motif: imagining her lover to be a “tawny-finn’d fish” that she draws up and... thinks “every one an Antony,/And say ‘Ah, ha! y’are caught” (II.v.13-14); she expresses wonder that after his military campaign that Antony has returned from “The world’s great snare uncaught”

⁷⁴ Slavoj Žižek, The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology (London, 1999), p.297.

⁷⁵ In a particularly resonant discussion of the drive, which may be read as illuminating the phantasmatic basis of Rome’s vicarious encounters with Cleopatra, Lacan argues that “desire is merely a vain detour with the aim of catching the jouissance of the other - insofar as the other intervenes, the subject will realize that there is a jouissance beyond the pleasure principle.” Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, pp.183-4.

(IV.viii.19); berating Seleucus on his betrayal she threatens to “catch thine eyes/Though they had wings” (V.ii.155-6); even at her death Caesar’s obsequies state that “she would catch another Antony/In her strong toil of grace” (V.ii.345-6).

While, traditionally, this imagery has been read in terms of Cleopatra’s predatory nature, it also links Cleopatra to a motif that, strictly speaking, does not have at its disposal the unified space of a figure.⁷⁶ Like the drive, Cleopatra exceeds the alternatives of the active or the passive and, instead, comes to figure as the articulated point of tension between the two categories.⁷⁷ Indeed, Cleopatra’s warning to Iras that “saucy lictors/Will catch at us like strumpets” (V.ii.213-14) suggests that, rather than defining a subjective attitude, to catch or be caught entails the interval of what may be called a proximate distance, it implies a relationship toward something. Following Luce Irigaray, we may also suggest that Cleopatra, like “Woman,” is historically on the side of the drive as a marker of sexual difference insofar as “woman always tends toward without any return to herself as the place where something positive can be elaborated.”⁷⁸ As I argue in the next section, however, Antony and Cleopatra is as much concerned with other topological paradoxes or metastases that come to have a crucial, if often enigmatic, bearing on the very production of subjectivity itself.

“Wrinkled Deep in Time”

⁷⁶ According to Lacan, the drive is that which exceeds the categories of the active or the passive that involves a kind of self-reflexive turn, not a simple reversal of the active into the passive. The drive, in other words, can only ever remain “snatching at its object.” Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1994), p.167.

⁷⁷ In this respect we might say that Cleopatra frequently seeks to assume the position not of the object of desire, but that of the drive. She assures Antony, for example, that her “becomings” are intended to “Eye well to you” (I.iii.98-9).

⁷⁸ Luce Irigaray, An Ethics of Sexual Difference, Carolyn Burke trans., (London, 1993), p.9.

Having been promised “sixty sails” from Cleopatra, Antony resolves that “our overplus of shipping will we burn,/And with the rest full-mann’d [...] Beat the approaching Caesar” (III.vii.49). A little later in the play Enobarbus is informed that “Antony/Hath after thee sent all thy treasure, with/His bounty overplus” (IV.vi.20-22). Bearing in mind Terry Eagleton’s observation that in *Antony and Cleopatra* “the language of politics no longer meshes with the discourse of value, and the play simply dramatizes their contradiction,”⁷⁹ the two references to overplus here are particularly noteworthy in view of the fact that this term appears in no other play by Shakespeare.

It does, significantly, appear in a document in defence of colonial trade by Thomas Hariot in 1587, who argues that there is “such an overplus sufficiently to be yeilded, or by men of skill to be provided, as by way of traffique and exchange with our owne nation of England, will enrich the providers.”⁸⁰ Despite Hariot’s somewhat anxious reference to “our owne nation of England,” it was precisely this seemingly elusive “overplus” that threatened to deplete the nation’s wealth in the increasingly nebulous networks of contemporary commerce. Most notable in this respect was the ambivalent response to the success of the East India Company which regularly became the focus of suspicion that, in Patricia Fumerton’s words, “something strange was happening to England’s wealth, and no one knew exactly where to point the finger.”⁸¹ Inquiring in 1623 into the whereabouts of East Indian trade, King James was informed by the deputy governor of the company that “having

⁷⁹ Quoted in John Drakakis (ed) *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1992), p.398.

⁸⁰ Quoted in R.H. Tawney (ed) *Tudor Economic Documents* (London, 1946), p.73.

⁸¹ *op. cit.*, Fumerton p.174.

first served his Majesty's dominions, the overplus is transported to foreign parts in the nature of a home bred commodity."⁸² As Fumerton suggests, encounters with the "new world" led to "a nervous realization about market forces in the Jacobean world. Once located, strangeness 'out there' was discovered to be 'in here' in the English identity itself."⁸³ Indeed, the term "overplus" in many respects can be read as a precursor to what in the transition to capitalism proper came to be known as "surplus value" – which, as Lacan argues, is not a claim to property so much as to the excess or usufruct generated by it: in other words, what is implied is a certain relationship to enjoyment.

As I tried to sketch out in the previous section, Antony and Cleopatra also suggests that the ethnic moment proper to the colonial scene implies a certain relationship towards enjoyment, not least insofar as Egyptian "pleasure" is something that comes to threaten the coherence of Rome's national identity. Typically, Rome's criticisms of Antony routinely focus on the way "he fishes, drinks, and wastes/The lamps of night in revel" or how he will "stand the buffet/With knaves that smell of sweat" (I.iv.4-5; 20-1). Indeed, Caesar's recollection of how previously Antony did "eat strange flesh/Which some did die to look on" (II.67-8) is a particularly revealing insight into how it is, quite literally, a certain "relationship toward the Thing, structured by means of fantasies, that is at stake when we speak of the menace to our 'way of life' presented by the other."⁸⁴ In other words, the national identity of Rome in Antony and Cleopatra appears to be maintained so long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices. The conflict between Rome and Egypt in the play is

⁸² Ibid., p.175.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 183.

not merely a clash of cultures that can, as numerous critics of the play would appear to suggest, be reduced to a series of binary oppositions (private/public, male/female, from/content etc.). Rather, what appears to be at issue here exceeds the dialectic of self and other and opens onto a more radical level of estrangement that, strictly speaking, cannot be accounted for purely in terms of socio-symbolic features. It is precisely this paradox, I would like to suggest, that is addressed in Jacques-Alain Miller's seminar on what he calls "extimite":

Why does the other remain Other? What is the cause for our hatred of him, for our hatred of him in his very being? It is hatred of the enjoyment in the Other. This would be the most general formula of racism...a hatred of the particular way the Other enjoys...the Other as he who essentially steals my own enjoyment.⁸⁵

Indeed, in a journey to the Orient in 1600 John Cartwright relates how "In this place is to be seen the strange sights of fireworks, of banquets, of music, of wrestling, and of whatsoever triumphs else there is to be shown, for the declaration of the joy of this slothful people."⁸⁶

If, according to Jacques-Alain Miller, it is "Jouissance...that grounds the alterity of the Other when there is no Other of the Other,"⁸⁷ at a phantasmatic level what many contemporary accounts of the Orient appear to disclose is precisely this confrontation of incompatible

⁸⁴ Slavoj Žižek, "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead," New Left Review, 183 (1990), pp.50-63, p. 51.

⁸⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimite" in Lacanian theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure and Society, ed. Mark Bracher et. al. (London, 1994), pp.74-87, p.79.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Early Modern Tales of Orient: A Critical Anthology, ed. Kenneth Parker (London, 1999), p.116.

⁸⁷ Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimite," p.79. In a gesture of counter-identification that is typical of Cleopatra's rhetorical strategy in the text, she responds to Antony's accusation that she is "idleness itself" with the conceit that "'tis sweating labour,/To bear such idleness so near the heart/As Cleopatra this" (I.iii.93-5). Indeed throughout the text, there is a strange preoccupation with the expenditure of energy: Octavius is presented as "labouring" (II.vi.14) for Julius Caesar, while his revelry on the barge is characterized as a "monstrous labour" (II.vii.98); Canidius remarks that "With news the time's in labour, and throws forth,/Each minute, some" (III.vii.80-1) and according to Antony, Mardian's safe return from battle "Does pay thy labour richly" (IV.xiv.36).

modes of jouissance that, as this excerpt suggests, is centred upon “the way in which the Other obtains a plus-de-jouir: either he does not work or he does not work enough, or he is useless or a little too useful, but whatever the case may be, he is always endowed with a part of jouissance that he does not deserve.”⁸⁸

In this section I want to develop further how this “overplus” - this radically ambivalent marker of identity qua enjoyment that constitutively “o’erflows every measure” - also cannot be thought outside consideration of a certain textual superfluity in Antony and Cleopatra that similarly throws into doubt the notion of any pure loss or expense. Bearing in mind Miller’s discussion of extimite, I now wish to examine more explicitly those ways in which the text negotiates a relationship to an alterity that exceeds the determinations of any clearly defined demarcation between exteriority and interiority. In this respect we will consider how the question of enjoyment opens inevitably onto the question of jouissance as that which constitutes the very play of the signifier upon which “meaning” itself comes to be negotiated.

We might begin in this respect by considering how the much noted theatrical quality of the play itself also involves a kind of interminably repeated supplementation. Arguing that the play in many ways comes to speculate upon its own “metastasis,” Michael Goldman not only avers that “Antony and Cleopatra are each other’s best audience,” but that “this is a

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.80. Again Cleopatra offers a particularly resonant example of this paradox, and which might profitably be read in the light of Slavoj Zizek’s discussion of the femme fatale as the locus of a certain “surplus enjoyment”: “What bestows on her an aura of mystery is precisely the way she cannot be clearly located in the opposition between master and slave. At the moment she seems permeated with intense pleasure, it suddenly becomes apparent that she suffers immensely; when she seems to be the victim of some violence, it suddenly becomes clear that she enjoys it. We can never be quite sure if she enjoys or suffers, if she manipulates or is herself the victim of manipulation. Slavoj Zizek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Lacan Through Popular Culture, p.65.

play in which we identify with audiences, with Antony and Cleopatra as each other's audience, with ourselves as audience and with the audience characters on stage."⁸⁹ Similarly, Linda Charnes observes that "no other Shakespearean play is filled with as many reporters and messengers as Antony and Cleopatra."⁹⁰ What this infrastructural economy of re-marking in the play appears to suggest, however, is that there is something within the text that cannot yield to presence. Arguing how the very possibility of meaning relies upon "a structural opening [that] allows context to transform itself or to give way to another context," Derridean differance bears upon the way that every mark is always already a re-mark precisely insofar as "self-identity" is nothing but the inverted representative of the space of its own condition of (im)possibility.⁹¹ Indeed, Derrida argues that this supplementary re-marking is immanent to the theatrical event insofar as "theatre does not show 'things in themselves,' nor does it represent them; it shows a representation, shows itself to be a fiction; it is less engaged in setting forth the image of things than it is in setting up the machine."⁹²

This is precisely the kind of ignominious fate that Cleopatra seeks to avoid at the hands of her Roman captors whose "mechanic slaves/With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers

⁸⁹ Michael Goldman, Acting and Action in Shakespearean Tragedy (Princeton, 1984), p.138.

⁹⁰ Linda Charnes, Notorious Identity: Materializing The Subject in Shakespeare (London, 1993), p.106. John Danby also argues that "characters judge and comment on each other more than in any other Shakespeare play." "Antony and Cleopatra: A Shakespearean Adjustment," in Antony and Cleopatra: Contemporary Critical Essays, ed. John Drakakis (London, 1994), pp.33-56, p.36.

⁹¹ Derrida, for example, argues that "every mark has the force of detachment which not only can free it from such and such a determined context, but ensures even its principle of intelligibility and its mark structure - that is, its iterability (repetition and alteration). A mark that could not in any way detach itself from its singular context - however slightly and, if only through repetition, reducing, dividing and multiplying it by identifying it - would no longer be a mark." Politics of Friendship, trans. George Collins (London, 1997), p.216.

⁹² Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (London, 1981), p.238.

shall/Uplift us to the view" (V.ii.209-11). This speech, which has so often been singled out for discussion as the text's "self-reflexive" commentary upon its own position of enunciation, is remarkable in the way that the frame of the text is both inscribed into, and accounted for, by the text itself. That is to say, the "theatrical" here is always already co-opted by a certain "writing" or "mechanical repetition" described by Geoffrey Bennington as "the necessity of a contamination of any essence by a generalized 'technology.'" If it is indeed the case that, as one critic avers, Antony and Cleopatra betrays a dangerous over-proximity to "the mechanics by which characters make meaning,"⁹³ Derrida argues that it is this "alterity in the same" that is unthinkable outside of its relation to a "machine..that plays or works,"⁹⁴ In other words, Antony and Cleopatra cannot avoid a certain necessity of "stand[ing] on mechanic compliment" (IV.iv.31-2), insofar as the theatrical itself is something that inscribes this essential impossibility of any absolute synchronization.⁹⁵

What I wish to suggest here is that Antony and Cleopatra frequently comes to signal the incursion of jouissance or "non-synchronous temporality" that Homi Bhabha has also discerned in the colonial scene as

..the 'foreign' element that reveals the interstitial; that insists in the textile superfluity of folds and wrinkles; and becomes the unstable element of linkage, the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which 'newness' comes into the world.⁹⁶

⁹³ Kent Cartwright, Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double (New York, 1991), p.245.

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1978), p.127.

⁹⁵ Derrida provides a more extensive consideration of these issues in his excellent essay on Romeo and Juliet entitled "Aphorism Countertime" in Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature, ed. Derek Attridge (London, 1992), pp.414-33.

⁹⁶ Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London, 1994), p.227.

This “indeterminate temporality of the in-between” is nowhere more explicit than in what one critic of the play somewhat appositely refers to as its preponderant strain of “iterative imagery.”⁹⁷ Indeed, Derrida’s inventory of motifs that he relates to the “remark” bear a striking resemblance to figures that also populate Antony and Cleopatra. Crucially, for Derrida the structure of the remark is not only suggested “in the movement of a fan” but also

includes the many-faceted figure of wings, pages, veils, sails, folds, plumes, etc., constituting and reconstituting itself in an endless breath of opening and/or closing....through a tropic twist..[they] inscribe above and beyond that movement the very movement and structure of the fan-as-text, the deployment and retraction of all its valencies; the spacing, the fold, and hymen between all these meaning-effects..⁹⁸

While the “divided disposition” (I.v.53) of Antony and Cleopatra has long been noted thematically in those speeches that try to negotiate a “midway/”Twixt extremes”(III.iv.19-20), the text also traces a certain play of spacing in figures that come to inscribe this essential vacillation. Indeed, it is at this level of a certain “metastasis” that the sublime power of the text comes to inscribe the movement or pulsation around the contours of an invisible void that yawns in the scene of presence.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Leo Kirchbaum, “Shakespeare’s Cleopatra,” Shakespeare Association Bulletin, 19 (1944), pp.161-171, p.165. For a bizarre yet strangely illuminating study of the play in this respect, see James E Harting, The Ornithology of Shakespeare (London, 1978).

⁹⁸ Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (London, 1981), p.251.

⁹⁹ It is to this extent that what we earlier referred to as the drive becomes the accomplice of this strange topology in the text. Lacan, for example, discusses the drive as an “outwards-and-back movement,” “a thrust that emerges through the rim only to return as its target, after having encircled something I call the object a.” The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p. 178, p.194.

Not only is Antony characterized as a victim of “fretted fortunes” (IV.xii.8), Antony and Cleopatra is preoccupied with figures of textile weaving that similarly elude the possibility of any straightforward stitching, leading one critic to compare the play to an infelicitous “welding together of material.”¹⁰⁰ Following his defeat at the hands of Caesar, for example, Antony claims that “The seven-fold shield of Ajax cannot keep/The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides” (IV.xiv.38-9); Cleopatra’s betrayal by Seleucus and her humiliation before Caesar is signaled by being “unfolded/With one that I have bred” (V.ii.169-70); Charmian’s speculates upon a lover that may be made “fifty-fold a cuckold” (I.ii.64), and Antony’s determines that Scarus is to be rewarded “ten-fold/For thy good valour” (IV.vii.15-16).

Insofar as the security of spatial boundaries routinely become the focus of some political anxiety in the play, we might recall here Timothy Clark’s analysis that

[...] the structure of the ontico-ontological difference may be described as a “fold,” specifically a dissymetric fold. An entity becomes apparent in an appearing (being) which withdraws in a structure of erasure as folding-back. Language is itself a fold of this structure in that, in its very effect of bringing to presence, it witholds itself and may not appear as an object.¹⁰¹

Perhaps equally significant in this respect is the sheer number of times in the play when words, literally, come to withhold themselves, as something lodged in the gullet of the signifier: Cleopatra admonishes Antony for being “entangled with those mouth-made vows,/Which break themselves in swearing” (I.iii.30-1); Alexas relates that Anthony’s “speech sticks in my heart” (I.v.41); Charmian is rebuked for favouring Caesar over Antony:

¹⁰⁰ Levin Schucking, Character Problems in Shakespeare’s Plays (London, 1922), p.146.

“Be chok’d with such another emphasis,/Say the brave Antony” (I.v.69-70); and even Caesar confesses that “mine own tongue/Splits what it speaks” (II.vii.121-2). Octavia too is similarly burdened with the unspeakable, suspended upon a “tongue [that] will not obey her heart, nor can/Her heart inform her tongue,” words are again swallowed in the instant of being spoken. Or, rather, they come to swell in the very space of their disappearance, not only as a promise, but as a kind of metastasis which recalls how “The higher Nilus swells,/The more it promises” (II.vii.20-1):

... the swan’s down feather,
That stands upon the swell at the full of tide,
And neither way inclines
(III.ii.47-50)

It is this strange spatio-temporal movement in the play - Imobilis et mobili – that also increasingly comes to suggest that “presence” is something that “swells” or affects itself without ever giving birth to itself.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Timothy Clark, “Being in Mime: Heidegger and Derrida on the Ontology of Literary Language,” Modern Language Notes, 101, 5 (1986), pp.1003-1021, p.102.

¹⁰² Indeed, even at the close of the play, Caesar’s inquiry after “the manner of their deaths? I do not see them bleed” (V.ii.335-6), Cleopatra’s body offers nothing to Caesar’s gaze but the impenetrable and ineffable exigence of a dead weight:

If they had swallow’d poison, ‘twould appear
By external swelling: but she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

(V.ii.343-5)

Refusing initially to yield to an erotisme des corps that would make of it a site of legibility, the body remains an unfathomable and weightless density so concentrated and reposed upon itself that it “looks like sleep.” And yet it soon gives itself away, enfolded on itself so that an unexpected contact is made: “Here on her breast,/There is a vent of blood, and something blown” (II.347-8). In this weightless contact where depth distends toward the surface without simultaneity, we find a strange relation of autoeroticism where the body touches itself without making its way back to itself. Cleopatra’s body is indeed made ‘tremulous’ here, not only as the site of an essential vascillation, but as the immanence of its own swelling echoic depth.

In this respect, the text's excrescent doublings and multiplications do not so much suggest some uniform spatial expanse as a disymmetry of cleavages and folds that give rise to a more enigmatic kind of spacing. While wars between Antony and Caesar "would be/As if the world should cleave" (III.iv.30-1); anticipating defeat Antony imagines how his arms will be "pleach'd", that is, both folded and intertwined, in a fate of "penetrative shame" (IV.xiv.73-5); Pompey is fearful of how Antony and Caesar "May cement their divisions, and bind up/The petty difference" (II.ii.48-9); Octavia's marriage allows the hearts of Caesar and Antony to be "knit/With an unslipping knot" (II.ii.126-7) so that they are "for ever knit together" (II.vi.112); Antony praises how his severed navy "Have knit again" (III.xiii.171); applying an asp to her breast Cleopatra urges that "With thy sharp/teeth this knot intricate/Of life at once untie" (V.ii.302-4); Antony goads Caesar that "If you'll patch a quarrel,/A matter whole you have to make it with" while Caesar accuses Antony of "patch'd up" excuses (II.ii.53.55).

In other words, if Antony and Cleopatra has frequently been arraigned for its languorous refusal to get to the point, it is perhaps because its multiplicity of points are shown to be nothing but the knotted inflection of its folds. From Philo's "Nay, but.." (I.i.i), not only is the "beginning" of the text revealed already to be implicated in a middle, lines of force typically fail to run between two points and in a play that is more inclined to "tie up [its] points" (IV.iii.34) in an invaginated structure that eludes the determination of an indivisible edge.¹⁰³ Opining to Antony that she is caught "twixt extremes," Octavia is advised to "let her love draw to that point which seeks/best to preserve it" (III.iv.21-2). What, in fact, the

¹⁰³ We might recall here that Caesar refers to "unhack'd edges" (II.i.10) while, contemplating suicide, Cleopatra speculates whether "knife, drugs, serpents have/Edge, sting, or operation" (IV.xv.24-5).

“point” amounts to here is less a site anterior to the vicissitudes of difference than a product of differential relations and competing magnetic pulls.

From its initial mention of “the bellows and the fan” of a gypsy’s lust, Antony and Cleopatra is comprised of a surfeit of figures that variously threaten to exceed the very confines of figurality in a paradoxical movement of auto-fissure that, according to Derrida, characterizes every “mark” as such. What distinguishes these figures, perhaps the fan most ingeniously so, is a spatio-temporal torsion that appears always already to have divided the movement of departure from a first time: a “movement” whose enigma is most powerfully condensed in Antony’s determination to “let that be left which leaves itself” (III.xi.19-20).¹⁰⁴ Perhaps most conspicuously so, it is in the account of Cleopatra’s barge progress where language assumes a rhetorical power that is in direct proportion to the way that it trembles before the very threat of its own disappearance:

Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were
silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their stroke.

(II.ii.193-97)

In other words, throughout the speech signifiers transport themselves in a movement from limit to limit that takes place in and as syncopation, yet which cannot be said to take place as such. Rather, borrowing Jean-Luc Nancy’s recent definition of the sublime, “meaning” is offered here only “in the schematic spacing and throbbing of the trace of figures, and thus

¹⁰⁴ This strange movement has not gone unnoticed by critics of the play. Emrys Jones, for example, observes that “though [it is] not without movement it is in a way static.” Jones, op. cit., p.11.

only comes to pass in the syncopated time of the passage of the limit to the limit” (emphasis added).¹⁰⁵ The language of the speech does not so much seek to mime the ponderous passage of the barge but suggests, rather, that the very anchorage of “meaning” itself is the product of a more enigmatic kind of slippage. The celebrated sensuousness of the speech (its strokes, its beats, its bends, its fans) privileges the heterogeneity of touch as that limit where, simultaneously, form gets carried away into the absence of form - making the formless itself stand out as such: “At the helm/A seeming mermaid steers: the silken tackle/Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands” (II.ii.208-10). It is impossible to speak of contact here; rather, language is sensitive to itself only at a certain limit of tactility that swells between extreme tension and distention, so that “touching [becomes] the limit of itself: the limit of images and words, contact - and with this, paradoxically, the impossibility of touching inscribed in touching, since touching is the limit.”¹⁰⁶ That is to say, meaning literally insists throughout the speech as suspension, as a diaphanous weaving of spirit that is more comparable to the diffusion of a perfume in an unresisting atmosphere:¹⁰⁷ “From the barge/A strange invisible perfume hits the sense/Of the adjacent wharfs” (II.ii.211-13). Touch, in other words, as that which announces a peculiar spacing of proximate distance, a joui-sense of weightless contact that, if we can risk such a formulation, “makes one sense what makes one sense (what it is to sense).”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Sublime Offering” in Of The Sublime: Presence in Question, ed. Rodolphe Gasche and Mark C. Taylor (New York, 1993), pp.25-55, p.45.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.46.

¹⁰⁷ I am, of course, touching here upon certain motifs more commonly associated with the thought of G.W.F Hegel. See Phenomenology of Spirit (Oxford, 1977), p331.

¹⁰⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, The Muses, trans. Peggy Kamuf (California, 1996), p.17. If language appears to unburden itself of all material weight here it is no less the case that the text consistently calibrates the densities of its forms and the voluminosity of its depths through this implied (non)interval of touching: Charmian demands from the soothsayer “a matter of more weight” (I.ii.65-6); Ventidius pursues Anthony “with what haste/The weight we must convey” (III.ii.36); Caesar accuses Anthony of

While several critics have praised the “suggestive” and ethereal quality of the speech, its convoluted folds of contact also suggest another kind of “floating” which, for Derrida, provides the figure of “suggestion” as such, as that which is “barely revealing at all, on the point of disappearing, the indecision of that which remains suspended..”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the “divers-colour’d fans” not only evoke this lateral movement, they do so in an image of vacillation that (somewhat infelicitously) seeks to grasp the simultaneity of the same at the point of bifurcation so that the “wind did seem/To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,/And what they did undid” (II.ii.203-5).¹¹⁰

Significantly it is, once again, Cleopatra who is the animating source of this strange kind of auto-affection (*qua jouissance*): procuring a space of representation that also threatens to unmoor signification from any anchorage in referentiality. Beggaring all description, it is precisely Rome’s fear that language cannot “unveil” the thing itself that is shown simultaneously to produce desire and also give rise to what Derrida has elsewhere termed “apotropaic anxiety.” With its surfeit of maritime figures the entire scenography of Enobarbus’ speech is uncannily reminiscent of one that Derrida associates with the ambivalent role of “woman” who, in phallogocentric discourse, “regulate[s] the play of sails

“lightness” so that Rome “bear[s] /So great a weight” (I.iv.24-5), while Enobarbus predicts that “the full Caesar will/Answer his emptiness” (III.xiii.36). Outwitted by Caesar because his ships are “heavy” (III.vii.38), Anthony’s defeat is announced by the fact that he is “full of lead”(III.xi.72). Not only is it a “happy horse” that bears the “weight”(I.v.21-3) of Antony, he invites Pompey to “weigh/what is worth embrac’d” (II.vi.33-4); Cleopatra’s remark that Antony’s “loss” is proportionate “to the weight” (V.ii.101-2) is ironically recalled in the spectacle of Antony’s conveyance to the monument: “How heavy weighs my lord!/Our strength is all gone into heaviness,/That makes the weight’ (IV.xv.40).

¹⁰⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, p.239.

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Royle has also suggestively drawn attention to “the uncanny motion without motion” in the text. See *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind*, (Oxford, 1991), p.156.

(of a ship, for example) around..... apotropaic anxiety.”¹¹¹ Cleopatra is made homologous with the promiscuous passage of the signifier which “perforates even as it parries,” and which “derives its apotropaic power from the taut, resistant tissues, webs, sails and veils which are erected and unfurled around it.”¹¹² Significantly, even the rigging and the sails designed to arrest any involuntary movement are, paradoxically, entrusted to the lubricious folds of “silken tackle” (II.ii.219). If, according to Derrida, there are no figures without “woman” because she “is the mast or mainstay that fixes all meanings in phallogocentric thought,”¹¹³ what the entire speech hints at somewhat more capriciously - with its cast of dimpled boys, mermaids, cupids and nymphs - is that any disturbance in the rigging that tries to navigate the ordinance of the signifier also threatens to erase the mark of sexual difference itself, abandoning meaning to “float between the masculine and the feminine.”¹¹⁴

The polysemy of “curls” (V.ii.300), “folds” (V.ii.169-70) “pinches” (I.v.28/ V.ii.294) and even “wrinkles” (I.v.29/II.xi.37) to be found in Antony and Cleopatra, then, not only weave the text in manifold ways, they also mark the spacing of a semantic void in a movement of auto-affection that threatens to exceed phenomenality itself.¹¹⁵ That is to say, it is within

¹¹¹ Jacques Derrida, Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles, trans. Barbara Harlow (London, 1978), p.41.

¹¹² Ibid., p.41.

¹¹³ Wendy O'Shea-Meddour, “The Seduction of Sirens: Derrida and Woman” in Textual Practice, 13, 3 (1999) , pp.465-86, p.469.

¹¹⁴ O'Shea-Meddour, op. cit., p.473. Indeed, in Enobarbus' peroration that “Holy priests bless her when she is riggish” (II.ii.239-40) we encounter the contradictory etymological cleavage between riggishness as that which refers to a wanton and licentious nature, and the more commonplace meaning of rigging as the very armature of that which polices the boundary itself.

¹¹⁵ Cleopatra's “hops” (II.ii.229), Antony's preparedness to “leap”(III.xiii.51) and Caesar's calculation that his fortune lies upon a “jump” (III.viii.6) are not only motifs of anticipated movement that “condense down toward the point of an idea,” following Derrida they may also be read as “descriptions/inscriptions of the structure and movement of the literary textile, a ‘hesitational’ turning into writing.” And isn't it also this uncanny sense of motion without motion that Antony invokes as the vacillation essential to the time of desire?:

these very folds that the textuality of the text is itself re-marked, and in a movement so “intrinsicate” (V.ii.303) that it can only relate to itself through dividing itself. Indeed, this plurivalent aspect of the text is perhaps most evident in the prodigious throng of its scene changes. Arraigned famously by Samuel Johnson for neglecting “any art of connection or care of disposition,”¹¹⁶ as one of only six other plays in the Folio that are not divided into acts or scenes, the scenic form of Antony and Cleopatra has provoked more critical debate than perhaps any other Shakespearean text. Printed in twenty-nine double-column pages that are in turn folded upon themselves and set in a relation of contiguity rather than sequentiality, the Folio’s peculiar morphology perhaps most astutely bears witness to the scene of writing as the theatre and principle of an endogenous folding. As even the most rigorous bibliographical scholarship has demonstrated, efforts to adduce any reliable clue to a structure that is immanent in the play is more likely to be enveloped in the text’s own “strange forms” in a way that no amount of editorial argumentation can efface : “like the rest of the Folio, [Antony and Cleopatra] was not set page by page in sequence, but by formes, and that the formes were composed and printed ‘from the inside outward.’”¹¹⁷

Let us go, Come;
Our separation so abides and flies,
That thou, residing here, goes yet with me;
And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee.
Away!

(I.iii.102-5)

Moreover, if Caesar is variously characterized as the agent of a “speed” that “carries beyond belief” (III.ii.56) this movement exceeds comprehension because it pertains to a certain mobility that, strictly speaking, has nothing at all to do with movement. Rather, what such speed announces is an “ecstasy of movement” that obliterates movement as such. At once moving and non-orientable, temporality offers itself both here and elsewhere in the text in a doubly contradictory dimension: as heterogeneity and instantaneous disjunction that perhaps most powerfully reveals the cinephilic aspect of the text first noted by John Danby.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in M.R. Ridley, *op. cit.*, xi.

¹¹⁷ John Wilders (ed) Antony and Cleopatra, (London, 1995), Introduction, p.78.

Divided from itself from the start, involuted upon itself in a way that problematizes the illusion of any dialectical egress or regress, Antony and Cleopatra returns to itself only under this obligation of a certain departure from itself. It is in this respect that the spatio-temporal paradoxes of the play open onto the question of a metastasis whose borders question the intangibility of every edge. The much remarked upon “expansive” mood of the text is more obsidional than it is directional, the site of a strange auto-affection that has no signifiable reality that is prior to this undecidable process of opening/closing that reforms itself without let up. If “according to the structure of supplementarity, what is added is always a fold and this addition gives way to a kind of multiple division or subtraction that enriches itself with zeros as it races breathlessly toward the infinite,”¹¹⁸ in Antony and Cleopatra we find an equally breathless logic of execrecent expanse: Antony either agonizes over the “Ten thousand harms” (I.ii.126) that his Egyptian revelry may provoke or is proffering kisses to his lover that are either “many doubled” (I.v.40) or “many thousand” (IV.xv.20); praising Pompey’s martial skill Enobarbus remarks that “you have well deserv’d ten times as much/As I have said you did” (II.vi.77-8); Antony excuses the indignities he has endured at the hands of Rome “and thousands more of semblable import” (III.iii.2-3); preparing for war Antony promises to be “treble-sinew’d, hearted, breath’d” (III.xiii.178); he accuses Cleopatra of having “a million moe” (IV.xiv.18) hearts other than his own and honours Eros as being “Thrice-nobler than myself” (IV.xiv.95); no stranger to hyperbole himself, Enobarbus calculates that Caesar is “twenty times of better fortune,/He is twenty men to one” (IV.ii.4-5).

¹¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, p.262.

There is something more at stake here than, as one critic avers, merely celebrating “the feeling that bigness is wonderful.”¹¹⁹ The sheer exorbitance of Antony and Cleopatra’s multiplications and incessant re-foldings produces vicariously a sense of the text’s materiality rather than simply being revealed by it. In this crucial respect the play offers an exemplary case of what is, according to Derrida, the most enduring if generally unacknowledged ruse of textuality insofar as “it makes us take agglomerates for substances.”¹²⁰ Indeed, we might recall here one critic’s revealing summary of the text as that which “heap[s] up together all that is most unsubstantial, frivolous, vain, contemptible and variable, till the worthlessness be lost in this magnitude, and a sense of the sublime spring from the very elements of littleness.”¹²¹ If it is the case that, as Slavoj Žižek suggests, “the process of ‘transubstantiation’ gets under way when substance itself becomes the predicate of (what was) its own predicate,”¹²² this paradoxical overplus in Antony and Cleopatra also increasingly comes to assume the spatio-temporal contours of the very space of what we call the “subject” as such.

“I have fled myself”

¹¹⁹ Harry Berger, Jr., “Hydra and Rhizome” in Russ McDonald (ed) Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts (London, 1994), pp.79-105, p.92.

¹²⁰ Jacques Derrida, Dissemination (London, 1981), p.246.

¹²¹ Anne Brownell Jameson, Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical and Historical (New York, 1967), p.259.

¹²² Slavoj Žižek, The Plague of Fantasies (London, 1997), p.45.

This principle whereby an identity becomes what it is by realizing its inherent negativity - that is, by taking cognizance of its own death - is one that radically subtends those "strange forms" that are such an invincible preoccupation of the text. Indeed, Antony's bungled attempt at suicide and his protracted death scene locate him more precisely in the domain that Lacan was to call "between the two deaths." Alongside Jonathan Dollimore's observation that Antony's heroic identity is a product of the very structures that render him obsolete and in fact hasten his death, a Lacanian gloss permits the further suggestion that both Antony and Cleopatra are "already dead" and that, to a large extent, the unavowed project of the text is to remind them of this fact.¹²³

If, traditionally, critics have formulated an ambivalent response to Antony's death, it is perhaps because of the generally unacknowledged suspicion that such a death is in fact already upon the hero even before the play can properly be said to begin. Indeed, we may refer here to A.C. Bradley who sought to justify the exclusion of Antony and Cleopatra from the pantheon of the "great tragedies" in precisely these terms: "[When] the splendour [of passion] vanishes, we do not mourn, as we mourn for the love of Romeo or Othello, that a thing so bright and good should die. And the fact that we mourn so little saddens us."¹²⁴

For Bradley, paradoxically, it is our very failure to mourn the death of the lovers that constitutes the only available site of mourning. Indeed, in a text that problematizes the very

¹²³ As numerous critics of the play have long noted, Antony's extended "leave taking" risks descending into comedy. Yet, from a Lacanian perspective, this conspicuous lack of tragic dignity is a symptom of that moment when the subject is reduced to a void of absolute alienation since, according to Lacan, there is no Cause to which he can sacrifice his being (even Cleopatra's death, we should recall, proves itself to be a hoax). Antony's seemingly noble conviction that it is left to "Ourselves to end ourselves" (IV.xiv.19) and Cleopatra's encouragement that "none but Antony/Should conquer Antony" (IV.xv.16-17) merely emphasizes the fact that Antony is deprived of any substantial Destiny that can find support in the symbolic order. Ultimately, in terms of an ethical posture as it is defined by Lacanian psychoanalysis, Antony's suicide may be read literally as an empty gesture that "functions as the index of a subjective deadlock which can no longer express itself in tragic pathos." Slavoj Žižek, The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters, p.117.

¹²⁴ A.C. Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry (Oxford, 1909), p.304.

idea of any initial and initiating point of departure, both Antony and Cleopatra might be said to have always already constituted themselves as their own mourners.¹²⁵

I would also like to suggest here that a more complex relationship obtains between Antony's death(s) and the very possibility of symbolization tout court. While Antony is "already dead" at the level of the symbolic order, crucially this must be accompanied by his actual/biological death if the signifying network is to retain a minimal degree of internal consistency. Lacan's seemingly otiose assertion that everybody must die "at least twice" (Cleopatra, we should recall, is typically exorbitant in this respect, enjoying no fewer than twenty "deaths"), is largely concerned to emphasize the retrospective character of the signifying process. That is, for Lacan any attempt at symbolization/historicization implies an empty place, the exigency of that which is, in fact, a non-historical kernel or structural impasse around which the symbolic order itself comes to be constituted. The crucial dialectical point not to be missed here, of course, is that this deadlock which appears to prevent the symbolic order from constituting itself in its (impossible) synchronous unity is also the retroactive product of the very act of symbolization itself.

Dollimore's suggestion, then, that Antony encodes an identity that is "becoming but not yet residual"¹²⁶ assists in grasping how Antony is so routinely located at the site of what may

¹²⁵ What can be discerned in Bradley's comments then, is a profound dissatisfaction that there is no point of reference in Antony and Cleopatra where the lovers can be rescued from the text's prepossessing posture of "leave-taking." Bearing in mind that Bradley's opprobrium of the text elsewhere is also informed by the perception that it is too often caught in the act of constituting its own fictions, that it fails ultimately to occlude the traces of its own means of production: "in calling Antony and Cleopatra wonderful or astonishing, we appear to be thinking first of the artist and his activity, while in the case of the four famous tragedies it is the product of his activity, the thing presented, that first engrosses us." Quoted in the Introduction to John Drakakis (ed) Antony and Cleopatra: A New Critical Casebook (London, 1993), pp1-25, p.3.

be called a temporal ek-stasis throughout the play. Repeatedly unable to posit an essential identity that inheres in a moment of undivided presence, Antony is either brooding over the fact that Caesar keeps “harping on what I am,/Not what he knew I was” (III.xiii.142-3), or he takes succor from the conviction that “I am Antony yet” (III.xiiii.56): a statement where, in the very gesture of registering his proper name, we find an inflation of the loss that threatens to isolate “Antony” from any designated reference.

Indeed, throughout the text Antony is situated in relation to a certain surplus or variation on the paradox of an “overplus” that we spoke of earlier, and which finds its most concise expression in Enobarbus’s claim that “sometimes, when he is not Antony,/He comes too short of that great property/Which still should go with Antony” (I.i.56-8). Even though this statement is offered as a rebuke, the strange syntax conspicuously draws attention to this contradiction between the universal and the particular. While these remarks appear ostensibly to be saying the opposite, the redoubled references to “Antony” are invoked as markers of identity even when Enobarbus appears to be criticising Antony for his failure to incarnate the predicates (“that great property”) that define the very identity of “Antony” as such. As the rhetorical axis of excess and lack makes clear, Anthony’s identity appears to be made even more resonant at the very point when it encounters itself in its antithetical determination. While Slavoj Žižek argues that the “subject exists only within [a] failed encounter between the Universal and the Particular,”¹²⁷ Enobarbus’ comments here similarly imply that Antony is nothing but a name for this constitutive discord.

¹²⁶ Dollimore, *op. cit.*, p.205.

¹²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor, p.46.

This rhetorical failure to posit a reliable limit of totalization is a recurring motif in the text's efforts to render definitively Antony's "great property," or what is elsewhere enigmatically referred to as his "own particularity" (IV.ix.20). What is often revealed in the play is nothing short of an onto-dramatization of this very contradiction. On the one hand Antony is pure negative universality, a solipsistic identity that makes abstraction of every particular content. According to Caesar he "is the abstract of all faults/That all men follow" (I.iv.10); as a species that appears to encompass its own genus, Antony is similarly referred to as the "man of men" (I.v.72), "the word of war" (II.ii.44). Indeed, this passage of the genus into species is evoked in suitably vivid terms when Antony fantasizes to his soldiers that "I wish I could be made so many men,/And all of you clapp'd up together in/An Antony" (IV.ii.16-18). On the other hand we find in Caesar's comment that Antony "becomes his flaw" (III.xiii.34) the suggestion that Antony is this abstract power of negativity which comes into existence in the very domain of its determinations. In other words, "self identity" here implies the coincidence of an entity with the empty place of its inscription, an "overplus" that becomes incommensurate to any predicate.¹²⁸ The text's rhetoric of transubstantiation is, in this respect, less concerned with any notion of transcendence than in disclosing the politically charged exigencies of how, in Ernesto Laclau's words, "the universal emerges out of the particular not as some principle underlying and explaining the particular, but as an incomplete horizon suturing a dislocated particular identity."¹²⁹

¹²⁸ In terms of the many "economic" metaphors associated with Antony throughout the play, Antony is represented as having so much honour that he can afford to spend it endlessly. That is to say, "excess" is not something that appears to be attached to Antony but that which appears to constitute him originally. Indeed, we could say that Antony, paradoxically, routinely comes to augment his "identity" precisely insofar as he "loses" it.

¹²⁹ Ernesto Laclau, "Universalism, Particularism and the Question of Identity" in *Emancipations* (London, 1996), pp.20-36, p.28. This passage of the genus into the species is also the very figure of over-determination as such; that is, the process whereby "totality" comprises a particular element that embodies its universal structuring principle. And isn't this precisely also the basic paradox of the Lacanian logic of "non-all"? That is, in order to produce the illusion of totality one has to add or subtract (which amounts to the same thing in a differential order) a paradoxical element which "in its

We may suggest, then, that Antony himself is to some extent the embodiment of the text's failure to secure its own temporal homeostasis. Indeed, the sheer ubiquity of the term "yet" in Antony and Cleopatra perhaps most conspicuously announces this relation of the future anterior which, for Lacan, inscribes subjectivity within a self-referential 'short-circuit' as

something that 'will have been,' that is never present...It is always-already 'past,' although it never appeared in the past itself..[it is] constituted...as the result of the way the past's mirroring in the future is mirrored back in the present.¹³⁰

Eluding any moment of pure undivided presence, as simultaneously "residual" and "emergent" Antony's subjectivity constitutively is the inscription of this essential vacillation. Indeed, Cleopatra's dream of Antony not only attempts to remythologize her dead lover, her very effort to do so encodes this strange time of that which "will have been." Dolabella's incredulity towards the queen's enquiry of whether "there was, or might be such a man," (V.ii.94) is further compounded by Cleopatra's response that only serves to reaffirm her initial equivocation: "but if there be, or ever were one such,/It's past the size of dreaming" (ll. 96-7).¹³¹

very particularity, embodies the universality of the genus in the form of its opposite." Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do, p.44.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.15. It is worthwhile recalling here Lacan's account of the relationship between the subject and the signifier: "What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming," Lacan, op. cit., 1977, p.86. At its most basic level, then, subjectivity is nothing other than this very inconsistency of the signifying chain.

¹³¹ Isn't it also possible to discern at the heart of the text's self-reflexive commentaries how the very possibility of theatre itself is mired in this essential contrempe? That is to say, there is an implied degree of convergence between text's problematic inscription of history and the early Jacobean theatre's equally ambivalent role as a producer of significations whose meaning arises apres coup: or, rather, in Cleopatra's strangely apposite term, "extemporally" (V.ii.216). In both cases we are intimately concerned with a relationship between the signifier and symbolization that, in Lacan's words, inscribes a "history [that] is already producing itself on the stage where it will be played out." Jacques Lacan, "Function and Field of Speech and Language' in Ecrits: A Selection, Alan Sheridan trans., (London, 1977), pp.30-113, p.52.

Such revisionist mythmaking is not an uncommon feature of a text that frequently identifies improvisation as the site specific to the emergence of both subjectivity and history: as something that “will have been,” decided afterwards through inscription in the symbolic order. Indeed, we might recall here the victorious Caesar’s determination to record “How hardly I was drawn into this war,/How calm and gentle I proceeded still/In all my writings” (V.i.74-6). Such politically astute sensitivity to the fact that one can become a “tale of oneself only by ceasing to be oneself”¹³² stands in marked contrast to the account of Antony’s suicide which is represented as a defiant act of self-sufficiency that, paradoxically, also comes to flout the very device of textuality as such:

he is dead, Caesar,
Not by a public minister of justice,
Nor by a hired knife, but that self hand
Which writ his honour in the acts it did.

(V.i.19-22)

In other words, the text appears to hint that any symbolic rewriting of the past attests to the presence in the symbolic network of a foreign kernel that can only acquire meaning “after the fact.” As I have argued in earlier chapters, it is precisely this very impossibility of elaborating a continuous passage from genesis into structure that constitutively gives rise to

¹³² Stephen J. Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (London, 1980), p.238. Alternatively, we might recall the posthumous fantasy-scene invoked by Antony “Where souls do couch on flowers, we’ll hand in hand,/And with our sprightly port make the ghost gaze’ (IV.xiv.51-2). This fantasy of an impossible gaze, where Antony “outlives” himself to bear witness to the spectacle of his own death, is a scenario that, according to Slavoj Žižek, provides “a contrario proof that the status of the subject is that of a missing link, of a void which, within the synchronous set, holds the place of its foreclosed diachronous genesis.” Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do, p.198.

every “subject effect.” Indeed, the strange time of passage that we find in Antony’s determination to “let that be left which leaves itself” (III.xi.19-20) implies this essential vacillation between protention and retentional traces so that, in another example of the text’s strange kind of auto-affection, there can be no accession to an event that is not, in a sense, preceded by its already having been left behind.

Bearing in mind here how the colonial discourse of the text would have acquired particular resonance for a Jacobean culture that was itself embarking upon a neo-colonialist project of its own, according to Homi Bhabha this constitutive discord between genesis and structure also inscribes the ambivalent moment of the colonial itself “as the continual dramatization of emergence - of difference ...as the beginning of a history which is repetitively desired.”¹³³ As I have argued, *Antony and Cleopatra* so consistently evokes the very idea of a first time as that which is most enigmatic, that even the moment of Cleopatra’s “death,” “What should I stay - ” (V.ii.312), presents a posture of leave-taking that is suspended upon the tantalizing suggestion that she might, in fact, remain. Similarly, both in the curious lineation of the verse and in the metaphor that he employs, even Caesar’s attempts to negotiate political agreement with Antony locates an “edge” as something that is inscribed upon the curvature of a return:

.... if I knew
 What hoop should hold us staunch, from edge to
 edge
 O’th’ world I would pursue it.

(II.ii.121-4)

¹³³ Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse” in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader*, ed. Stephen Heath (London, 1996), pp.312 -332, p.328.

That is to say, these ambivalent and chiasmic intersections of leaving/following in Antony and Cleopatra more properly open onto the disjunctive dimension of a symbolic order which, in Lacan's words, is itself suspended between "non-being and insisting to be...a symbolic order in travail, in the process of coming, insisting in being realized."¹³⁴

Again, not insignificantly, it is Cleopatra who provides a strangely resonant if complex elaboration of this tension through the example of her seemingly inexplicable attack of amnesia. Prior to Antony's first departure for Rome the queen's obsequies soon spiral into a circuit of negation:

Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it;
 Sir, you and I have loved, but there's not it;
 That you know well. Something it is I would -
 Oh, my oblivion is a very Antony,
 And I am all forgotten!

(I.iii.89-93)

Cleopatra's predicament here (which elaborates yet another case of a character in the ambivalent throes of leave-taking) is exemplary of the psychoanalytico-existential paradox which claims that there is no substantial content to be lost that is previous to the experience of loss itself: i.e. where it is through the very activity of recovering the lost object that "loss" is constituted as such. Poised precariously between Being and Nothing, the speech

¹³⁴ Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis (Cambridge, 1988), p.326.

strives vainly to possess the determination of a “something” whose content endlessly relapses into a “nothing in the form of something.”¹³⁵

In other words, this decidedly enigmatic textual intromission illuminates succinctly the play’s broader examination of the paradoxical way in which being retains its consistency only insofar as it is endlessly posited from the perspective of becoming, i.e. where “being” is nothing but another name for the subject in this essential posture of ‘leave-taking.’ Indeed, Antony’s seemingly contradictory observation that “I have fled myself” (III.x.8) acquires epigrammatic significance here as an account of how subjectivity comes to be only insofar as it coincides with the very moment of its own self-impediment, i.e. the “subject” as it is famously referred to in Lacanian algebra as $\$$.¹³⁶ In other words, Lacan’s assertion that “The already found is already behind, but stricken by something like oblivion”¹³⁷ argues that symbolization constitutively runs behind the signifying chain of production itself so that, effectively, subjectivity is this aseptic space of inscription that the signifier refers to in order to find any measure of consistency.

In this respect, the rhetoric of self-relating negativity so peculiar to Cleopatra is significant beyond her fabled prowess in theatrical self presentation. Cleopatra does not simply reduce

¹³⁵ The dialectical point to be grasped here, however, is that without this constitutive tension, Being and Nothing would in fact coincide and the space of subjectivity itself would be eclipsed as such. In a way that the strange auto-affective dimension of the text perhaps makes most legible, it is the very movement of lost presence that will already have instituted the process of its appropriation.

¹³⁶ Indeed, Slavoj Žižek offers a scenario remarkably similar to Cleopatra’s predicament when he argues that “in order to ‘forget’ (or to ‘lose’) something, one must first forget that there is nothing to forget: [where] this oblivion makes possible the illusion that there is something to forget in the first place” (emphasis added). Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment As A Political Factor, p.60, n.41.

¹³⁷ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.7.

subjectivity to a void, this void is itself constitutively opened up by the very contexts that strive vainly to replenish it. Most obviously so in the barge scene, Cleopatra is indexically registered rather than rhetorically troped by the signifiers whose very movement she in fact constellates. Enobarbus's panegyric that "vilest things/Become themselves in her" (II.ii.238-9) acquires special resonance in a text where the indefinite pronoun as well as the noun "nothing" proliferates.¹³⁸ Cleopatra is structurally homologous here with the deictic function of the "things" that ostensibly "become themselves in her"; she is, in other words, rendered the equivalent of a grammatical shifter wherein the specificity of reference depends upon renewable context. Somewhat appositely, in this respect, Lacan provides a gloss on the elementary "grammar" that informs Freud's account of how the nascent ego's first judgements of attribution are similarly organized around "vilest things":

There are no good and bad object, there is only good and bad, and besides that, there is the Thing. Good and bad already enter into the order of Vorstellung (representation) as indices of that which orients the position of the subject.¹³⁹

Cleopatra is indeed an index of the sublime, but in a characteristically Lacanian sense: precisely insofar as the signifying chain produces its own constitutive impediment in order to maintain the possibility of generating new symbolizations. Enobarbus's exaltation of Cleopatra as that which "Age cannot wither, nor custom stale" (II.ii.235) is particularly suggestive of the way that symbolization is productively aligned to an ahistorical "missing link" that is, paradoxically, unaccounted for by the very synchronic horizon to which it gives rise.

¹³⁸ The ubiquity of its use in Shakespeare (eleven times in all) is surpassed only by King Lear.

¹³⁹ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.78.

It is in this respect it is that the text's rhetoric of "precipitous identification" most astutely bears witness to the inconclusive character of the causal chain. What is perhaps most striking is the sheer number of times where characters fashion their identities not in some positive content but in a purely self-referential signifying form which alludes to a "meaning-to-come." Caesar's insight that man is "ne'er loved till ne'er worth love,/Comes deared by being lacked" (I.iv.43-4) is more than simply a wistful acknowledgement of the fickle quality of public opinion. Rather, examples of this non-synchronous temporality resonate throughout the text in anxieties which reveal that, in the space of symbolic intersubjectivity, it is impossible for characters to ascertain what they are for the other, so that "objective" social identity becomes established through the expedient of "subjective" anticipation. It is through an equally sinuous commentary on "good precedence" that Pompey calculates the political advantage of assassinating his political rivals:

'tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;
mine honour, it.....
 being done unknown,
I should have found it afterwards well done,
But must condemn it now.

(II.vii.77-8; 79-81)

Indeed, Menecrates' paradoxical claim that we "profit by losing of our prayers" (IV.iii.69) suggests that the exigencies of profit and loss enter into a strange kind of symbiosis insofar as, precisely, the substantial content of any act is rendered meaningful only when it is registered in the symbolic order as that which is "found...afterwards." Enobarbus's reflection that "things outward/Do draw the inward quality after them" (III.xiii.32-3) comes

perilously close to acknowledging that it is the symbolic order itself which constitutes the subject's decentred cause in the recursive movement of that which only "will have been."¹⁴⁰

"Let That Be Left Which Leaves Itself"

Caesar's characterization of public opinion as that which "Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide" (I.iv.46-7) is only one of a series of figures in the text that are strangely suggestive of this paradoxical movement that is caught between protension and retention: where "movement" as such threatens to become the site of its own arrest, as something which "rots itself with motion" (II.48). This disymmetry may even be discerned in the scene of humiliation that Antony imagines will be his fate in Rome, when he is placed before "the wheeled seat/Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded/His baseness that ensued" (IV.xiv.76-8). The sinuous grammatical construction here radically undermines any attempt to posit a logical temporal priority between "before" and "after" so that, in a strange sense, the image of being "drawn before" Caesar coincides with the movement of that which comes "after" Caesar.

¹⁴⁰ The increasingly familiar *ennui* that appears to seize most of the Roman protagonists throughout the play might properly be termed "melancholic" insofar as subjectivity is revealed to be installed repeatedly and metonymically in the field of the Other. In a text that, following Freud, routinely implicates loss as "the loss of some abstraction....such as one's country, liberty an ideal and so on," Homi Bhabha's suggestion that melancholia is a necessary symptom of the colonial encounter offers a particularly illuminating gloss on how "loss" is cathected in *Antony and Cleopatra*: "If we take Freud at his word - melancholics display an insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure - then the narrative of melancholia preserves the icon of the Ideal - Nation - but by virtue of identifying with it from a position of loss and absence, exile and migration; the signifying act that gives it meaning cannot be contained or incorporated within the sign." Homi Bhabha, "A Question of Survival: Nations and Psychic States" in *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds*, ed. James Donald (London, 1991), pp.89-105, p.101.

In a text that never ceases to interrogate the logical confusions that arise when, in Cleopatra's words, "good precedence" is both allayed and delayed, this ambivalence appears to inscribe a movement of coming after as the very condition under which anything comes to be in the first place. Most memorably evoked perhaps by the figure of fans where what "they did/Undid" (II.ii.204), this movement does not simply encode the time of that which might come, stay a while and then depart. Rather, "following" Samuel Weber, we could suggest that the text announces the strange time of something that comes to pass, which "arrives only in passing, or inversely, [where] it is only in passing that it arrives."¹⁴¹ The fact that the "movement" of the drama is not uncommonly referred to as, in Speaight's words, "difficult to follow,"¹⁴² acquires added relevance here precisely because in the text following, like leaving, is constituted as the site of a difficulty that is, strictly speaking, non-thematizable. In short: we do not merely encounter a text that is difficult to follow, but a difficult following that the text itself dramatizes as its own immanent and ineradicable difficulty.

Time and again the text variously encodes this metastasis where what ostensibly is left behind is also that which, in a strange sense, is still to come: so that self-leaving becomes the irruptive driving force of life itself. Bemoaning his fate to Eros, for example, Antony claims that "the exigent should come, which now/Is come indeed: when I should see behind me/The inevitable prosecution of/Disgrace and horror" (IV.xiv.63-6). Antony's apparent assurance here that his fate is "come indeed" is complicated almost immediately by reference to an exigency that cannot in fact be arrested in a moment of undivided presence. What is

¹⁴¹ Samuel Weber, Mass Mediaurus: Form, Technics, Media (Stanford, 1996), p.140.

¹⁴² Robert Speaight, Nature in Shakespearian Tragedy (London, 1955), p.138.

“behind” here is not that which assumes a relation of anteriority or even that which may be resumed in the simplicity of a present: it refers, rather, to a past that is still to come.

Following Jacques Derrida we could say that the competing figures of protention and retention here actually “imply each other in strange fashion. What is anticipated in protention disjoins the present from its identity to itself no less than what is retained in the trace.”¹⁴³

Whether brooding upon “these strong Egyptian fetters I must break” (I.ii.111) or how he “must from this enchanting queen break off” (ll.125) the text’s amplified references to breaking, which for Derrida “is inseparable from the concept of differance,”¹⁴⁴ cumulatively reinforce the perception that the very notion of any absolute leaving is something that is, strictly speaking, impossible. Prior to his first “departure” for Rome, for example, we find Antony engaged in a lengthy and anxious performance of leave-taking that only appears to further emphasize his apparent paralysis: “I must haste from hence” (I.ii.129); “I must be gone” (ll.133); “[Rome] Cannot endure my absence” (ll.170); “I shall break the cause of our expedience to the queen” (ll.176); “our quick remove from hence” (ll.194).

In a text that so frequently evinces an awareness of its own constitutive and constituting belatedness, it is Antony and Cleopatra who are most conspicuously revealed to be the retroactive embodiment of their own fictions. Already in many respects the crystallization of their own historical possibility, they serve crucially to illuminate this “difficulty....in conceiving that what is imitated could be still to come with respect to what imitates, that the

¹⁴³ Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, . p.95.

¹⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, p.18.

image can precede the model, that the double can come before the simple.”¹⁴⁵ It is this apparent dysfunction in the trajectory of classical mimesis that most astutely bears witness to the paradox of symbolization itself: of how death can “happen” only insofar as it keeps on happening. Indeed, Caesar’s seemingly contradictory declaration that Cleopatra “hath pursued conclusions infinite/ Of easy ways to die”(V.ii.353-4) is a succinct and strangely articulate comment on how, especially in this text, any event is radically informed by a simultaneity of singularity and repetition that cannot yield to the simplicity of a present: so that “death” is always already co-opted as the sustaining force of the symbolic order itself. In this respect, Antony and Cleopatra discloses representation as that which “can defend itself against death only through an economy of death, through deferment, repetition, reserve - [so that] it is the idea of a first time which becomes enigmatic.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, Cleopatra’s determination to engineer a suicide that is “after the high Roman fashion” recalls the less than noble example of Antony’s suicide which, intended to “o’ertake” Cleopatra, actually “follows” a death that supersedes him. In other words, what Antony putatively “follows” is an example that, strictly speaking, follows him.

Similarly, delivering her property up to Rome Cleopatra exhorts Caesar to behold “How pomp is follow’d! mine will be yours,/ And should we shift estates, yours would be mine” (V.ii.150-1). Again, the chiasmic tension between leaving/following discloses how what appears as a limit of the point of departure is already the determination of a certain kind of following, the extreme of its negative relationship.¹⁴⁷ Cleopatra’s remembrance of Antony’s

¹⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, Alan Bass trans. (London, 1978), p.202.

¹⁴⁷ There are several examples in the text of this paradox. Caesar, for example, complains that “I wash my brain and it grow fouler” (II.vii.94), while Pompey predicts that in the concord between

erotic presence as “dolphin-like” (V.ii.89) most vividly suggests this undulating process of transgression in which a surface is exceeded, but where that very excess comes retroactively to encounter and augment its source.¹⁴⁸ In fact, this idea is brought into even sharper focus when Caesar resolves to “take my leave,” an observation that prompts Cleopatra to remark that “[Caesar] may through all the world: ‘tis yours..” (V.ii.132-3). Addressed as it is to “the universal landlord” (III.xiii.72) Cleopatra explicitly draws attention here to the way that imperialism is itself an expression of the onto-dramatic problem of leaving/following: Caesar so appropriates all space that his departure from one location is coterminous with his arrival in another. And, in another variation of this paradox, we find that Enobarbus remains a “follower” of Antony even in the act of becoming the master-leaver:

Forgive me in thine own particular,
But let the world rank me in register
A master-leaver, and a fugitive:
O Antony! O Antony!

(IV.ix.20-23)

Caesar and Antony “That which is the strength of/their amity shall prove the immediate author of/their variance” (II.vii.124-7).

¹⁴⁸ For example, Caesar remarks of Antony’s dwindling military fortunes that “when valour preys on reason,/It eats the sword it fights with” (III.xiii.199-200) while Antony fantasizes that to “bathe my dying honour in the blood/ Shall make it live again (IV.ii.3-6). A similar paradox appears to be at issue in Enobarbus’s description of how Cleopatra “having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted...And, breathless, power breathe forth” (II.ii.230-32). In other words, it is precisely when breathing is on the verge of “leaving” its own condition of possibility that it also finds its most pronounced aspect of articulation. We might recall here that for Lacan the unconscious indicates a topology of “gaping, flickering, an alternating suction... the structure of that which closes is inscribed in a geometry wherein space is reduced to a combining: strictly, it is what is called an edge.” Jacques Lacan, “Position of the Unconscious” in Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, ed. Richard Feldstein et. al., trans. Bruce Fink (Albany, 1995), pp.259-83, p.267. Between subject and other, then, the unconscious is this breaking edge that offers glimpses of the subject only as something that is a flickering in eclipses, the “subject” as that which constitutively is this topological paradox.

If, as I have argued, this strange movement of incerto tempore finds itself in close proximity to writing in the text it is insofar as writing condenses the enigma of this ungraspable anteriority of the beginning again in relation to every power to begin: “the quest for a rightful beginning, an absolute point of departure, a principal responsibility.”¹⁴⁹ The constitutive belatedness of that which defers presence, of that which becomes conceivable only on the basis of deferred presence, also inscribes the paradoxical “movement” of a loss that will always already have set in motion the process of its re-appropriation: a “bounty” that grows “the more by reaping” (V.ii.86).¹⁵⁰

Again, it is the barge scene that perhaps makes most legible how signification “follows” the sound and echo of its ongoing amplitude: i.e. carried over into a mimesis where, if we can risk such a formulation, imitation leaves what it ostensibly follows by exceeding it. In an image that most powerfully conveys this dialectic of voiding-and-filling, the water vainly tries to keep up with the gashes produced by the silver oar

Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes.

(II.ii.195-7)

¹⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (London, 1982), p.6.

¹⁵⁰ The kind of “metastasis” or spatio-temporal paradox that I have in mind here is nowhere more effectively addressed than in Derrida’s comments on the trace: “..leaving the trace is also to leave it, to abandon it, not to insist upon it as a sign...In the concept of trace is inscribed in advance the retreat [re-trait] of effacement. The trace is inscribed in being effaced, and leaving the traced wake of its effacement in the re-treat....The word ‘leave’ in the locution ‘leave a trace’ now seems to be charged with the whole enigma. It would no longer announce itself starting from anything other than the trace, and especially not from a letting-be. Unless letting-be be understood otherwise, following the sign the trace makes to it where it is allowed to be effaced..” Jacques Derrida, “At This Very Moment in This work Here I Am,” in A Derrida Reader: Between The Blinds, ed. Peggy Kamuf, trans. Ruben Berezdevin (New York, 1991), pp. 403-39, p.426.

Mark and erasure, trace and loss: to leave and yet remain, the remainder that leaving leaves. Indeed, we may relate the text's topological network of wounds, gaps and gashes to Derrida's discussion of the punctum as that which punctures space and, in as much as it is unlocatable, it is not just a particular space that it punctures, but the very sense of space itself. According to Derrida the punctum is heterogeneous to space and yet, at the same time, is not simply opposed to space. It leaves the definition of place behind, but it is only in being left behind, only in the wound that marks the puncture, that there is a sense of place: "a wound no doubt comes in (the place of the point signed by singularity, in (the) place of its very instant (stigme), of its point. But in (the) place of this event, the place is left."¹⁵¹

In other words, what is left behind, the trace of the trace, is place. It is, perhaps appropriately, "the market-place" (III.vi.3) which most powerfully condenses this sense of a place that falls infinitely outward into an open economy where voiding and filling, presence and absence, profit and loss enter into a decidedly equivocal relation. Enobarbus recalls that before Antony's first meeting with Cleopatra

The city cast
Her people out upon her; and Antony,
Enthron'd I'the market place, did sit alone,
Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature.

(II.ii.211-18)

¹⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" in Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty, ed. Hugh Silverman (London, 1988), pp.259-296, p.295.

What is left here, after even space has gone to follow Cleopatra, is leaving itself. Yet this is a leaving that cannot leave entirely, for the non-remainder creates a vacuum, a non-place that takes place as a “a gap in nature” (ll.218). Leaving’s leftover (what leaving leaves behind), then, is leaving itself – what remains in the mobile reality of its own possibility.

In a text where identity so routinely comes to augment itself through being divided from itself, through losing itself, perhaps all that is indeed left behind, as Cleopatra remarks, are “cinders” (V.ii.172). For Derrida, of course, “cinders” become trace, the incineration of experience, “remains without remaining [...] a remainder without a remainder” that always threatens to be blown into abhorring.¹⁵² Yet as Martin Frobisher’s strange discovery perhaps most powerfully revealed, what “remains” is always already enjoying the miracle of its own transformation - into nothing less than the very stuff of history itself.

¹⁵² Jacques Derrida, “There is No One Narcissism” in Jacques Derrida: Points....Interviews, 1974-1994, ed. Elizabeth Weber (California, 1995), pp.196-216, p.209.

Conclusion

Shakespeare, Enjoyment and the Law

The Real Thing

What's in a name? In a recent advertising campaign for its soft drink the Coca Cola company undertook a radical rewriting of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Just at the moment when the star-cross'd lovers are about to perform the exchange of love's faithful vow, Juliet decides to jilt Romeo in favour of a soft drink and then announces to the camera that you "Can't beat the feeling...Coke." For John Drakakis this example is adduced as evidence of the way that the "Shakespeare myth" authorizes a "combination of universal culture and global capitalism locked in an arabesque of mutual validation."¹ From a psychoanalytical perspective, however, there is something more at issue here than a potentially counter-hegemonic clash of cultural registers.

At one level the advertisement discloses how desire gets under way around a locus of nonsense; in other words, Coca-Cola has become such a successful mass media symbol insofar as, in a succession of campaigns, the very seductiveness of its appeal is staged in the

¹ John Drakakis, "Shakespeare in Quotations," in Studying British Culture: An Introduction, ed. Susan Bassnet (London, 1997), pp.53-67, p.60.

very negation of “meaning” itself. Coca-cola, as this particular example suggests, is the bearer of a surplus jouissance - “Can’t beat the feeling” – so that “Coke” is, effectively, a filler for this very void in meaning itself. What appears to be at issue here is the paradoxical function of what Lacan was to call the “pure signifier.” As Slavoj Žižek has argued, “The only possible answer to the question ‘What is Coke?’ is already given in the advertisements; it is the impersonal ‘it’ (‘Coke, this is it!’) - ‘the real thing,’ the unattainable X, the object-cause of desire.”² To this we should add that, more recently, the advertising slogan has been condensed further into the vaguely menacing injunction that Lacan identifies explicitly with the pressure imposed by the superego: “Enjoy!” (Jouis !).³

Do we not also find here an elaboration of Lacan’s formula for fantasy (S (O) a) at its most basic level: i.e. where the subject (\$) finds in an object (a) the condensed “cause” of its desire? If the tragic dilemma of Shakespeare’s lovers is posed in the perplexing question of “What’s in a name?,” the Coke advertisement alleviates this ontological uncertainty precisely insofar as the “object-Coke” takes the place of this impasse in the symbolic order in its role as the “Real Thing,” the materialized incarnation of jouissance itself. Moreover, is it merely a coincidence that it is specifically Juliet who, through a mysterious smile and a wink at the camera, appears to have some privileged access to this enjoyment? If, according to Lacan, what endows the symbolic order (the Law) with meaning and authority is also what irretrievably bars it, it is significant that it is “Woman” who is placed here at the point of this inherent lack that Coke (as object a) comes to cover. For Lacan, of course, this point

² Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London, 1989), p.96.

³ “Nothing forces anyone to enjoy (jouir) except the superego. The superego is the imperative of jouissance - Enjoy!” Jacques Lacan, Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (London, 1998), p.3.

of the lacking foundation of the Law has an intrinsic relation with femininity and the non-existence of “Woman”: “The woman relates to S ($\frac{A}{\bar{A}}$), which means that she is already doubled, and is not all.”⁴

The “joke” implicit in the advertisement is, of course, that Juliet chooses Coke over pursuing a “meaningful” relationship with Romeo. What our Lacanian reading would suggest, rather, is that “Coke” itself is a sublime object precisely insofar as it dissimulates the less appealing knowledge that “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship.”⁵ In short, Coke is nothing but the embodiment of a non-dialectizable remainder that haunts the symbolic order from within and which forever prevents a “natural” relationship to obtain between man and woman. For Lacan every “love story” is in fact a mirage that attempts to fill out the void of this impossibility of any “relationship” between the sexes. “Coke” qua object a literally puts itself in the place of what cannot be glimpsed of the Other: “object a plays the role...of that which takes the place of the missing partner.”⁶ The point, then, of Lacan’s well-known statement that there is no sexual relationship is precisely that the subject’s relationship to the Other is always inadequate, even perverse, insofar as the subject relates to the Other as object a qua the embodiment of some excessive jouissance. Borrowing a formulation from Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, we could say that the advertisement implicitly acknowledges the fact that “it takes three to love: the lover, the beloved, and the object a that causes the fantasy of

⁴ Quoted in Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne: Feminine Sexuality, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, (London, 1982), p.152-3.

⁵ Jacques Lacan, Encore, p.34. Lacan supplements this statement with contention that “What makes up for the sexual relationship is, quite precisely, love,” p.45.

⁶ Ibid., p.63.

love.”⁷ For Lacan, moreover, it is precisely on the basis of this impasse “that love is put to the test.”⁸

Let us turn our attention here to a point of reference a little closer to Shakespeare’s play where, in The Anatomy of Melancholy, Robert Burton recounts a scenario which he regards as endemic to the fascination of falling in love:

Many lovers confess, when they came in their mistress’ presence, they could not hold off their eyes, but looked steadily on her, inconnivo aspectu, with much eagerness and greediness, as if he would look through, or should never have enough sight of her: Fixis ardens obtutubus hoeret [his eyes clung to her with fixed and burning gaze]. So she will do by him, drink to him with her eyes, nay, drink him up, devour him, swallow him.⁹

Burton’s suggestion that the male voyeur is transfixed by his beloved, precisely by his attempts to “look through” the surface spectacle, indicates that his desire is motivated by something that remains inapprehensible at the level of vision. According to Lacan voyeurism is concerned less with desire than the function of the scopic drive, of an attempt to look at something that cannot in fact be seen:

[...] what is the subject trying to see? What he is trying to see, make no mistake, is the object as absence. What the voyeur is looking for and finds is

⁷ Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, “Plato’s Symposium and the Lacanian Theory of Transference: Or, What Is Love?” in South Atlantic Quarterly, (1989), 88, 4, pp.725-55, p.744. Moreover, this is also the force of Lacan’s otherwise obscure comment in his unpublished Seminar from 1974, where he makes the claim that “If something ex-ists with respect to something else, it is precisely inasmuch as it is not coupled, but rather ‘tripled’ to it, if you will allow me this neologism.” Quoted in Bruce Fink, The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance (Chichester, 1997), p.195, n.34

⁸ Jacques Lacan, Encore, p.144.

⁹ Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy (London, 1972), p.139.

merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain. There he will phantasize any magic of presence...¹⁰

In other words, what is at stake in the encounter between the lovers is a relationship toward the gaze in a Lacanian sense: i.e. the blind spot in the field of vision whose elision, precisely, renders it the Real “cause” of desire. Denied the gaze of the constituting Other the love relation dramatizes the predicament of a subject that is looked at from somewhere other than the position from which one sees. The attempt of Burton’s lover to “look through” what is offered to his eye is precisely such a vain attempt to overcome this constitutive split between the eye and the gaze, to see oneself from the place of the Other. To avoid psychosis, it is necessary that the subject be confounded in its attempts to dialectize this antinomy which for Lacan is, famously, the ontological snag around which all love turns: “When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that - You never look at me from the place from which I see you.”¹¹

In Burton this opacity of the object locates woman at a paradoxical deadlock within the scopic economy: at the same time woman is all surface spectacle, “counterfeit, composed and artificial...[who] inveigles and deceives,” and she is the unfathomable abyss where “without doubt, there is some secret loadstone...a magnetic power, a natural inbred affection, which moves our concupiscence.”¹² Can we not detect in this reference to a “secret loadstone” the phantasmatic “stuff” of jouissance that Lacan also referred to as a secret treasure or agalma: that within the subject that is “more” than the subject and, precisely

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.182.

¹¹ Lacan, op. cit., p. 103.

¹² Burton op. cit., p.87.

insofar as it eludes cognitive grasp at the level of empirical content, becomes the driving force of desire? For Lacan beyond love, which in essence is narcissistic, there is desire, caused by this hidden *agalma*. Which is to say that beyond the dressed-up image, there is the residue, i.e. the object *a* which makes every image “hold”: “his eyes clung to her with fixed and burning gaze.”¹³

The illusion that pertains to a *qua* surplus enjoyment is the illusion that, behind it, there is the lost substance of *jouissance*. Both “woman” and the “object” deceive in a Lacanian way: not because they are a deceitful substitutes for the Real, but precisely because they invoke the impression of some substantial real behind the semblance. Indeed, John Herrick, a contemporary of Burton, concludes his own ruminations “Upon Some Women” with the charge that they are “False in legs, and false in thighes;/False in breast, teeth haire, and eyes:/False in head, and false enough;/ Only true in shreds and stuffe.”¹⁴ Again, “stuffe” here must be read in the light of Lacan’s well known reference to the object *a* as pure semblance, the phantasmatic “stuff” of the subject which is “a substance caught in the net of the shadow, and which, robbed of its shadow-swelling volume, holds out once again the tired lure of the shadow as if it were substance.”¹⁵ Beauty here becomes a dissimulation, a lure that protects the subject from directly confronting the nullity that *is* “woman.” For Burton too female beauty is also that which, if approached too closely, puts the lover in danger of being engulfed in the abyss of *jouissance*: to “drink him up, devour him, swallow him.” Let us

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.139.

¹⁴ Michael Davis ed, *John Herrick: A Selection* (London, 1967), p.56.

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, “Subversion of the subject,” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977) pp.292-324, pp.315-16.

now, briefly, develop some of these issues a little further through more explicit reference to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.

"It Had To Be You"

Romeo's first encounter with Juliet offers, in fact, an even more articulate example of the way that the gaze comes to function as a "cause" of desire in amorous discourse. After inquiring of her identity Romeo then offers what is by now a familiar panegyric:

...she doth teach the torches to burn bright.
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear -
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear

(I.v.44-7)

Presented as a site of excessive iridescence Juliet, like the jewel to which she is punningly compared, is the site of a potentially oppressive visuality. Indeed in his seminars on the function of the gaze Lacan also remarks that "the point of the gaze always participates in the ambiguity of the jewel."¹⁶ Moreover, is not the idealization of Juliet here triggered by the dissimulation of that other "precious object" Lacan was to call the agalma, the kernel that is in the beloved something more than the beloved herself precisely insofar as it eludes escapes

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.96.

any (specular) structure of exchange?¹⁷ Significantly, Lacan claims that the lover most often uses this object “as a stopper”¹⁸ which, by its fascinating and eblouissant presence attempts to render invisible the constitutive lack in the Other qua the symbolic order.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, then, do we not find in Romeo’s perplexing conceit that Juliet “hangs upon the cheek of night/As a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear” (ll.45-6) a particularly anxious form of realignment around this absence? In the reference to the Ethiop we not only find a racially inflected adaptation of the text’s competing master tropes of light and dark, Juliet is also located ambivalently at a site both of exoticism and strangeness, of fascination and radical alterity. Moreover, in the conceit’s “metaphorical” displacement from the eye to the ear (that other privileged erotogenic zone which, for Lacan, is also a localized site of jouissance) Juliet comes to function quite literally here as a “stopper” for the hole in the whole: a surrogate for the void in the Other that is the subject’s constitutive “cause.”¹⁹

¹⁷ In his discussion of Plato’s Symposium Lacan redefined the agalmata (the ‘jewel’ of identification) as the agalma insofar as beyond love, which in essence is narcissistic, there is desire, caused by this hidden agalma. Beyond the imaginary features of the beloved there clings a residue, i.e. the object a which makes every image ‘hold.’

¹⁸ According to Michel Silvestre, when confronted with this object the lover “can either try to encircle it or to stuff it with a stopper.” Michel Silvestre, Demain la psychanalyse (Paris, 1987), p.301.

¹⁹ Bearing in mind here Lacan’s definition of sublimation as “the elevation of the object to the dignity of the Thing,” Romeo’s conceit was already part of the literary topoi of Elizabethan England. In Amoretti, for example, Edmund Spenser not only characterizes his beloved as something that is infused with an aura of unreal wealth, the idealizing fiction of her “secret treasure” brings another kind of surplus into play, the one referred to in Lacan’s notion of plus-de-jour. As the following extract demonstrates, desire circulates primarily around the orificial gaps in the body’s integrity that procures this surplus enjoyment. For Lacan, of course, surplus enjoyment is foremost a bodily jouissance whose role is to fill out those orifices that constitute the erotogenic zones:

For loe my love doth in her selfe containe
all this worlds riches that may farre be found:
if Saphyres, loe her eies be Saphyres plaine,
if rubies, loe her lips be Rubies sound:
if Pearles, hir teeth be pearles both pure and round. (Sonnet 15)

In Romeo's metaphor that Juliet "hangs upon the cheek of night" the gaze is organized around a constitutive lack that insists, quite literally, in a relation of radical suspension; as a point of integument which constitutes at once the limit of and the access to jouissance.²⁰ Indeed, Romeo's suspicion that "some consequence yet hanging in the stars" (I.iv.107) may be the omen of some disaster finds a bitter echo at the close of the text when, preparing for suicide, Juliet speculates whether "some poison doth yet hang" on her lover's lips (V.iii.165).²¹ The play of desire not only takes place around an ambiguous spatial interval, this disjunctive relation also announces the topological paradox proper to love itself, succinctly formulated by Mladen Dolar as "the junction of a contingent exterior with the most intimate exterior."²² For Lacan not only is all subjectivation coterminous with a moment of suspension of subjectivity to the Other, "falling in love" is in many ways a paradigmatic example of the way that the subject is in fact an effect of this suture.

Famously, Romeo articulates what is perhaps the most enduring expression of "love at first

²⁰ It is important to recall here Lacan's definition of the object a as the primordial traces of jouissance that 'fall from the body' when the subject accedes to the symbolic order. In his seminar on the gaze Lacan claims that "the subject is strictly speaking determined by the very separation that determines the break of the a, that is to say, the fascinatory element introduced by the gaze." The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.118. What we should again bear in mind then, apropos Lacan's discussion of the object a is that we are dealing with a concept that comprises itself and its own dissimulation. Object a is simultaneously the pure lack, the void around which desire turns and which, as such, causes the desire; and the imaginary element which conceals this void, renders it invisible by filling it out. The point, of course, is that there is no lack without this little piece of the real, this element filling it out. The rich jewel that causes Romeo's desire conforms precisely to this paradox of a filler that is sustained by that which it dissimulates.

²¹ Indeed, the word 'hang' resonates throughout the text in a way that constellates implicitly around this dual association with love and death. Immediately prior to his duel Mercutio somewhat portentously claims that he will "be hanged" if Romeo wears Tybalt's livery (III.i.56); deaf to Friar Laurence's calls for caution Romeo wishes to "Hang up philosophy" (III.iii.57); equally unresponsive to her father's will an exasperated Capulet inveighs against his daughter to "Hang thee young baggage" and to "hang I Beg! Starve! Die in the streets" (III.v.160; 192); the musicians wish to "hang" Peter (IV.v.140) and Romeo observes of the apothecary that "Contempt and beggary hangs upon thy back" (V.i.71).

²² Mladen Dolar, "At First Sight" in Gaze and Voice as Love Objects, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, (London, 1996), pp.129-53, p.129.

sight”: “Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight./For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night” (ll.51-2). The gaze operates here in terms of the dissimulation of a foreign body in the signifying chain which makes possible a seamless reconstitution of contingency into necessity. Following Roland Barthes we could say that, as the archetypal lover, Romeo discloses this “deception in amorous time” insofar as “love at first sight is always spoken in the past tense it might be called an anterior immediacy.”²³ Commenting more specifically on the Lacanian implications of this motif, Mladen Dolar argues that every evocation of love at first sight is, in fact, a compromise formation produced by the structural impasse of the gaze qua object a:

If the gaze comes to fill the lack of sense in that senseless fortune, it also creates it by filling it, for it is only looking backward that one sees the lack, and only as a lack destined to be filled. Life didn’t ‘make sense’ before, but now, suddenly, it does.²⁴

Can we not also discern in Dolar’s analysis here the libidinal traces of Lacan’s “mirror stage,” that primordial (and ambivalent) moment of jubilation when the child falls in love with its own image?²⁵ In other words, Lacan’s drama of recognition also implicates the function of the gaze in a strange embodiment of fate: that is, as a time loop where the subject, in a sense, comes to be what it recognizes itself always to have been. Perhaps even more pointedly, in one of his later seminars Lacan was to assert that “the displacement of negation, from contingency to necessity, is the point of suspension to which all love attaches

²³ Roland Barthes, A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments (London, 1990), p.194.

²⁴ Mladen Dolar, “At First Sight” in Gaze and Voice as Love Objects, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (London, 1996), pp.129-53, p.134.

²⁵ “The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation..” Écrits: A Selection, p.4.

itself.”²⁶ In a text where any idealized vision of romantic “destiny” variously comes into conflict with increasingly urgent social and political contingencies, it is precisely this passage from what Lacan calls the tuche to the automaton that may be regarded as the illusion proper to love qua response to the real.²⁷ That is to say, the automatism of love is set in motion when some contingent, ultimately indifferent, (libidinal) object finds itself occupying a pre-given fantasy -place.²⁸

Indeed, Hollywood’s most recent version of the play is, perhaps surprisingly, quite revealing in this respect. In Baz Luhrmann’s adaptation the initial exchange of glances between the lovers is in fact mediated through the semi-transparent and distorting glass of an aquarium. Momentarily the face of each lover is anamorphically distended before they come to gaze “directly” upon each other. At least from a heuristic standpoint, this scene offers a suggestive gloss upon Lacan’s repeated assertions that love is a kind of anamorphosis: an

²⁶ Quoted in Gregory L. Ulmer, Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys (London, 1992), p.212.

²⁷ Lacan argues that tuche (‘as if by chance’) is “the function of the real as encounter - the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter.” The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, p.55.

²⁸ Moreover, this automatism does not only operate primarily by the gaze, it is also deflected toward the voice, that other privileged Lacanian object. In the balcony scene it is precisely the case that even “a few sentences overheard in the dark” is enough to become the phantasmatic stuff that makes the lovers’ passion hold:

I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheard’st, ere I was aware,
My true-love passion; therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love
Which the dark night hath so discovered.

(II.ii.102-6)

optical illusion that tries to give body to the substance of enjoyment through “a construction around emptiness that designates the place of the Thing.”²⁹

In other words, this detail in Luhrmann’s film is in many ways strictly homologous to Lacan’s insistence that it is precisely such a screen of fantasy that, while seemingly posing as an obstacle between the subject and its desire, actually confers ontological consistency on the object of desire as such. Moreover, it is also in this sense that anamorphosis, as I have suggested at several points in preceding arguments, is closely aligned to the temporal short circuit that, in this case, also underpins the paradigm of “love at first sight.” In both cases, what is ostensibly assumed to be the “cause” of desire is in fact revealed to be posited by desire itself: “The paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause, i.e. the object a is an object that can be perceived only by a gaze ‘distorted’ by desire, an object that does not exist for an ‘objective’ gaze.”³⁰ More pointedly, what Romeo and Juliet reveals time and again is that “love,” rather than extending beyond the reach of the Law (as most conservative representations of the play would have it) is, in a very radical sense, something that arises precisely in response to the fact the Law (qua the symbolic order) is already truncated from within, invaded by a kernel of non-sense that prevents it from ever coinciding fully with its own “explicit” rules.

²⁹ Jacques Lacan, “Courtly love as anamorphosis” in The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: 1959-1960, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London, 1992), pp.139-55, p.140.

“In You More Than You”

It is a well known fact that Romeo and Juliet is one of Shakespeare's most punning plays. M.M. Mahood observes that “even a really conservative count yields a hundred and seventy-five quibbles.”³¹ In The Arte of English Poesie (1589) George Puttenham has occasion to remark upon “your figures Auricular that worke by Surplusage.”³² Puttenham's other reference to punning is described in terms of “vicious speech” in which “we speake or write doubtfully and that the sence may be taken two ways” which he calls “the ambiguous or figure of sence incertaine.”³³ It is precisely this ambiguous “sense” that is the focus of the sadistic wordplay which takes place between Sampson and Gregory at the beginning of Romeo and Juliet:

Sampson: I will be civil with the maids,
I will cut off their heads.

Gregory: The heads of the maids?

Sampson: Ay, the heads of the maids or their maidenheads;
take it in what sense thou wilt.

Gregory: They must take it in sense that feel it.

(I.i.21-6)

What is immediately discernible in this exchange is the suggestion of how an illicit pleasure is reflexively produced by the fact that language contradicts its own ostensible claims to

³⁰ Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture (London, 1997), p.12.

³¹ M.M. Mahood, Shakespeare's Wordplay (London, 1979), p.56.

³² Quoted in John Drakakis “Jew. Shylock is my name.’: Speech-prefixes in The Merchant of Venice as symptoms of the early modern,” unpublished paper, p.15.

³³ Ibid., p.15.

univocal meaning or “sense.” Strictly speaking, what is at issue here is not so much “pleasure” as such, as a stain of jouissance which, as Ellie Ragland astutely observes, “marks language as an essence that bespeaks a ‘beyond’ in language itself, conveying the ‘sense’ of a meaning that is always more (or less) than the words spoken.”³⁴ We might even advance the claim here that punning is possible precisely because language is inhabited by a residue of nonsense which, for Lacan, also inevitably brings words into a certain relationship with jouissance. Indeed, Lacan frequently punned jouissance as “jouis-sense” to indicate how “pleasure” and “sense” constitutively infringe upon each other so that, in the words of Stephen Melville, the joint problematic here might be called one of “‘enjoy-meant,’ combining the logic of pleasure with the pleasure of logic.”³⁵

Like Puttenham, then, Lacan was also intrigued by the effects of an ineradicable “surplusage” that inheres within words and which, perhaps more menacingly, threatens to derail language as a purely neutral machinery of symbolic mediation. To this end, Lacan coined the term lalangue to refer to those inconsistent sprouts of enjoyment (exemplified above all through punning and wordplay) which violates the formal constraints of language: “That the unconscious is structured like a language, can be said precisely because the effects of lalangue, which are a knowledge already there, expand beyond all that the being who speaks is able to utter.”³⁶ In short, the subject is able to understand jokes, slips of the tongue and so

³⁴ Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, “An Overview of the Real: With Examples From Seminar I” in Reading Seminars I and II: The Paris Seminars in English, ed. Richard Feldstein et. al. (New York, 1996), pp.192-211, p.195.

³⁵ Stephen Melville, “Psychoanalysis and the Place of Jouissance” in Critical Inquiry, 13, Winter (1987) pp.349-370, p.351.

³⁶ Jacques Lacan, Encore, p.33.

on, not because of language but because of lalangue.³⁷ For Lacan the effects of lalangue are most palpable in those rarified occasions when the locutionary markers of “love” and “hate” expose the symbolic structure as both porous and inadequate to the task of representation. That is to say, the symbolic order can never achieve its full completion and close its circle because its very constitution involves a point at which “meaning” stumbles against its own boundary and suspends itself in enjoy-meant. In a text whose formal deficiencies have often been excused on the grounds of the “sheer might of [its] poetry,”³⁸ we might profitably recall here Lacan’s assertion that lalangue indexes both a lack of symbolic sufficiency and an irredeemably “poetic” facility of seeking to convert this lack into a surplus:

The map of lalangue is the map of the ‘points of poetry’ where lack is cancelled, where it becomes excess, and where what is impossible to utter is said in a poem.³⁹

Moreover, in many respects lalangue indexes the emergence of a social pathology hinted at in Mahood’s suggestion that “our pleasure [in wordplay] comes from the verbal ingenuity itself, and the impulses to be aggressive, exhibitionist or sceptical [...] because they act as a safety valve for these anti-social instincts.”⁴⁰ It is necessary to add to this account that, conceived as a species of lalangue, wordplay in fact offers a glimpse into what we earlier

³⁷ Slavoj Žižek, by way of Hegel, offers an even more pithy definition: ‘language [lalangue] is language in so far as its external boundary that guarantees its identity-with-itself is reflected-into-it and assumes the shape of an inherent impediment that transforms its field into an inconsistent, ‘not-all’ totality.’ Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor (London, 1994), p.111. For an exemplary extended introduction to Lacan’s idea of lalangue and how it is pivotal to the way that the Law stumbles upon this constitutive limit, see Renata Salecl, “See No Evil, Speak No Evil: Hate Speech and Human Rights” in Radical Evil ed. Joan Copjec (London, 1996), pp.150-69.

³⁸ H.B. Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy (Cambridge, 1948), p.62.

³⁹ Jacques Lacan, Encore, p.75.

⁴⁰ Mahood, op. cit., p.29.

referred to as the “illegal” underpinning of the social Law itself; that is, how symbolic authority is rendered efficacious by an obscene underside that Lacan calls the superego. Insofar as the superego qua lalangue discloses the intrusion of enjoyment into the field of ideology, the opposition of symbolic Law and superego assists in helping us to clarify the constitutive tension that obtains between ideological meaning and enjoyment: “symbolic law guarantees meaning, whereas superego provides enjoyment which serves as the unacknowledged support of meaning.”⁴¹

Indeed, we might recall here that the childish baiting by Sampson and Gregory is initiated under the very sign of the law: “Let us take the law of our sides” (II.36). Gregory’s subsequent imputation of disgrace, “I will bite my thumb at them”(II.40), not only instigates an argument around the “meaning” of this gesture, it also betrays a more primal kind of “infantile” behaviour insofar as “lalangue is something that one sucks, it is the maternal part of language that undergoes jouissance.”⁴² And doesn’t Puttenham’s reference to “vicious speech” find its more contemporary counterpart in the phenomenon of “hate speech” which

⁴¹ Slavoj Žižek, The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality (London, 1994), pp.60-61.

⁴² Juan-David Nasio, Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan, trans. David Pettigrew (New York, 1998), p.50. We should also bear in mind here that, for all its poetry, elsewhere in the text it is possible to discern evocations of this primordial state. Significantly, it is immediately before she recounts Juliet’s first attempts at speech (her accession to the symbolic order) that the Nurse also nostalgically reflects upon a time when Juliet “did taste the wormwood on the nipple/Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool” (I.iii.30-31). Moreover, this ineluctable association between satisfaction and loss (i.e. death) that Lacan repeatedly aligns with jouissance perhaps finds its most vivid expression in Friar Laurence’s sinister ruminations upon the nurturing and death-dealing properties of “The earth that’s nature’s mother is her tomb:/What is her burying grave, that is her womb;/And from her womb children of divers kind/We sucking on her natural bosom find” (II.iii.5-8).

also operates “via a passing obscene innuendo or an aggressive joke [that] makes itself heard in the interstices of the ‘civilised’ democratic discourse”⁴³

Moreover, both the implicit and explicit violence directed toward the body throughout the text (most conspicuously so in the bawdy wordplay) invariably alight upon the orificial gaps in bodily integrity or object a that in fact “bespeak” the loss of jouissance (which is written in Lacanian algebra as $J \overline{A}$). Paradoxically, then, these objects variously become sites of “identification” in the text precisely insofar as they are non specularizable; i.e. to the extent that they point beyond a purely dyadic (Imaginary) structure of exchange. Lacan, of course, named these points of identification, that are bifurcated between body parts and loss itself, “unary features.” Crucially, these unary features (le trait unaire) link identification not to an “image” but to a “signifier,” to some trait in the other that is wholly depersonalized and without any content. In other words, stripped of every symbolic determination, the “unary feature” compels identification at a point of pure difference (which, in Lacanese, is notated as the signifier $S1$): i.e. in those “idiosyncratic” details or gestures which testifies to the way that the other satisfies his or her enjoyment.

For example, do we not find in Mercutio’s reproachful rejoinder to Benvolio’s “talk of peace” a demonstration of how the impulse for violence is, quite literally, “caused” by those

⁴³ Slavoj Žižek, The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters (London, 1996), p.108. In other words, ‘hate speech’ and seemingly garbled speech bring us closer to the ‘stuff’ of language than well articulated phrases, and may be said to serve as something of a bridge between the symbolic and the real. Lacan’s notion of lalangue reveals the way that even when words are emptied of a strictly referential content they make an impact. As Romeo and Juliet reveals time and again, it is in this more radical sense that we can claim that ‘words matter,’ acquiring a phantasmatic materiality and weight that escapes the ordinance of the symbolic order. We need only recall here the fact that Lacan explicitly lists the ‘phoneme’ as one of the ‘objects’ that causes desire: “An unthinkable list, if one adds, as I do, the phoneme, the gaze, the voice - the nothing.” “Subversion of the Subject,” p.315.

spectral attachments to the body that can only signify (and are partially signifiable through) seemingly incompatible modes of jouissance? That is to say, in those enigmatic ways that the other's body "speaks" the unfathomable ways that it seeks to satisfy the drive? :

Thou? Why, thou wilt quarrel with a man that hath a hair more or less in his beard than thou hast. Thou wilt quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no other reason but because thou hast hazel eyes. What eye but such an eye would spy out such a quarrel? [...] Thou hast quarrelled with a man for coughing in the street....Didst thou not fall out with a tailor for wearing his new doublet before Easter; with another for tying his new shoes with old riband? And thou wilt tutor me from quarrelling!

(III.i.16-20; 24-30)

Mercutio's elaboration here of the "divine details" of unconscious identification both recalls and privileges (perhaps not entirely fortuitously) Dora's identification with her father's "cough" as the concrete void place in the subject's signifying chain as that which betokens the enigmatic cause of desire. In The Ethics of Psychoanalysis Lacan details specifically the reasons for the hostility experienced by the subject when s/he is confronted with this jouissance that is by its very definition "strange," "other" and dissimilar:

I do not experience jouissance as 'strange' because it is the jouissance of the Other, but, on the contrary, that it is because of this jouissance that I perceive my neighbour as (radically) Other and 'strange.' (emphasis added)⁴⁴

Ultimately, then, for Lacan (and Mercutio it seems) the kernel of the problem is more properly to be located in the fact that the subject experiences its own jouissance as something that is both strange and hostile. Rhetorically, Mercutio's otherwise "playful"

⁴⁴ Alenka Zupancic, "The Subject of the Law" in Cogito and the Unconscious, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London, 1998), pp.41-73, p.44.

opening gambit that Benvolio will “quarrel with a man that hath a hair more or less in his beard thou hath” is, from this Lacanian perspective, a fairly reliable indication that what is actually at stake here is enjoyment.⁴⁵ Vacillating between lack and excess, this almost negligible mark of difference which precipitates violence (la petite difference: a hair, no less) illuminates the paradox of how, quite literally, the subject’s “Thing” is both inaccessible to the other and, at the same time, threatened by him.⁴⁶ If Prince Escalus’ implicit exhortations throughout the play (and the “ethical” ideal that the lovers’ deaths are explicitly called upon to realize) is that one should “love thy neighbour as thyself,” according to Lacan such an attitude also urges silently the compunction to love “that most neighbourly of neighbours who is inside” the subject: namely, its jouissance.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller’s analysis of “extimacy” is again indispensable here: “Why does the Other remain Other? What is the cause for our hatred of him, for our hatred of him in his very being? It is the hatred of the enjoyment in the Other [...] a hatred of the particular way the Other enjoys [...] The question of tolerance or intolerance is not at all concerned with the subject of science and its human rights. It is located on the level of tolerance or intolerance toward the enjoyment of the Other, the Other as he who essentially steals my own enjoyment [...] There is no other enjoyment but my own. If the Other is in me, occupying the place of extimacy, then the hatred is also my own.” Quoted in Slavoj Žižek, Tarrying With The Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology (Durham, 1993), p.203.

⁴⁶ To the extent that we can read this speech as a strangely articulate meditation (and perhaps apology) for the ostensible “cause” of violence in the play we can again refer profitably to the work of Slavoj Žižek. Specifically addressed to the way that “nationalism” is the privileged domain of the eruption of enjoyment into the social field, Žižek avers that we must apprehend “Cause as the Fredian Thing (das Ding), [as] materialized enjoyment [...] the ‘other’ wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our ‘way of life’) and/or it has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what gets on our nerves, what really bothers us about the ‘other,’ is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment [...] The basic paradox is that our Thing is conceived as something inaccessible to the other and at the same time threatened by him; this is similar to castration which, according to Freud, is experienced as something that ‘really cannot happen,’ but whose prospect nonetheless horrifies us.” Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture (London, 1997), p. 165.

⁴⁷ In The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Lacan explicitly poses the question of “what is more of a neighbour to me than this heart within which is that of my jouissance and which I don’t dare go near?” Moreover, for Lacan how ever variously it is phrased the injunction to ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’ is the same thing as the barrier to jouissance, and not its opposite..I retreat from loving my neighbour as myself because there is something on the horizon that is engaged in some form of intolerable cruelty. In that sense, to love one’s neighbor may be the cruelest of choices.” Jacques Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, pp. 186, 194.

In other words, throughout Romeo and Juliet the relationship between “love” and “hate” implies a certain inverse symmetry that has remained largely unaccounted for in critical discussions of the play: what makes the other an object of love (as well as hate) is the very jouissance that is linked to the way that the other satisfies his or her drive.⁴⁸ As both Romeo and Juliet’s rhapsodies demonstrate time and again, the loving subject is also both perturbed by and attracted to this jouissance of the other, to the ungraspable trait unaire that in fact generates every fantasy about the beloved.

“There’s No Such Thing.....”

Let us conclude by turning our attention briefly to a more recent example which finds Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet implicated in a narrative where both the “sexual relationship” and the Law inevitably come to circulate around a certain impasse in the symbolic order itself. On February 14 1997 The Washington Post published a Valentine’s Day message that was later revealed to be a cryptic “love note” from Monica Lewinsky to President Bill Clinton. In a quotation that seeks to refashion the 21 year old intern’s imbroglio with the President as a species of “forbidden love” the ad reads as follows:

⁴⁸ Lacan was to return to this point time and again. Even in the early seminars of the 50s (when Lacan had not yet fully formulated the central importance that the Real would subsequently come to play in his ‘return to Freud’) we find the following remarks: “If love aspires to the unfolding of the being of the other, hate wishes the opposite, namely its abasement, its deranging, its deviation, its delirium, its detailed denial, its subversion. That is what makes hate a career with no limit, just as love is.” Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955, trans. John Forrester p.277. In later years, of course, Lacan would argue that there is, in fact, a paradoxical limit involved here: namely that of jouissance.

HANDSOME

With love's light wings did
 I o'er perch these walls
 For stony limits cannot hold love out,
 And what love can do that dares love attempt.

- Romeo and Juliet 2:2

Happy Valentine's Day.
 M.⁴⁹

Leaving aside for the moment how this identification with the “star cross'd lovers” would acquire bitter irony in the ensuing months (in the person of a certain Kenneth Starr), Romeo and Juliet implicitly functions here as a fantasy frame through which the lovers will subsequently try to negotiate a sexual relationship. Upon their next encounter the President not only acknowledged having seen Lewinsky's love note but also expressed “his fondness for Romeo and Juliet.”⁵⁰ Indeed, it was also on this occasion that “for the first time, she [Lewinsky] performed oral sex through completion.”⁵¹

This enigmatic connection between Shakespeare and sex is pressed even further in a remarkable letter to the President where Lewinsky invokes the bard in slightly less lyrical terms. Confessing to her own fondness for Shakespeare Lewinsky confides that she

⁴⁹ The Starr Report: The Independent Counsel's Complete Report to Congress on the Investigation of President Clinton, (London, 1998), p.112. Even more portentous, perhaps, is the fact that Lewinsky's final 'love note' to the President “was inspired by the movie Titanic.” p.183.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.114.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.115.

[...]finds solace in works from the past that remain profound and somehow always poignant...one must read him like one tastes a fine wine or good cigar - take it in, roll it in your mouth, and savour it!⁵²

Bearing in mind Roland Barthes' contention that all textual pleasure retains libidinal traces to "the motions of ungratified sucking, of an undifferentiated orality,"⁵³ this extraordinary passage may be read not only as an example, reductio ad absurdum, of how Shakespeare has become a "consumer" activity, but also how contemporary erotic investment in Shakespeare is, in the words of Scott Wilson, typified by "a mastication detached from any material, alimentary need, concerned only with the manipulation of status signs and the exchange of hollowed out cultural values and meanings."⁵⁴ "Shakespeare," at least in psychoanalytical terms, operates here not so much as a signifier of desire so much as that of the drive itself. Indeed, a closer examination of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal offers a revealing summary of how both "enjoyment" and the "law" inevitably come to constellate around a certain impasse in the symbolic order that Lacan, of course, refers to as the "(non) sexual relationship."

Apart from re-enacting the fantasy of Romeo and Juliet, the infamous Clinton-Lewinsky predilection for "telephone sex" is another example which hints at the fact that sex is in a sense always already virtual – mediated through the expedient of a "fantasy frame." That is to say, far from diluting the spontaneous experience of the sexual act, sex is always formalized minimally through a fantasy scenario that serves effectively to crystallize its

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.136.

⁵³ Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1975), p.5.

⁵⁴ Scott Wilson, Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice (Oxford, 1995), p.92.

enjoyment. Jouissance qua “surplus-enjoyment” is not a surplus that merely supplements some normal fundamental enjoyment precisely because enjoyment as such emerges only in this surplus, because it constitutively is an “excess.” As we argued in connection with Antony and Cleopatra, if this surplus was to be subtracted enjoyment itself would be lost. To this extent Lacan’s formula for fantasy (S O a) indicates how a minimum of distance is retained between the subject and a potentially nauseating contact with the object-Thing, the meaningless and potentially traumatic stain of enjoyment. Significantly, we find that on the evening when Clinton and Lewinsky are alleged to have used Romeo and Juliet as part of their sexual foreplay before finally “performing oral sex through completion,” the President testified to feeling “sick after it was over.”⁵⁵

It is, however, Clinton’s ingenious pedantic quibbles over the ostensible definition of sexual relations that unwittingly brings him into alignment with psychoanalysis: particularly in terms of Lacan’s well known maxims that ‘il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel’ and (more ambivalently) that attempts to posit “the ideal or typical manifestation of behaviour in both sexes, up to and including the act of sexual copulation, are entirely propelled into comedy.”⁵⁶ Indeed, we need only refer here to the extraordinary intervention made by the Judge presiding at the deposition of the Paula Jones case who provided the following definition of “sexual relations”:

[...] a person engages in ‘sexual relations’ when the person knowingly engages or causes contact with the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh,

⁵⁵ The Starr Report , p.115.

⁵⁶ Jacques Lacan, “The Meaning of the Phallus” in Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York, 1982), p.84.

or buttocks of any person with an intent to arouse or gratify the sexual desire of any person [...] 'Contact' means intentional touching, either directly or through clothing.⁵⁷

In this bizarre (even comic) attempt to formalize the rules of sexual interplay, the Law is compelled into further eroticizing the very practices that it is called upon to censure. What we are presented with here is the most conspicuous example of the way that the Law simultaneously authorizes and prohibits access to putatively "illegal" forms of enjoyment. In short, this is possibly the most compelling example from the entire Clinton saga where an obscene supplement is revealed to be the unacknowledged support of every relationship. The "official" seemingly indifferent face of the public Law is already split from within, traversed by a constitutive impossibility that is also its obscene spectral double (i.e. the menacing agency of the "superego" that we saw ventriloquized in the Coke advertisement's senseless injunction to 'Enjoy!').⁵⁸ It is also from within this context that we can begin to account for the popular perception of Clinton's misconduct at the time. Far from becoming the target of scathing criticism and moral outrage (despite the best efforts of his political adversaries) Clinton was tolerated as a comic and even "carnavalesque" figure of fun.⁵⁹ Even more remarkable is the fact that in the immediate aftermath of the scandal not only did

⁵⁷ The Starr Report, p.202.

⁵⁸ It is worth repeating once again that for Lacan the "sexual" dimension of enjoyment is not to be understood in an explicitly 'genital' sense. Rather jouissance is marked by its mythical destiny of tending toward absolute pleasure, to be consumed in the incestuous act. It is to this extent that Law in Lacanian psychoanalysis always implicitly relates to the myth of the primal horde. Lacan frequently draws attention to this paradoxical (and constitutive) relationship between the Law as an agency of prohibition and the Law as that which contains an incitement toward enjoyment: "[...] not only does the murder of the father not open the path to jouissance that the presence of the father was supposed to prohibit, but, in fact, strengthens the prohibition. The whole problem is there...Although the obstacle is removed as a result of the murder, jouissance is still prohibited; not only that, but the prohibition is reinforced." Jacques Lacan, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (London, 1996), p.176.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Iain Dale and John Simmons (eds) The Bill Clinton Joke Book: Uncensored (London, 1998).

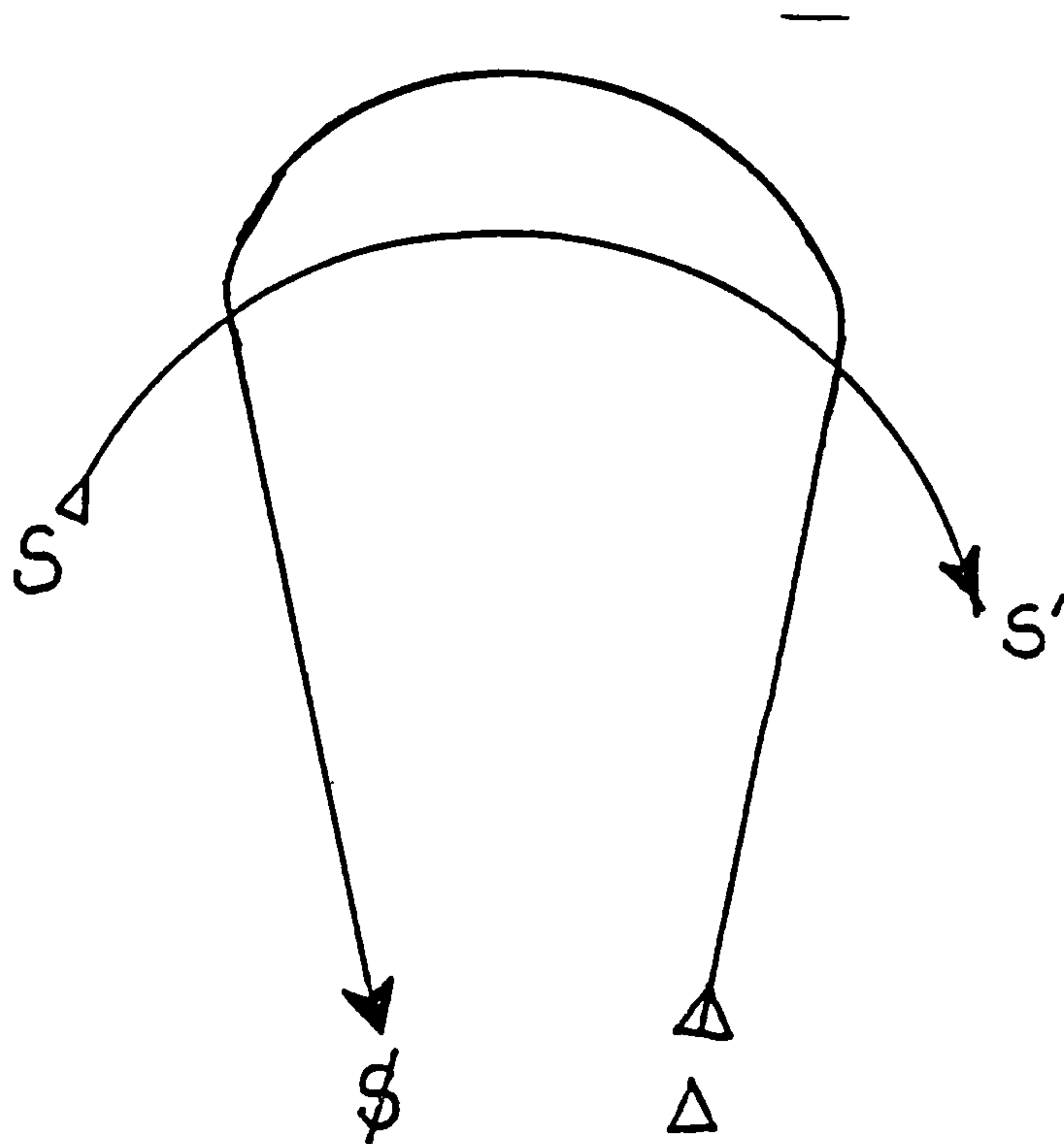
Clinton's personal popularity ratings improve but the Democratic party actually increased their representation in Congress.

In many ways the response of the American electorate demonstrates quite powerfully the Lacanian insight that was also addressed in our earlier discussion of Richard III: that it is not so much identification with the public (symbolic) Law that holds society together, but rather identification with a specific form of transgression of the Law, i.e. with a specific form of enjoyment. What "Fornigate" most effectively reveals then (to borrow a formulation that has gained a wide critical currency in Lacanian studies) is how enjoyment is necessarily a political category. As we demonstrated in our discussion of Richard II, it is the protective circulation of fantasy around a certain structural deadlock in the symbolic order that, properly speaking, also negotiates the very space of subjectivity itself.

Ultimately, what we call "subjectivity" is nothing other than this "object" precisely insofar as it is radically incommensurate with every subject as such. To suggest, as I do now, that this putatively Lacanian object is always already "Shakespearean" is to draw attention to one last temporal paradox that, it seems, we have been aware of all along. Recalling our discussion of Hamlet we could say that "there is no such thing as a relationship between Shakespeare and Psychoanalysis," so much as what Lacan calls extimite: the intimate exteriority of the material letter, the mute signifier lodged through primal repression and incorporation in those significations that cause both "Shakespeare" and "psychoanalysis" to become the objects of our desire.

Appendices

Figure 1.



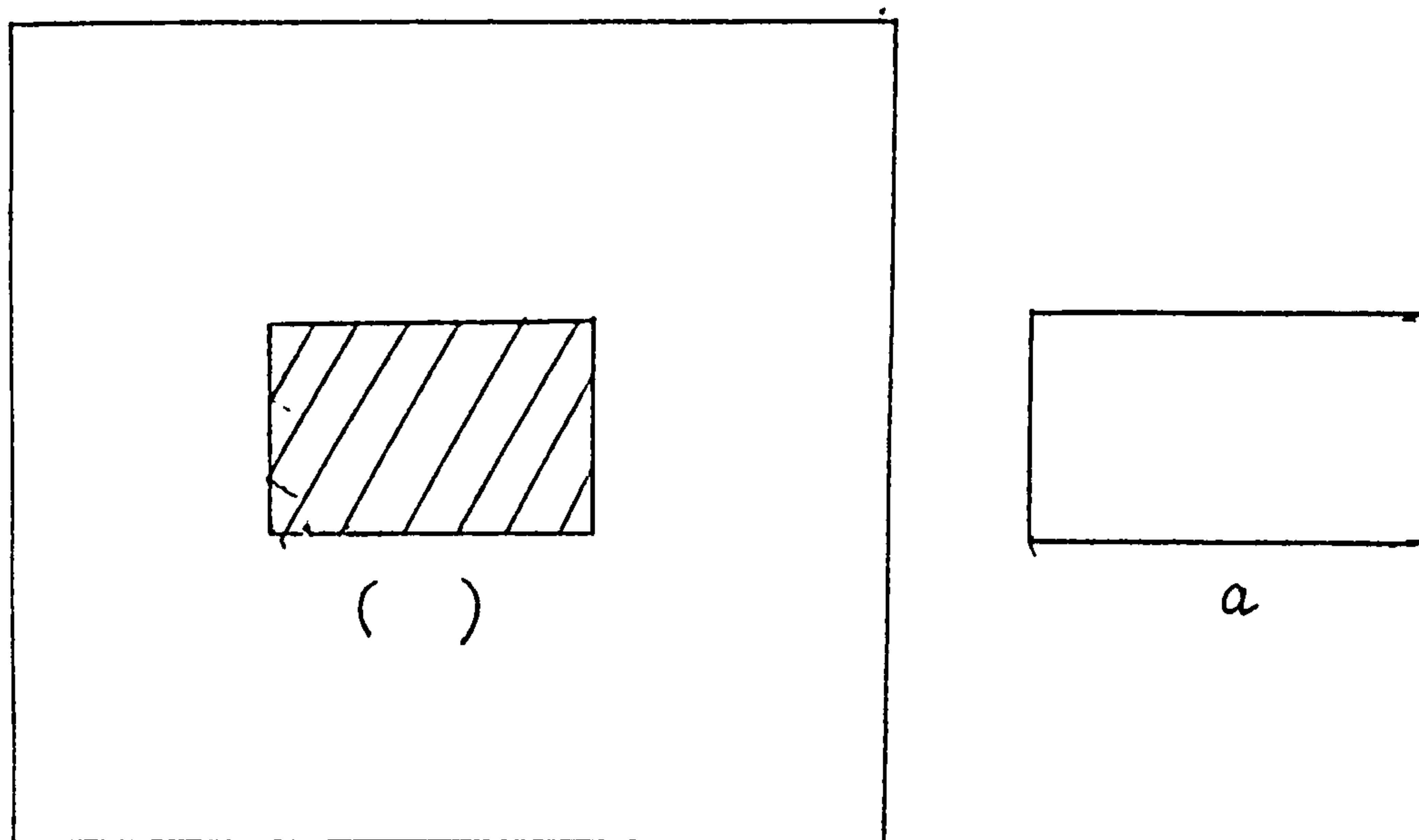
Graph I

This part of Lacan's 'graph of desire' is intended to illustrate the retroactive constitution of meaning. We have the signifying chain (S --- S') crossed by another vector starting from a mythical pre-symbolic intention and ending, after it passes through the signifier, with the subject (\$). The vector of (subjective) intention retroactively 'quilts' or fixes the vector of the signifying chain: it enters the signifying chain at an 'ulterior' point and leaves it at an 'anterior' point. The effect of the operations of such a 'quilting point' (point de capiton) is that the subject recognizes, in a contingent series of signifiers, the Meaning (of his existence). This moment of the recognition of Meaning is the moment of subjectivation.

'The field of reality rests upon the extraction of the object a , which nevertheless frames it.'

We understand that the covert setting aside of the object as real conditions the stabilization of reality, as "a bit of reality." But if the object a is absent, how can it still frame reality?

Figure 2.



It is precisely because the object a is removed from the field of reality that it frames it. If I withdraw from the surface of this picture the piece I represent by a shaded square. I get what we might call a frame: a frame for a hole, but also a frame of the rest of the surface. Such a frame could be created by any window. So object a is such a surface fragment, and it is its subtraction from reality that frames it. The subject, as barred subject – as want-of-being – is this hole. As being, it is nothing but the subtracted bit. Whence the equivalency of the subject and object a .¹

¹ Jacques-Alain Miller, "Montre a Premontre," *Analytica*, 37 (1984), pp.6-7.

Glossary of Some Lacanian Symbols

S - (Read “barred S.”). The subject has two faces: (1) the subject as alienated in/by language, as castrated (== alienated), as precipitate of “dead” meaning; the subject here is devoid of being, as it is eclipsed by the Other, that is, by the symbolic order; (2) the subject as spark that flies between two signifiers in the process of subjectivization, whereby that which is other is made “one’s own.”

a - Written object a, object (a), petit a, objet a or objet petit a. In the early 1950s, the imaginary other like oneself. In the 1960s and thereafter, it has at least two faces: (1) the other’s desire, which serves as the subject’s cause of desire and is intimately related to the experiences of jouissance and loss thereof (examples include the breast, gaze, voice, faeces, phoneme, letter, nothing); (2) the residue of the symbolization process that is situated in the register of the real; logical anomalies and paradoxes; the letter or signifierness of language.

S1 – The master signifier or unary signifier; the signifier that commands or as commandment. When isolated, it subjugates the subject; when it is linked up with some other signifier, subjectivization occurs, and a subject of/as meaning results.

A – The Other, which can take on many forms: the treasure-house or repository of all signifiers; the mOther tongue; the Other as demand, desire or jouissance; the unconscious.

A – (Read “barred A”) The Other as lacking, as structurally incomplete, or as experienced as incomplete by the subject who comes to be in that lack.

S(A) - Signifier of the lack in the Other. As the Other is structurally incomplete, lack is an inherent characteristic of the Other, but that lack is not always apparent to the subject, and even when apparent, cannot always be named. Here we have a signifier that names that lack; it is the anchoring point of the entire symbolic order, related to every other signifier.

S () a – Matheme or formula for fantasy, usually the “fundamental fantasy.” It can be read as “the barred subject in relation to object a,” that relation being defined by all the meanings the lozenge in the middle of the matheme takes on. With object a understood as the traumatic experience of jouissance that brings the subject into being in the encounter with the Other’s desire, the formula for fantasy suggests that the subject tries to maintain just the right distance from that dangerous desire, delicately negotiating the attraction and the repulsion.

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