UNTIMELY AESTHETICS
SHAKESPEARE, ANACHRONISM AND PRESENCE

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

ÉTIENNE POULARD

School of English, Communication and Philosophy

Cardiff University

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This thesis is for Johann.

‘The writer must not conceal that his activity is one of arranging.’

– Walter Benjamin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……………………………………………………………………1

ABSTRACT……………………………………………………………………………2

NOTE…………………………………………………………………………………3

SECTION I – ANACHRONISM AND PRESENCE IN SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM……………………………………………………………...4-76

- **INTRODUCTION – SHAKESPEARE OR THE THEATRE OF THE IMPOSSIBLE**……...5-47

  ‘Something Repressed Which Recurs’: The Motif of Caesar’s Rome in Shakespeare’s Late Elizabethan Dramas……………………………………5

  A Brief Overview of ‘Shakespeare’s Anachronisms’ in the Criticism……………...7

  Historicism’s Shakespeare: Anachronisms as Fragmentary Reflections of an Authentic Historical Scene……………………………………………………8

  1599, A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: A Key Instance of Historicist Criticism……………………………………………………………………10

  ‘I Should Be the One to Know’: Historicising New Historicism…………………..12

  ‘Young Scamels from the Rock’: The Waning of New Historicism………………13

  New Historicism and Poststructuralism……………………………………………15

  Renaissance Self-Fashioning, or How New Historicism is Based on a Misreading of Foucault’s Power/Resistance Dialectic…………………………….17

  ‘We Are Always Free’: Foucault’s Account of Resistance………………………..19

  Greenblatt’s ‘Disingenuous’ Relation with French Theory—
  The Instance of Derrida…………………………………………………………….21

  ‘The Limits of a Compromise’: French Theory as New Historicism’s *Pharmakon*……………………………………………………………………24

  ‘A Declaration of Critical Independence’: *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* as an ‘American Tale’…………………………………………………………...27

  ‘A Very Puzzling Sentence’: Greenblatt’s Craving for Freedom………………….29

  New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Presentism and the Present of Criticism……………………………………………………………………30

Presentism: Moving Beyond New Historicism……………………………………….32

Registering the Viewer's Eye Within the Literary Scene:
Anachronism as a Key Tool of Presentist Criticism……………………………….34

Literature as an Experience of Displacement:
Derrida and the Questioning of Presence…………………………………………..35

The Text's Iterability as the 'Signature of the Thing
"Shakespeare"'……………………………………………………………………..36

The Text as an Open-Ended Collection of Non-Saturable Contexts………………38

The Theatre of the Impossible: Introducing the Untimely Aesthetics of
Shakespearean Drama……………………………………………………………...39

The Foreclosure of the Hermeneutic Field in Historicist Criticism:
The Instances of *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*………………………………………..42

The Aestheticisation of the Impossibility of Presence in *Henry V*………………...44

Mediation as Key Factor of *Différance*: Lacan's Big Other……………………….45

The Subjectivities of Literary Criticism: Meaning as a Location of Change……...46

- **CHAPTER 1 – 'VIOLATOR OF CHRONOLOGY': *SHAKESPEARE'S ANACHRONISMS* IN CON-TEXT(S)** …………………………….48-76

I- SHAKESPEARE, ANACHRONISM AND THE CRITICISM……………………..48-56

a. Anachronism as the Universal Fate of Literature……………………...48
b. The Constitutive Anachronism that Haunts Literary Criticism………..51
c. A 'Disgrace to the Stage': Shakespeare's Anachronisms in the Eighteenth Century……………………………………………………..54

II- SHAKESPEARE THROUGH THE AGES:
FROM TIMELESS GENIUS TO EMBLEM OF *DIFFÉRANCE*…………………..56-66

a. 'Guided Only by His Genius': Romantic Shakespeare in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries……………………………..6
b. 'Shakespeare Without a Muzzle': The Politicisation of Shakespeare as a Key Feature of Nineteenth-Century Literary Discourses………….59
c. 'Anachrony Makes the Law': French Theory, *Différance* and Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century…………………………………62

III- THE IMPLICATIONS OF ANACHRONISM FOR LITERARY CRITICISM
AND ITS PRACTITIONERS……………………………………………………...66-76

a. 'The Renaissance discovery of Time', or the Alleged Emergence of a New Subjectivity in the Period………………………66

b. From Shakespeare's Time to Our Own: Anachronism as Metadramatic Reflection on the Representability of History…………..70

c. Anachronism as Registration of the Viewer's Eye Within the Representational Scene………………………………………………...73

SECTION II – HISTORICAL PRESENCE AS THE NEGATIVE ONTOLOGICAL CENTRE OF SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA……………………..77-163

- **INTRODUCTORY NOTE**…………………………………………………………78-81

- **CHAPTER 2 – 'PATHOLOGICAL INTERIORITY': HUMAN CHARACTER AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME IN *JULIUS CAESAR***……………………………...82-122

INTRODUCTION……………………………………………………………82-85

I- 'WHAT IS IT O'CLOCK?'—MOVING IN THROUGH HISTORICAL LAYERS…………………………………………85-96

a. Time Out of Joint in English Culture: Anachronism as National Institution…………………………………...85

b. Temporal Crisis in Late Elizabethan England: *Julius Caesar* as Historical Document…………………………………89

c. 'What is it o'clock?': Untimeliness as Key Diegetic Feature of *Julius Caesar*……………………………………...93

II- SHAKESPEARE'S ROME: DIFFERENT PLANES OF REALITY……………...96-108

a. The 'Romanness' of Shakespeare's Romans…………………………..96

b. 'Rome' as a Multi-Layered Signifier…………………………………..99

c. Unmasking the Politics of Representation: *Julius Caesar* as Postmodern Metadrama……………………………103

III- A WORLD OF PHANTASMA: MAPPING OUT CHARACTER PSYCHOPATHOLOGY……………………...108-21

a. A Lesson in Character: Exploring the Inner Human Costume………………………………...108

b. Psychic Dysfunction as Characteristic Symptom of Shakespeare's Rome……………………………………………….111

c. 'I Think': The Hallucinatory Dreamtime of Phantasma……………...114

CONCLUSION…………………………………………………………...121-22

- **CHAPTER 3 – 'IMPERFECT PERFORMANCES': FRAGMENTED MEANINGS AND MEANINGFUL FRAGMENTS IN *HAMLET*** ……. 123-63

INTRODUCTION ……………………………………………………………... 123-25

I- THE MEANING OF *HAMLET*: THE GREATEST QUESTION MARK ………... 125-35

a. *Hamlet*'s Criticism—Criticism's *Hamlet* …………………………….. 125

b. Defamiliarisation Effect: The Fragmented Material Reality of *Hamlet* ………………………………………………………... 128

c. 'The Strangest Play Ever Written': Estrangement as Core Feature of *Hamlet* ……………………………………………… 132

II- NEW HISTORICIST *HAMLET*: STEPHEN GREENBLATT'S *HAMLET IN PURGATORY* ……………………………………………………. 135-46

a. A Protestant Playwright Haunted by the Spirit of His Catholic Father ……………………………………………………… 135

b. 'Heavy Hints'—Or Why the Ghost (Supposedly) Comes from Purgatory ……………………………………………………... 138

c. The Medieval Emphasis on the State of the Soul at The Moment of Death …………………………………………... 141

III- 'A LIMITLESS ACCUMULATION OF THE IMPERFECT': IN SEARCH OF *HAMLET*'S OBJECTIVE TRUTH CONTENT ………………... 146-60

a. Historicising *Hamlet* in the Twentieth Century: Lilian Winstanley and Carl Schmitt …………………………………….. 146

b. When Historicism Turns to Myth-Making: The Cases of *Hamlet or Hecuba* and *Hamlet in Purgatory* ………….. 150

c. 'Dissonant Unity': Gathering the Fragmented Meanings of *Hamlet* through Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory ………….. 155

CONCLUSION ………………………………………………………………... 160-63

SECTION III – THE MEDIATION OF PRESENCE: MAPPING OUT THE BIG OTHER IN SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA ……………………………… 164-236

- **INTRODUCTORY NOTE** …………………………………………………….. 165-69

- **Chapter 4 – 'O My Democratic Friends': *Henry V* or the Performance of Presence**……………………………170-216

Introduction……………………………………………………………...170-72

I- Chorus: The Great Performer of Presence………………………172-85

a. Historicist *Henry V* and the 'Strictly Textual' Alternative…………...172

b. Mediated Presence and Loss of Origin: *Henry V*'s Alienation Effect………………………………………..177

c. Ghostly Semiosis: The Inexorable Drifting of Meaning Within the Text and Beyond………………………………………….180

II- The Failure of Presence in *Henry V* and Beyond……………….185-203

a. The Chorus' 'Now': Problematising Presence………………………..185

b. 'Thought is Free', or Shakespeare's 'Contradictory Approach to Language'…………………………………………………………..190

c. 'Within the Girdle of these Walls': An Imaginary Audience in an Imaginary Playhouse………………………………………………….195

d. 'Play With Your Fancies': Chorus as Historical Pervert……………..199

III- Mapping Out the Big Other: Who Is Being Interpellated?……………………………………………………203-15

a. 'A Largess Universal, Like the Sun': The Chorus' Cult of Personality…………………………………………………………….203

b. Subjectification and Interpellation: *Henry V* via Foucault and Althusser…………………………………………………………...206

c. *Henry V*, or the Aestheticisation of *Différance*……………………….209

d. Chorus as Interpellated Subject— Locating Lacan's Big Other (or Not)…………………………………211

Conclusion…………………………………………………………...215-16

- **Chapter 5 – 'I Am in the Picture': The Displacement of Subjectivity and the Aestheticisation of the Big Other in Shakespearean Drama**……………………………………………..217-36

Introduction……………………………………………………………...217-19

I- Uncanny Perspectives: Shakespeare's Lacanian Optics……….219-28

a. 'Looking Awry': Žižek and *Richard II*………………………………219

b. The 'Pre-Existence of a Gaze' in *Hamlet*: The Core of Alienation Underlying Subjectivity……221

c. 'Enter Three Witches': A Gaze Lurking in the Margins of Theatricality……224

II- INTERPASSIVITY: ON THE DISPLACEMENT OF SUBJECTIVITY IN SHAKESPEARE AND IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY……228-36

a. The Interpassive Chorus of *Henry V*……228

b. Three Instances of Interpassivity in Contemporary Mass Entertainment……230

c. 'A Paralysed Object-Gaze': The Objectification of the Viewer……233

CONCLUSION – BEYOND RESISTANCE: POST-CRITICAL SURRENDER……237-42

POST-SCRIPT……243

BIBLIOGRAPHY……244-61

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ABSTRACT

For many critics, Hamlet's famous dictum that 'The time is out of joint' is to be read as a social comment on Shakespeare's own historical moment (*Hamlet*, 1.5.189). Generally thought to have been written around the same period as *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* contains a similar statement—'it is a strange-disposèd time,' Cicero remarks early on in the play (1.3.33). In *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, James Shapiro suggests that, far from being coincidental, this recurring untimeliness in fact pervades the plays Shakespeare wrote at the turn of the seventeenth century—and most notably *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. For Shapiro, the many anachronisms that can be found in those plays point to a shared, objective core of historical reality ('Shakespeare came of age when time itself was out of joint,' the critic argues). The idea that the ultimate meaning of Shakespeare's dramas is inextricably bound up with the late Elizabethan (or early Jacobean) moment of their production is a central tenet of historicist criticism. Largely due to the hegemonic status of new historicism in the field of Shakespeare studies in the last thirty years or so, this mode of criticism has become, to a great extent, normative.

The present work takes issue with the systematic approach that consists in viewing Shakespeare's plays as mere reflections of an overarching, 'objective' historical reality. Specifically, the thesis challenges the default historicist framework in which many of Shakespeare's plays have been embedded. Thus, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* and *Henry V* are here looked at with a large emphasis on the present of interpretation (as opposed to the authorial moment). A key thread of the thesis is the sense that the meaning of these plays is directly determined by the criticism. In other words, their meaning is essentially constructed in *the present*—a fundamentally unfixed and ever-moving category. Accordingly, alleged anachronisms are here viewed as by-products of this subjective present. Rather than expressing the objective historical 'real' of the dramas, such anachronisms are considered to testify to the intrusion of the viewer within the literary scene. This implies that the dramas are always already infected not so much by their author's historical moment but by the eye of the critic itself.

At the heart of the thesis is the sense that Shakespearean drama can be viewed through the grid of an aesthetics of untimeliness, which manifests itself in various ways. The coexistence of multiple presents of interpretation within the hermeneutic field of the plays is one of the ways in which such an aesthetics can be experienced. For instance, the colossal criticism of *Hamlet* guarantees that no one historical elucidation of the play can prevail. Alternatively, the diegetic content of the plays can also be used to support the idea of an untimely aesthetics. On many occasions, Shakespeare's dramas comment on the inherent disjunction that alienates them from the historical past which they (supposedly) purport to stage—this is generally done through the medium of key metadramatic characters like the Chorus in *Henry V*. In either case, complete historical presence is negated. Thus, the thesis posits the impossibility of presence—or untimeliness—as a valid aesthetic category in view of Shakespeare's dramas. Each individual chapter illustrates how the dramas can be said to aestheticise the intrinsically differential quality of literature. Ultimately, the thesis also emphasises how *différance*, to use Jacques Derrida's celebrated coinage, lies at the heart not only of literature but of all forms of staged entertainment.

Unless specified otherwise, all quotations from Shakespeare's works are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean Elizabeth Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: Norton, 1997).

The Walter Benjamin quotation that appears after the title-page is taken from *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, translated from the German by John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 179.

I

ANACHRONISM AND PRESENCE IN SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM

INTRODUCTION – SHAKESPEARE OR THE THEATRE OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

> Literature has no definitive meaning or resting place, even if it allows one to explore notions of 'definitive meaning' and 'resting place' in especially critical and productive ways. The literary work never rests. It does not belong. Literature does not come home: it is strangely homeless, strangely free.
>
> – Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*[1]

'SOMETHING REPRESSED WHICH RECURS': THE MOTIF OF CAESAR'S ROME IN SHAKESPEARE'S LATE ELIZABETHAN DRAMAS

Whether 'out of joint' or 'strange-disposèd,' time never appears to be quite at one with itself in the plays Shakespeare wrote in or around 1599 (*Hamlet*, 1.5.189; *Julius Caesar*, 1.3.33). This, at least, is what critics have recently suggested. In *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (2005), James Shapiro argues that the dramatist's 'writing this year rose to a new and extraordinary level'—for 'in the course of 1599 Shakespeare completed *Henry the Fifth*, wrote *Julius Caesar* and *As You Like It* in quick succession, then drafted *Hamlet*.'[2] Shapiro is particularly interested in the ways these dramas 'tended to spill into each other' and how 'the technical innovations in one led to advances in the next.' This 'cross-pollination of the plays,' as he calls it, manifests itself through recurring motifs.[3] Overflowing the borders of *Julius Caesar* (generally viewed as Shakespeare's arch-Roman play), the theme of Caesar's Rome—as well as the historical figure of Caesar himself—echoes in the series of plays singled out by Shapiro in his study.[4] Quoting from Sigmund Freud's influential essay on the uncanny, Marjorie

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[1] Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 45.

[2] James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. xv.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 366 and 367.

[4] '*Julius Caesar* was not the first text in which Shakespeare dealt with the life and reputation of the Roman dictator,' Richard Wilson remarks. In fact, 'the very first scene of the play thought to be his

Garber remarks that the theme of '*Rome*, Caesar's Rome, is the "something repressed which recurs"' in Shakespeare's dramas.[5] As Shapiro observes, the recurrence of this specific theme in the plays written in or around 1599 is indeed uncanny. Towards the end of *Henry V*, the Chorus invokes 'the senators of th'antique Rome'; and in *As You Like It* Rosalind knowingly alludes to 'Caesar's thrasonical brag of "I came, I saw, I overcame"' (5.0.26; 5.2.27-28). Even uncannier are the repeated references to Caesar in *Hamlet*. 'Of all Shakespeare's plays, it is perhaps in *Hamlet* that we feel most the ghostly, dislocated presence and pressure of Julius Caesar,' Garber observes.[6] In the first scene of the play, Horatio provides a detailed account of the supernatural events that allegedly took place 'A little ere the mightiest Julius fell' (1.1.106.7); and later on in the play, Polonius remembers: 'I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i'th'capitol; Brutus killed me' (3.2.93-94).[7] Drawing on the literary sources, critics have pointed out that 'the legend of Hamlet comes down to us from prehistoric Denmark', which means that it predates Caesar's Rome by at least several hundred (if not several thousand) years.[8] If the repeated invocation in *Hamlet* of the legendary Roman statesman is uncanny, it is because, from a strictly chronological point of view at least, it is an anachronism.

Thus, 'right from the beginning, it seems, Shakespeare found the example of Julius Caesar ominous, and the story of the general who conquered Gaul to build an empire a dangerous precedent for the English' (Richard Wilson, *Penguin Critical Studies: Julius Caesar* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 4).

[5] Marjorie Garber, 'A Rome of One's Own', *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* [1987] (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), p. 82.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[7] It is perhaps worth noting, as a token of the uncanny circularity of the concept of Caesar's Rome in the Western unconscious, that Freud himself admitted to having played the part of Brutus—'strange to say,' he recalls, 'I really once did play the part of Brutus. I once acted in the scene between Brutus and Caesar from Schiller [*Die Räuber*] before an audience of children' (*The Interpretation of Dreams* [1899], translated from the German by James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. 460).

[8] David Bevington, *Murder Most Foul: Hamlet Through the Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

A Brief Overview of ‘Shakespeare’s Anachronisms’ in the Criticism

It would be difficult to investigate the question of untimeliness in Shakespeare without considering to some extent the topic of anachronism. Critics have long noted that Shakespeare’s works contain ‘anachronisms’—generally defined as temporal inconsistencies in view of official recorded history.[9] There is a long tradition, starting in the eighteenth century, of scanning the plays for such instances.[10] Literary anachronisms in the period were often treated with haughty disapproval: they were considered as authorial blunders that needed to be acknowledged and, in most cases, corrected. Shakespeare’s works were particularly exposed to such editorial ‘corrections’—eighteenth-century editions of the plays are known for their textual revisionism.[11] The widespread stereotype according to which Shakespeare had lacked a formal education, amongst other factors, reinforced editors’ self-righteousness and often justified the systematic amendment of what were viewed as regrettable chronological ‘errors’ within the dramas. But the tide turned in the nineteenth century: the overarching influence of Romantic ideas on literary criticism meant that such ‘mistakes’ did not matter so much to critics anymore (although, it is worth noting, they remained mistakes).[12] In fact, the

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[9] The first chapter of this thesis (‘“Violator of Chronology”: *Shakespeare’s Anachronisms* in Con-text(s)’) provides a detailed account of the treatment of anachronism in Shakespeare criticism, with references to the relevant criticism.

[10] See, for instance, Francis Douce, ‘On the Anachronisms and some other Incongruities of Shakspeare’, *Illustrations of Shakspeare, and of Ancient Manners: With Dissertations on the Clowns and Fools of Shakspeare; on the Collection of Popular Tales Entitled Gesta Romanorum; and on the English Morris Dance* (London: Richard Taylor, 1807), pp. 281-96. See also Paul Stapfer, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity: Greek and Latin Antiquity as Presented in Shakespeare’s Plays*, translated from the French by Emily Jane Carey (London: Kegan Paul, 1880).

[11] The editions of Shakespeare’s works by Samuel Johnson (1765) and Edmond Malone (1790) (two of the most authoritative editors and critics in the period) repeatedly address anachronisms as mistakes. For Johnson, the anachronisms are ‘faults’ perpetrated by a ‘violator of chronology’—the expression appears in the preface to his edition of the works (reprinted in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, edited by Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 333). Malone reads temporal deviations in Shakespeare as evidence that ‘our author is guilty of an anachronism’ (the phrase is reprinted in *A New Variorum Edition of Henry the Fourth Part I*, edited by Samuel Burdett Hemingway (Philadelphia and London: Joshua Ballinger Lippincott, 1936), p. 210n).

[12] See Wilhelm Michael Anton Creizenach, *English Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* [1893-1916]

whole question of anachronism seemed to vanish from the arena of Shakespeare criticism throughout most of the twentieth century; anachronisms, as discrete erroneous instances in the plays, were often viewed as insignificant details that could only catch the interest of old-fashioned, pedantic scholars.[13] Such trifles could in no way interfere with the universal genius of the author—this, at least, was a widespread view in the period. It was not until the late twentieth century that the notion was addressed again by critics.[14] This resurgence was inextricably bound up with the developments of new historicism and cultural materialism from the early 1980s onwards. With a large emphasis on the early modern context in which Shakespeare's plays were produced, this 'return of history in literary criticism' profoundly altered the meanings and implications of anachronisms.[15] Using strategies of systematic historical contextualisation, new historicists and cultural materialists positioned literary texts in relation to other aspects of the social formation within which those texts were produced.

Historicism's Shakespeare: Anachronisms as Fragmentary Reflections of an Authentic Historical Scene

Within the critical moment of new historicism, anachronisms could no longer be ignored or dismissed as mere incongruities. Instead, they acquired a new, history-laden value in the eyes of many critics. Thus, when the common people in *Julius Caesar* throw their 'sweaty night-caps' up in the air or 'pluck' each other 'by the sleeve,' we are told that those instances are to be read as a direct effect of an overarching early

[13] Mungo William MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (London: Macmilllan, 1910), p. 82.

[14] Charles and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 123-24.

[15] Richard Wilson, 'Historicising New Historicism', *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, edited by

modern reality intruding into the drama (1.2.244 and 180).[16] There have been divergent views in recent historicist criticism on the question of whether such anachronisms are the result of authorial intention. Breaking with an age-old critical tradition that treated anachronisms as blunders, Phyllis Rackin presents them as 'a crucial Shakespearean strategy' that dramatises the distance between past and present.[17] Other history-oriented critics maintain that there is nothing deliberate about most of the anachronisms that have been found in the dramas: in fact, for those critics, the supposed lack of intention on Shakespeare's part testifies to the anachronisms' function as gateways to the historical unconscious of the text. Shapiro, for instance, considers some key anachronisms as reflections of the author's late Elizabethan moment, which 'seeps into the play at the most unexpected and sometimes unintended moments.'[18] In this sense, the sheer profusion of anachronisms in *Julius Caesar* implies that there is something uncontrollable at work in this play—'something that has been repressed and now returns,' in Freud's celebrated phrase.[19] Taking Freud's insight on board, many historicist accounts rely on the implicit postulate that the experience of Shakespeare's drama is determined by an all-encompassing historical reality. The experience of the return of the repressed is particularly powerful in plays like *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar* or *Hamlet*, Shapiro argues. Thus, in the opening scene of *Julius Caesar*, Pompey's return to Rome is described 'in a passage whose topography, with its walls, towers, windows, chimney tops, crammed streets and great river, would have been familiar to Londoners

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[16] The footnotes to the Norton edition of the plays testify to a general historical bias towards late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England. Thus, the occurrence of 'sweaty night-caps' documents the fact that 'artisans wore felt hats on holidays'—in Shakespeare's time, the footnote implies (Greenblatt, *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 1540).

[17] Phyllis Rackin, 'Temporality, Anachronism, and Presence in Shakespeare's English Histories', *Renaissance Drama* 27 (1986), 101-23, p. 103.

[18] Shapiro, *1599*, p. 100.

[19] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, edited by Hugh Haughton, translated from the German by David

in Shakespeare's time.'[20] For Shapiro and many other historicist critics, anachronisms feature as fragmentary reflections of a whole, original historical scene, which constitutes the 'real' boiling underneath a deceptively smooth literary surface. Viewed through the lens of much historicist criticism, the historical 'real' of *Julius Caesar* indicates that there is perfect congruence between Caesar's Rome and Shakespeare's London.

1599, A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*: A KEY INSTANCE OF HISTORICIST CRITICISM*

The emphasis on Shapiro's book (over any other specific historicist account of Shakespearean drama) in this introduction is deliberate. In *1599*, Shakespearean drama is explored through the notion of untimeliness, which is also the central theme of the present thesis—as will become clear shortly, the untimely is here explored as an aesthetic category in its own right. This affinity (which, it should be said, does not extend beyond the realm of the thematic) notably accounts for the choice of the plays addressed in the three central chapters of this thesis: with the exception of *As You Like It*, the thesis examines the same works as Shapiro (namely *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*).[21] On a different level, *1599* also crystallises the recent return, in Shakespeare criticism, to the practice that consists in reading the plays exclusively through their authorial moment: 'what Shakespeare achieved and what Elizabethans experienced this year […] are nearly inextricable,' Shapiro writes.[22] For the prize-winning American

[20] Shapiro, *1599*, p. 174.

[21] A key methodological concern of the thesis lies in how critics react to literary works which they experience as historically loaded. *As You Like It* is not here examined as it has not been viewed as dramatising its historicity to the same extent as other plays produced in the same period. Whether it is medieval England, ancient Rome or pre-Christian Denmark, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* all posit a specific (although superficial) spatio-temporal setting. While it is true that *As You Like It* dramatises the temporal contrast between court and forest ('There's no clock / in the forest,' Orlando declares playfully), the play is rarely viewed through the lens of a specific historical period (3.2.275-76).

critic, but also for many other historicists, the untimeliness that can be experienced in the plays is inextricably (or very 'nearly' so) bound up with late Elizabethan politics.[23] Therefore, 'it's [not] possible to talk about Shakespeare's plays independently of his age,' Shapiro claims rather confidently in the preface to his book.[24] Viewed as a whole, the present thesis can be described as an examination and subsequent refutation of this single statement. The essentialistic notion that the ultimate meaning of Shakespeare's plays is anchored in a specific 'age' is here repeatedly questioned. Thus, each individual chapter of the thesis can be viewed as a demonstration of the possibility of talking about Shakespeare's plays independently of 'his age'. A guiding thread throughout is the sense (and there is nothing new or especially groundbreaking about this recognition) that there is no exclusive 'age' that the dramas demand to be viewed through. This notion inevitably challenges the conviction, implicit in much historicist criticism, that the dramas contain an inalienable core of historical presence. Thus, the present work takes issue with the systematic approach that consists in viewing Shakespeare's plays as mere reflections of an overarching, 'objective' historical reality. Specifically, the thesis challenges the default historicist framework in which many of Shakespeare's plays have been embedded. Thus, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* and *Henry V* are here looked at with a large emphasis on the present of interpretation (as opposed to the authorial moment). A key thread of the thesis is the sense that the meaning of these plays is directly determined by the criticism. In other words, their meaning is essentially constructed in *the present*—a fundamentally unfixed and ever-moving category. This approach notably aims at challenging the hegemonic status of new historicism in Shakespeare studies.

[23] *1599* won the 2006 BBC Four Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction.

'I SHOULD BE THE ONE TO KNOW': HISTORICISING NEW HISTORICISM

Looking back to the last thirty years or so, critics have recently pointed out the extent to which 'Shakespeare criticism has […] been dominated […] by the mode of critical thought termed "the new historicism".'[25] Not only seeking to provide an alternative to the timeless formalisms of new criticism (the predominant critical mode in literary studies until the late 1970s), new historicism had also defined itself against a so-called 'old' historicism (which prevailed in the early twentieth century). While old historicism was solely preoccupied with 'the historicity of texts', new historicism also insisted, in Louis Montrose's phrase, on 'the textuality of history.'[26] In its early stages, the critical movement included a strong self-reflexive element and displayed a characteristic resistance to classification. In his introduction to *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, Richard Wilson argues that this 'strategic eclecticism' was indebted to a generation of French philosophers who broke with Marxism in the early 1970s and called themselves the *nouveaux philosophes* ('new philosophers').[27] Generally viewed as the starting point of new historicism, Stephen Greenblatt's influential *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) testifies to this diversity (the book deals with historical figures as varied as Thomas More, William Tyndale, Thomas Wyatt, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare). In an attempt to define—or rather 'situate', as he puts it—new historicism in a 1986 address, Greenblatt alluded to his general reluctance to 'endorse propositions or embrace a particular philosophy, politics or rhetoric.' Therefore, he insisted that new historicism is 'a practice rather than a doctrine,

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[25] Duncan Salkeld, 'Shakespeare Studies, Presentism and Micro-History', in *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 76 (2009), 35-43, p. 36.

[26] Louis Adrian Montrose, 'Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture', in *The New Historicism*, edited by Harold Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), 15-36, p. 20.

since as far as I can tell (and I should be the one to know) it's no doctrine at all.'[28] This statement represents no less than Greenblatt's official claim to authority over the concept. In a very insightful essay aimed at 'Historicizing New Historicism', Catherine Belsey notes that 'new historicism was in effect Greenblatt's creation.' Indeed, 'the credit for establishing the concerns and modelling the outlines of new historicism must go to Greenblatt himself, who invented the name in 1982.' And 'that credit, or at least the responsibility, was one that Greenblatt himself was disarmingly prepared to accept.' Paraphrasing the American critic's memorable formulation, Belsey suggests (with more than a touch of irony) that 'he should indeed be the one to know. And as he indicates, new historicism was institutionalized extraordinarily fast, academically speaking.' The publication in 1986 of a special issue of the journal *English Literary Renaissance* on new historicism, which included an 'authoritative account of the movement's main concerns' by Montrose, was 'a sure sign of success,' Belsey remarks.[29]

'Young Scamels from the Rock': The Waning of New Historicism

While the academic success of new historicism remained largely unquestioned in the 1980s and for most of the 1990s, 'there has, for some years now, been a gathering sense that this hitherto dominant critical movement is on the wane,' Duncan Salkeld pointed out in a recent overview of the current state of Shakespeare studies.[30] For Salkeld, the 'waning' of new historicism can be detected in Greenblatt's treatment of a single word

[28] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture', in *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* [1990] (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 197-98. The essay is the transcript of a lecture given at the University of Western Australia on 4 September 1986 and was originally published in *Southern Review* 20(1) (1987), 3-15.

[29] Catherine Belsey, 'Historicizing New Historicism', in *Presentist Shakespeares*, edited by Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 27-45, pp. 27-28.

in *The Tempest*. In 'Learning to Curse', the American critic examines the complex quality of Caliban's rhetoric by singling out a particular passage, reproduced below:

> I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;
> And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts;
> Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how
> To snare the nimble marmoset; I'll bring thee
> To clustering filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee
> Young scamels from the rock. Wilt thou go with me?
>
> (2.2.159-64)

What characterises this passage, on the level of syntax, is its rhetorical intricacy: 'the rich, irreducible concreteness of the verse compels us to acknowledge the independence and integrity of Caliban's construction of reality,' Greenblatt argues. More importantly, 'Caliban's world has what we may call *opacity*,' the critic suggests. Many of the expressions in this passage—including 'pig-nut', 'marmoset' and 'clustering filberts'—testify to this opacity. For Greenblatt, 'the perfect emblem of that opacity is the fact that we do not to this day know the meaning of the word "scamel".' And 'so,' he concludes, 'most of the people of the New World will never speak to us. That communication with all that we might have learned, is lost to us forever.'[31] Commenting on Greenblatt's reading of the passage, Salkeld admits that 'the argument is poignant and powerful.'

> But in *The Norton Shakespeare* [published in 1997], Greenblatt follows the 1986 Oxford emendation of 'scamels' to 'seamews', an alteration based on a supposed compositorial misreading. A seamew is a seagull and well suits the context of jays' nests amid clustering filberts. Yet to favour 'seamews' over 'scamels' is to be convinced of something. It is to regard an argument for compositorial misreading as somehow more compelling, more historically valid, than an interpretation guided by ideology. On the smallest of orthographical points, a solidifying new historicism has silently melted into air. Contractual obligations may have constrained the Norton editors to keep, by and large, to the Oxford text. Yet to make sense of 'scamels' is to encounter questions of historical plausibility. 'Scamels' remains an intriguing mystery, but its

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[31] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century', in *Learning to Curse*, pp. 43 and 45. The essay was originally published in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, edited by Fredi Chiapelli (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of

> illegibility means that we cannot make anything we like of it. Limits of warranted assertion, persuasiveness and argument must apply.[32]

What is here implied is that Greenblatt's editorial compromise over a single word in his edition of Shakespeare's works marks the end of a certain new historicism—the one that defined itself through its resistance to classification and overt reluctance to foreclose the meaning of texts. For 'to favour "seamews" over "scamels" is to be convinced of something', Salkeld maintains. This is significant—especially in the light of Greenblatt's initial reading of the phrase (which dates back to 1976) as an inviolable symbol of literary opacity.[33]

New Historicism and Poststructuralism

Whether an effect of the large-scale institutionalisation of new historicism or of its subsequent waning, Greenblatt's semantic foreclosure of 'scamels' in *The Norton Shakespeare* brings into play an assumption of presence that subverts his earlier claims for the movement. This abjuration of opacity brings new historicism surprisingly close to the old historicism from which the critic was so keen to distance himself in the 1980s. According to Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady, 'it is becoming harder and harder to distinguish much recent historicist criticism from an earlier generation's old historicism.' For 'methods which once challenged complacency as the new historicism and cultural materialism of the 1980s have slowly evolved into today's de-radicalized historicism.'[34] This potential for de-radicalisation can be detected in new historicism's dubious—or

[32] Salkeld, 'Shakespeare Studies, Presentism and Micro-History', p. 41. For Greenblatt's glossing of 'seamews' as 'seagulls', see *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 3081.

[33] The definition of 'scamel' in the online *Urban Dictionary* as 'the generic name for a word whose meaning is not known'—as in '*foreign languages are full of scamel*'—suggests the extent to which Greenblatt's early reading of the phrase has seeped into the Anglo-Saxon cultural unconscious. 'Scamel', *Urban Dictionary*, http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=scamel [accessed 29 January 2013].

[34] Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady, 'Presentism, Anachronism and the Case of *Titus Andronicus*',

'disingenuous,' as Greenblatt himself calls it—relation to literary theory, which was manifest from the beginning. In his 1986 lecture, quoted above, Greenblatt explained that 'what distinguishes the new historicism from the positivist historical scholarship of the early twentieth century' is 'an openness to the theoretical ferment of the last few years.' While putting great emphasis on 'the presence of Michel Foucault on the Berkeley campus' during those years, Greenblatt also acknowledges 'the influence in America of European (and especially French) anthropological and social theorists,' which 'helped to shape [his] own literary critical practice.' Significantly, one of the aims of his intervention was to 'situate [him]self in relation to […] poststructuralism.'[35] Looking back to the critical reception of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Belsey points out that 'the early accounts stressed the influence of poststructuralism on the composition of the book.' In fact, 'by the end of the 1980s it had become an established "fact" that [Greenblatt's] model of self-fashioning was derived directly from poststructuralism in general and Foucault in particular. Since then, this view has been widely reiterated.'[36] Wilson, for instance, acknowledges 'Foucault's thesis that truth is an effect of words, and knowledge the exercise of power' as a central theoretical axiom of new historicism. Thus, by invoking the ghost of the French thinker in his 1986 lecture, Greenblatt proposed what was in effect 'a big bang theory of the origin of New Historicism.' 'But there is irony in this tribute,' Wilson remarks, 'since the message Foucault brought to America was that there is no founding moment, because every utterance or event has to be understood as part of something else.'[37]

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[35] Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture', p. 197.

[36] Belsey, 'Historicizing New Historicism', p. 29. This idea is put forward by several contributors in Veeser, *The New Historicism*. See notably the essays by Gerald Graff ('Co-optation', 168-81), Elizabeth Fox-Genovese ('Literary Criticism and the Politics of the New Historicism', 213-24) and Frank Lentricchia ('Foucault's Legacy: A New Historicism?', 231-42).

RENAISSANCE SELF-FASHIONING*, OR HOW NEW HISTORICISM IS BASED ON A MISREADING OF FOUCAULT'S POWER/RESISTANCE DIALECTIC*

There is irony not only in Greenblatt's own tribute but also in the continued association, in the literary criticism of the last thirty years, of the American critic's work with Foucault's theory of power. In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France (1970), Foucault declared that 'power is reinforced by the complicity of those who are dominated' and that 'it is transmitted by and through them.'[38] Crystallising the French thinker's preoccupation with the complex dialectic between power and resistance, this maxim would appear as a central theme in Greenblatt's early work. But, and as Belsey brilliantly demonstrates in her essay, new historicism (and *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* in particular) was founded on a misreading of Foucault. In *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault returned to his analysis of the power-resistance paradigm in greater detail:

> Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always 'inside' power, there is no escaping it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? Or that, history being the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner?[39]

In other words, and as Belsey rephrases it, Foucault's central question here is: 'should we say that power always prevails over resistance?'[40] For Greenblatt, the answer is clear: power must necessarily prevail. His early work systematically undermines the possibility for a resistance that would not collude with the power that created it. As Belsey notes, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* presents 'a succession of figures who shape themselves in relation to the prevailing authority.' Marlowe's protagonists, in particular,

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[38] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse: Inaugural Lecture, Collège de France', translated from the French by Ian McLeod, *Untying the Text: Post-Structuralist Reader*, edited by Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1981), 48-78, p. 52.

[39] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction*, translated from the French by Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1979), p. 95.

'consistently fashion themselves in defiance of authority. But, true to type, they do not thereby escape the social system's shaping power.'[41] On the contrary, Greenblatt writes,

> the attempts to challenge this system—Tamburlaine's world conquests, Barabas's Machiavellianism, Edward's homosexuality, and Faustus's scepticism—are subjected to relentless probing and exposed as unwitting tributes to that social construction of identity against which they struggle.[42]

For Belsey, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* testifies to the sense that 'there is in Greenblatt's 1980 analysis no rebellion that is not complicit with the power that produced it, and no chance of a revolt that is not subject to co-option or worse.'[43] It would be easy to blame Foucault for evading his own questions and leaving the difficult task of providing meaningful answers up to his readers. Along with most twentieth-century French thinkers associated with poststructuralism, Foucault has often been accused of rhetorical obscurantism.[44] It is certainly worth noting that Foucault duly answers the question he raises in *The History of Sexuality*. Should we say that power always prevails over resistance? Here is Foucault's answer:

> To suppose that power always prevails would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. […] There is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean

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[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

[42] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 209.

[43] Belsey, 'Historicizing New Historicism', p. 33.

[44] In an article entitled 'Foucault and the Revolutionary Self-Castration of the Left' (2011), Jérôme Emmanuel Roos voices his frustration at what he feels is Foucault's 'obscurantist writings.' More generally, Roos describes what he calls the thinkers of 'the post-1968 Left' as 'a bunch of fashionable bourgeois intellectuals holding obscure and unintelligible conversations about the linguistic construction of social reality.' The article was published on Roos' website, *ROARMAG.org: reflections on a revolution* (1 December 2011)—'an online magazine of radical critique and revolutionary imagination.' (http://roarmag.org/2011/12/foucault-chomsky-left-postmodernism-poststructuralism-anarchism/,

> that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end passive, doomed to perpetual defeat.[45]

For mysterious reasons, Foucault's answer to his own question has been largely ignored by critics; this is all the more puzzling when we know that the answer figures on the same page as the question (it is not hidden in a footnote or strategically deferred to another section of the book). Unsurprisingly, this overlooking has had a major impact on the reception of Foucault's theory of power in America.

'We Are Always Free': Foucault's Account of Resistance

Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* provides a striking instance, if not *the* founding instance, of what has now become a standard misreading of Foucault. It is certainly not to be ruled out that the widespread view of the French thinker as a determinist may be, to a large extent, the creation of new historicism itself.[46] As Belsey demonstrates in her essay, there is a major rift between Foucault's account of power and that of Greenblatt in his landmark 1980 book:

> What is distinctive and surprising in Foucault's version is its instability: power is always threatened, perpetually precarious. In Greenblatt's version, power *works*: irresistible, pervasive, it incites self-fashioning and takes advantage of attempts at subversion to intensify repression.[47]

Viewed in this light, Greenblatt's account of power essentially operates a foreclosure of Foucault's open-ended theory of resistance. In its assertion that power inexorably 'works', the American critic's narrative effectively negates the multiple sites of resistance posited by the French thinker. In other words, and as Belsey maintains, the

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[45] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, pp. 95-96.

[46] Roos argues, and this is a common criticism, that 'Foucault's critique of Western civilization [is] a deterministic one' because it implies that 'there is ultimately no way for willful agents to escape the choking grasp of their culture without reproducing the same forms of oppression they are trying to overcome.' Rehearsing a key new historicist assumption, Roos suggests that, 'far from posing a counter-hegemonic challenge to the dominant powers in the world, Foucault's armchair philosophy simply made resistance impossible' ('Foucault and the revolutionary self-castration of the Left').

new historicist assumption that resistance is always complicit with power is fundamentally at odds with Foucault's account.

> Resistances as Foucault defines them are untidy, unpredictable: they are plural, heterogeneous, sometimes co-opted, sometimes not, not necessarily sympathetic, not always effective. There is no Romantic idealization of resistances here, and no promise that history will permit them to triumph. But nor is there any concession to the view that they are 'doomed to perpetual defeat'.[48]

In her insistence on the potential for resistance, Belsey calls attention to a key difference between new historicism and its British counterpart cultural materialism. While the former focuses on how social and ideological structures restrain subjects, the latter often stresses the ongoing potential for resistance. 'To British historicist critics in the Eighties […], Renaissance texts were sites of conflict, not containment,' Wilson writes. And while 'materialist criticism would admit that "power uses circuses", […] it would also affirm that no sign system, however dominant, is truly global.'[49] This view was epitomised in Belsey's influential book, *The Subject of Tragedy* (1985), which was concerned with how 'subjects […] exceed the space allotted to them' and '"work by themselves" to challenge as well as confirm the existing order.'[50] The treatment, by many cultural materialists, of early modern texts as sites of conflict is undeniably more in line with Foucault's account of power than the new historicist narrative of containment. In a late interview, Foucault was asked to consider the power-resistance relationship and the implication, often associated with his work, that 'we are always trapped inside that relationship.' 'I don't think the word *trapped* is a correct one,' he replied:

> It is a struggle, but what I mean by power relations is the fact that we are in a strategic situation towards each other. For instance, being homosexuals, we are in a struggle with the government, and the government is in a struggle with us.

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[49] Wilson, 'Historicising New Historicism', p. 13.

[50] Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London:

> When we deal with the government, the struggle, of course, is not symmetrical, the power situation is not the same, but we are in this struggle, and the continuation of this situation can influence the behavior or nonbehavior of the other. So we are not trapped. We are always in this kind of situation. It means that we have always possibilities, there are always possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump *outside* the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it. So what I've said does not mean that we are always trapped, but that we are always free. Well anyway, that there is always the possibility of changing. […] You see, if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want. So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. So I think that *resistance* is the main word, *the key word*, in this dynamic.[51]

It is easy to see, in the light of these comments, how Foucault's account of resistance provided the theoretical framework for cultural materialism. By contrast, his conviction that resistance is '*the key word*' in the power-resistance dynamic sits ill at ease with the literary politics of new historicism.

Greenblatt's 'Disingenuous' Relation with French Theory—The Instance of Derrida

In their allegiance to new historicism, cultural materialists themselves have often misconstrued the role of poststructuralism in the development of Greenblatt's creation. Alan Sinfield, for instance, remarked that 'this historicism is "new" in that it draws upon [a] range of theoretical innovations' directly affiliated with poststructuralism.[52] However, Belsey's recent historical survey of the American movement brings a timely rectification to this assumption. Thus, she argues that the unbridgeable 'gap […] between Greenblatt's work […] and Foucault's' fundamentally calls into question 'the common perception of a poststructuralist influence on the new historicism that

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[51] Michel Foucault, 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity' [1982], in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984*, volume 1, edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1997), 163-74, p. 167.

[52] Alan Sinfield, 'Introduction', *New Casebooks: Macbeth*, edited by Alan Sinfield (London: Macmillan,

established itself in the first years of the 1980s.' Belsey also aptly points out that if 'Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser appeared in the footnotes' of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, it was 'in extremely attenuated form.'[53] This strategic attenuation certainly testifies to Greenblatt's 'unwilling[ness]', in the critic's own words, to 'enrol' himself in a 'dominant theoretical camp'. On the other hand, the systematic repression of all theoretical material to the secondary realm of footnotes also confirms the extent to which his relation to poststructuralist theory has been 'disingenuous,' as he freely admits.[54] This disingenuity is particularly evident in *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001), whose unique reference to Jacques Derrida (generally viewed as a key figure of poststructuralism) appears, rather predictably, shrouded in a footnote. From a comfortable distance, Greenblatt casually implies, in the vaguest of statements, that Derrida's book 'has many acute observations about the functioning of the ghost in Shakespeare's play.'[55] This non-reference (the absence of a quote or even a page number suggests the self-cancelling quality of the footnote) testifies to the critic's refusal to engage with the French theory which he claims 'has helped to shape [his] own literary critical practice'. In fact, Greenblatt is even more brutally disingenuous when he mentions Derrida in 'Towards a Poetics of Culture'. Curiously, the reference is not to be found in a footnote this time: it is displayed, rather self-consciously, in the 'main' text

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[53] Belsey, 'Historicizing New Historicism', pp. 32 and 29. On the other hand, and as Belsey duly points out in her essay, it must be said that 'Montrose made excellent use of Althusser, and [Joel] Fineman appropriated Lacan with great subtlety'—both Montrose and Fineman have been identified as key protagonists of new historicism (p. 29). In *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition*, Fineman saw a 'considerable overlap' between Shakespeare's work and contemporary theory; and such an overlap 'suggests either that Shakespeare was very theoretically acute or, instead, that contemporary theory is itself very Shakespearean' (*The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition: Essays Toward the Release of Shakespeare's Will* (Cambridge, MA and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991), p. 112). As far as cultural materialism is concerned, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield must also be credited for engaging with Althusser's ideology critique (see 'History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, second edition, edited by John Drakakis (London and New York: Routledge, 2002)).

[54] Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture', p. 197.

[55] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p.

of the essay. 'My use of the term *circulation* here is influenced by the work of Derrida,' Greenblatt claims; 'but sensitivity to the practical strategies of negotiation and exchange depends less upon poststructuralist theory than upon the circulatory rhythms of American politics.'[56] This is the only allusion to Derrida in the essay; and Greenblatt does not seem to think that it might be necessary to reference any of his work (nor does he even bother mentioning the thinker's first name). As Andrea Loselle observes in 'How French Is It?',

> Greenblatt has unconsciously singled out Derrida as the one reference undeserving of a footnote indicating where specifically or in what context he picked up the concept of circulation (he is quite conscientious in providing bibliographic data for his other references). There is a certain irony in this omission when we recall how much of Derrida's work has been devoted to the idea of the debt—for example his reading in *La carte postale* of Freud's symptomatic refusal to acknowledge his debt to Nietzsche, that phobic object-to-be-avoided.[57]

Thus, Derrida only figures in Greenblatt's influential essay as a *lieu commun* (literally a 'common locus'—but also a commonplace) or even a trademark. If 'Derrida' belongs to the public domain, as the essay seems to imply, this means that the most basic academic conventions need not be observed when it comes to using the thinker's ideas (the fact that Derrida himself was often accused of circumventing those very conventions has been used as a powerful, if dishonest, justification by conservative scholars to account for their refusal to engage with his work 'seriously').[58]

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[56] Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture', p. 207.

[57] Andrea Loselle, 'How French Is It?', in *French Theory in America*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen (London: Routledge, 2001), 217-36, p. 227.

[58] As Johann Gregory notes, Derrida has often been 'accused of being something of an antisocial, nihilistic, punning Hamlet-like antic, a figure that has endangered the articulation and future of philosophical and academic discourse' ('Wordplay in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the Accusation of Derrida's "Logical Phallusies"', *English Studies* 94(3) (2013), 313-30, p. 324). In his biography of the thinker, Benoît Peeters recounts how, 'in order to stigmatize Derrida's style and thought, a perfectly imaginary formula ("logical phallus[i]es") was attributed to him' (*Derrida: A Biography*, translated from the French by Andrew Brown (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), p. 447). Peeters is here alluding to the so-called 'Cambridge affair'. In 1992, Cambridge University was considering whether to award Derrida an honorary doctorate; however, several academics opposed the enterprise by signing a

Of course, and as Loselle points out, 'Derridian terminology has tended to circulate quite freely, that is, transdiscursively,' which means that 'one does not always need to cite a specific source when one uses the term *différance*.'[59] However, Greenblatt's acknowledgement of the influence of 'the work of Derrida' on his use of the term circulation is rather vague, if not obscure (is he thinking about Derrida's writings on *dissémination*?). For Loselle, this disingenuous tribute reveals more than might appear at first glance:

> Derrida plays a small but significant role in Greenblatt's essay; his work may haunt the new historicism in a way that cannot be forgotten in that he occupies the singular position of an ambivalent secondary source. […] Greenblatt's reference is not an essential omission but an open annulment. Fueling the sentence's logic is an internal judgment contained in the words *sensitivity* and

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signatories pointed out that 'M. Derrida's career had its roots in the heady days of the 1960s and his writings continue to reveal their origins in that period. Many of them seem to consist in no small part of elaborate jokes and the puns "logical phallusies" and the like, and M. Derrida seems to us to have come close to making a career out of what we regard as translating into the academic sphere tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists or the concrete poets' (Barry Smith *et al.*, 'Derrida Degree: A Question of Honour', *The Times* (9 May 1992), 138-39). After Cambridge University had finally voted to award him the honorary doctorate, Derrida responded to the attack—'I challenge anyone to find in my writings the expression "logical phallusies," by which the signatories of this document, in what is a serious and dogmatic abuse of their authority in the press, try to discredit me' ('*Honoris Causa*: "This is *also* extremely funny"', in *Points…: Interviews, 1976-1994*, edited by Elisabeth Weber, translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf (Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 404). However, 'the polemic was widely publicized, in Britain and elsewhere' and, unfortunately for Derrida, the apocryphal pun was repeatedly used by the media to consolidate his reputation as a rhetorical trickster (Peeters, p. 447). Following Derrida's death in 2004, *The Economist* published an obituary whose hostility was only matched by its overt philistinism: 'subjected to his weak puns ("logical phallusies" was a famous example), bombastic rhetoric and illogical ramblings, an open-minded reader might suspect Mr Derrida of charlatanism.' Indeed, 'there were no arguments, nor really any views either' in the works of Derrida, who 'contradicted himself, over and over again.' Thus, for *The Economist*, the French thinker's academic success illustrates the extent to which 'there has always been a market for obscurantism' ('Jacques Derrida, French intellectual, died on October 8th, aged 74' (21st October 2004), *The Economist*, http://www.economist.com/node/3308320 (accessed 8 February 2003)). Perhaps more than any other public figure, Derrida has been (and still is) repeatedly associated with ideas or words that do not actually occur in his work. In his official biography of the American rapper Tupac Shakur (also known as 2pac), Jamal Joseph credits Derrida for saying that 'we must each define the meaning of our own existence' (the book description, which features the quotation, is available on 2pac's official website http://www.2pac.com/keep-ya-head-up/ (accessed 21 February 2013)). In a recent anthology of Western philosophy, the notion that 'we must each define the meaning of our own existence' is attributed to Jean-Paul Sartre, whose existentialist philosophy has little in common with Derrida's own ideas—both Sartre and Derrida are French though, which might have led to some unfortunate confusion (*The Philosophy Book*, Sam Atkinson, Cecile Landau, Andrew Szudek and Sarah Tomley (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2011), p. 221).

> *practical*. Derrida's 'work' in general lacks a certain sensitivity to American political practicality, and cannot be incorporated because his work is not dependent on capitalist circulatory 'rhythms'. The author's use of the term *circulation* owes itself therefore to that which confirms the importance of borrowing, or acknowledging an influence in order to acknowledge in turn the 'signs of the legal and economic system' […] that paradoxically usurp and replace Derrida's authorship of a concept called circulation.[60]

While Foucault is presented by Greenblatt as an essential component within the genesis of new historicism, Derrida 'occupies the singular position of an ambivalent secondary source'. As Loselle puts it, the critic's refusal to engage with the French thinker's work according to usual academic standards in his essay is 'not an essential omission but an open annulment'. In his remarkable study of French theory and its influence on American intellectual life, François Cusset notes that new historicism's 'disciplinary tactics represent a […] retreat of literary theory and criticism back into their traditional domain (genetic criticism, the history of texts, and their political context)'—that new historicism should be here referred to as 'literary theory' is rather ironic (for Greenblatt defines literary theory precisely as that which is exogenous to the 'practice' of new historicism). Cusset goes as far as to refer to Greenblatt's enterprise as a 'protectionist withdrawal inside the boundaries of the literary world.'[61] In *Shakespeare in French Theory* (2007), Wilson provides his own interpretation of Cusset's argument by suggesting that 'New Historicism's theorising of Shakespeare […] was a "protectionist tactic" to secure "the borders of the discipline" by assimilating enough French theory to immunise the literary canon against "the insolent advances of deconstruction, post-colonial criticism, and the 'pop-culture' of media studies."'[62] From this perspective,

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[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 226-27.

[61] François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States* [2003], translated from the French by Jeff Fort (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 165.

[62] Richard Wilson, *Shakespeare in French Theory: King of Shadows* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 263. Wilson here relies on his own translation of Cusset's book, which was only translated into English in

French theory would have been nothing less than the *pharmakon* of Greenblatt's movement—the little bit of poison ensuring new historicism's monopoly over the literary canon. Put on display as an apotropaic symbol, Derrida's head would have been used in order to ward off the threat posed by poststructuralist theories. But such an immunological transfer might not have been possible after the 1980s, Wilson hypothesises:

> New Historicism […] expressed the bad conscience of America's universalist decades, when the USA promulgated a liberal world economic order to underpin its sponsorship of decolonisation in the former empires of its old rivals. But like the actual frontiers of the hyper-power, America's academic boundaries could not, on this view, remain open to such theoretical imports once the terms of global trade tipped so decisively towards Europe and Asia after the 1980s. New Historicism's hospitality to Foucault expressed 'the limits of a compromise', therefore, in Cusset's account, just as its imperviousness to [Pierre] Bourdieu betrayed its intolerance of any radical critique of its own foundations. Thus, French theories about language, sexuality and power were the foreign imports that made the American model of Shakespeare competitive enough with the old-fashioned British one to ensure it continued to secure 'a massive transfer of authority and cultural capital […] to American society'.[63]

Wilson's intricate literary economics suggests that new historicism remains a quintessentially American institution: while Greenblatt's school of thought might have had an interest, in its early stages, in meddling with French theory (on a very superficial level though), America's academic boundaries could not have remained open to such theoretical imports after the 1980s. Loselle emphasises how 'Derrida's "work" in general lacks a certain sensitivity to American political practicality, and cannot be incorporated because his work is not dependent on capitalist circulatory "rhythms".' However, she suggests that

> the backlash against French theory does not […] always find its impetus exclusively in the fact that it is French; it is un-American because it denies the

[63] *Ibid.*. In his reference to the 'massive transfer of authority and cultural capital' to American society ensured by the import of French theory, Wilson is quoting from Michael Bristol, *Shakespeare's America,*

> meaning of, for example, the development of capitalism in the United States. And meaning is provided for, predictably, by reference to history and origins.[64]

What those critics imply is that new historicism's fundamental resistance to poststructuralist theories might testify to a larger phenomenon of cultural incompatibility.[65] From this viewpoint, the alleged lack of [X] sensitivity to American political practicality in Derrida's work might perhaps explain why the French thinker never made it past the realm of the footnotes in Greenblatt's work.

'A Declaration of Critical Independence': Renaissance Self-Fashioning *as an 'American Tale*'

For Belsey, however, it is in new historicism's noisily advertised, and ultimately shallow, relation to Foucauldian theory that the limits of a compromise can be detected. In her historical overview of Greenblatt's movement, she wonders:

> How should we account for the fact that the resistance in Foucault's work remained imperceptible to the generation of American intellectuals, including Greenblatt himself, who so evidently believed that new historicism was rooted in poststructuralism in general and in Foucault in particular?[66]

Belsey invokes several reasons to account for this phenomenon. Firstly, she argues that Foucault's account of resistance is inextricably bound up with twentieth-century European history, and specifically World War II.

> Born in 1926, Michel Foucault would have been 18 at the time of the Normandy Landings. He would have been intensely aware of the extent of French collaboration with a force that presented itself as beneficient, but also of the work of those unofficial warriors 'without uniform' who resisted the occupation

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[64] Loselle, 'How French Is It?', p. 228.

[65] However, this controversial assertion is contradicted by Derrida's own account of his experience of American academia. In a late interview with the French magazine *L'Humanité*, he declared: 'the reception of my work in America (as elsewhere) has been more generous, more attentive. There, I encountered less censorship, fewer barriers, fewer conflicts than in France—it is true. And even though deconstruction has been the object of raging battles in the USA, the debate was more open than in France. There was always more space to manoeuvre.' In fact, towards the end of his life, Derrida adamantly wished he could be 'cleared of the "American" image' that so often preceded him (my translation) ('Entretien avec Jacques Derrida – Penseur de l'événement', *L'Humanité* (28 January 2004), http://www.jacquesderrida.com.ar/frances/evenement.htm (accessed 22 February 2013)).

> that brought them into being. The isolated French individuals and groups who obstructed German operations, while smuggling Jews and prisoners of war out of France, can have had little hope that they would succeed in defeating their oppressors. Moreover, they lived in constant awareness that they faced the penalty of summary execution. When Foucault invokes the word 'resistance' for his post-war French readers, it therefore carries a degree of pessimism, certainly, but at the same time intensely heroic overtones that were evidently inaudible to the discontented post-Watergate intellectuals of Ronald Reagan's America who so readily coupled Greenblatt's understanding of power with Foucault's.[67]

'While the Normandy Landings were indubitably part of American history,' Belsey points out, 'French collaboration-and-resistance were not.' Consequently, 'for 1970s America the word "resistance" carried few of the connotations it had in post-war France.'[68] Instead, what influenced Greenblatt (certainly more than poststructuralism), was 'a pervasive functionalism,' based in the theories of the American sociologist Talcott Parsons.[69] Acknowledging the influence of this arch-American theoretical tradition on the work of the new historicist critic, Belsey notes that 'the primary antecedents of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* are American […] and the outline of their ideas was already familiar in the United States.' In this sense, Greenblatt's book is essentially an 'American tale'.[70] For 'self-fashioning is another name for the American Dream' and 'in the sheer American-ness of its allegiances, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* constituted a declaration of critical independence.'[71] Ultimately, Belsey argues that 'poststructuralism played virtually no part in the composition of *Renaissance Self-*

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[67] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 36. In a late interview, Derrida confessed: 'I have always dreamed of resistance—I mean the French Resistance. Going back to my childhood, and being too young to do it—to do some Resistance—I dreamed of it, I identified with the heroes of all the Resistance films: secrecy, bombs on the rails, capturing German officers, and so on.' Thus, he admitted that 'deconstruction is resistance' in that it entails 'not yielding to the occupying power, or to any kind of hegemony (Jacques Derrida, 'What Does It Mean to Be a French Philosopher Today?', in *Paper Machine* [2001], translated from the French by Rachel Bowlby (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 112-20, pp. 115-16. For an account of resistance as a central theme of poststructuralism, see David Couzens Hoy, *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2005).

[69] Belsey, 'Historicizing New Historicism', p. 39.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Fashioning'; rather, its 'roots […] are to be found in American culture, and this fact played a major part in its extraordinary success.'[72]

'A VERY PUZZLING SENTENCE': GREENBLATT'S CRAVING FOR FREEDOM

Belsey observes that the epilogue of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* contains 'a very puzzling sentence.'[73] In the book's very last lines, Greenblatt writes: 'the Renaissance figures we have considered understand that in our culture to abandon self-fashioning is to abandon the craving for freedom, and to let go of one's stubborn hold upon selfhood, even selfhood conceived as a fiction, is to die.'[74] This sentence is puzzling in that it seemingly contradicts the Renaissance-based project of new historicism (Greenblatt's 'desire to speak with the dead,' expressed at the beginning of *Shakespearean Negotiations*, epitomises this project).[75] Indeed,

> it is not clear what these Renaissance figures are doing in 'our' culture, at least in a historicist work which insists that we best understand them in the light of their own. Nor is it clear […] why a *craving* for freedom constitutes a virtue. The proposition that to give up selfhood is to die seems rather extreme.[76]

Here again, Belsey's reaction to Greenblatt's epilogue testifies to a key difference between British and American historicists. Responding to the passage in a very similar way, Wilson quips at 'Greenblatt's existential panic at the end of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.'[77] Unlike new historicism, Wilson implies, cultural materialism remains attuned to the fundamental indeterminacy that haunts literature. In order to illustrate this contrast, the critic refers to Francis Barker's reading of Shakespeare's arch-cryptic

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[74] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 257.

[75] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 1.

[76] Belsey, 'Historicizing New Historicism', p. 44.

character in *The Tremulous Private Body*. '*Hamlet* is nothing but the prince's evasion of a series of positions offered him,' Barker notes:

> The point is not to supply this absence, but to aggravate its historical significance. […] Rather than a gap to be filled, Hamlet's mystery is a void to be celebrated, therefore, against the individualist illusion of man as free and full of meaning; a fable which it is still ours to undo today.[78]

Barker's reading of Hamlet's mystery as 'a void to be celebrated' contrasts sharply with Greenblatt's 'existential panic' when he suggests that to abandon the idea of selfhood is to die. This critical stance suggests that cultural materialism might be more open to the possibility of non-presence (a key locus of poststructuralism) than new historicism—this is at least what critics like Wilson or Belsey seem to believe. However, it should be borne in mind that the present thesis does not pronounce on the oft-contested notion that there is a significant difference between new historicism and cultural materialism (mainly because such a distinction is ultimately irrelevant to the thesis' concerns).

New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Presentism and the Present of Criticism

As Belsey remarks, it is not clear what the early modern figures of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* are doing in 'our culture'—from a new historicist perspective at least. Greenblatt's out-of-the-blue reference to 'our culture' in the very last lines of his book acknowledges the historical presence of the critic at the very core of the interpretive process. Taking into account the present moment from which its criticism is produced was never part of new historicism's critical project though. It is true, on the other hand, that some new historicist critics have at times argued in favour of the movement's connection to the present.[79] But cultural materialists have been certainly more upfront in their acknowledgement of the role of present concerns in the production of historicist

[78] Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*, quoted in Wilson, 'Historicising New Historicism', p. 14.

criticisms. In their foreword to *Political Shakespeare* (often considered as the manifesto of cultural materialism), Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield wrote:

> A play by Shakespeare is related to the contexts of its production—to the economic and political system of Elizabethan and Jacobean England and to the particular institutions of cultural production (the court, patronage, theatre, education, the church). Moreover, the relevant history is not just that of four hundred years ago, for culture is made continuously and Shakespeare's text is reconstructed, reappraised, reassigned all the time through diverse institutions in specific contexts. What all the plays signify, how they signify, depends on the cultural field in which they are situated.[80]

By taking on board the notion that 'the relevant criticism is not just that of four hundred years ago', cultural materialism fashioned itself as being in tune with the situatedness of the critical presents it produces. The recognition, in particular, that 'what all the plays signify, how they signify, depends on the cultural field in which they are situated' anticipates the more recent developments of presentism in the field of Shakespeare studies. In *Shakespeare in the Present* (2002), Terence Hawkes introduced presentism as a response to the ubiquitous urge 'to read the plays historically,' that is 'to reinsert them into the context in which they first came to be, and on which, it's said, their intelligibility depends.'[81] This was in direct reaction to David Scott Kastan's landmark book, *Shakespeare After Theory* (1999), which aimed to

> restore Shakespeare's artistry to the earliest conditions of its realization and intelligibility: to the collaborations of the theater in which the plays were acted, to the practices of the book trade in which they were published, to the unstable political world of late Tudor and early Stuart England in which the plays were engaged by their various publics.[82]

Hawkes questions Kastan's project of restoration and its reliance on 'facts'—'facts about specific historical conditions that have determined the reading and writing of literature, facts about the material circumstances of literary production, facts about how

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[80] Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'Foreword to the First Edition: Cultural Materialism', *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* [1985], edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, second edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 281.

[81] Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 1.

books and playscripts were actually produced, sold and received.' These 'facts', with all the objectivity which the term implies, constitute a way of warding off the spectre of presentism, Hawkes suggests. Thus, the critic wonders whether Kastan's project of restoration might 'hint at the recovery of a lost purity, of a final arrival at truth-revealing origins, of the Restoration at last of the genuine monarchy of genius, even of a more fundamental confrontation, no longer in a glass, darkly, but now face to face.'[83] These are, in Hugh Grady's words, some of 'the stagnating assumptions of "post-theory"' that have characterised Shakespeare studies for the last fifteen years or so. And in the wake of so-called 'post-theory' criticism, the political component that distinguished the modes of historicism which developed in the 1980s has become 'domesticated and academicized, leaving behind an empty fetishism of depoliticized "facts" and "objects" called "new new historicism" or "the new materialism".'[84]

Presentism: Moving Beyond New Historicism

For proponents of presentism, the domestication and academicisation of what were once supposed to be radical methods of critical inquiry prompted the sense, in 2012, that 'the field of Shakespeare studies seems now to have reached a turning point.' In fact, there is 'widespread agreement that it is time to move beyond the methods of new historicism'—and 'critical presentism is one of the new tendencies' that can provide 'alternatives to an exhausted new historicism,' they suggested.[85] According to Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady, a key feature of presentism is the recognition that

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[83] Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present*, p. 2.

[84] Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 38 and 37. For a more detailed overview of this phenomenon, see Hugh Grady, 'Shakespeare Studies, 2005: A Situated Overview', *Shakespeare: A Journal* 1(1) (2005), 102-20. See also Jonathan Gil Harris, 'The New New Historicism's *Wunderkammer* of Objects', *European Journal of English Studies* 4(3) (2000), 111-23.

> interpretation needs to involve awareness of historical difference but also that the nature of historical difference is itself an open question connected to our consciousness and discursive environment in the here and now, so that 'historicism' and 'presentism' are always (already) connected.[86]

In other words, and as Grady puts it elsewhere, 'there can be no historicism without a latent presentism'—Greenblatt's 'very puzzling sentence' at the end of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* provides a good example of this intrinsic connection.[87] Slavoj Žižek (whose writings are addressed extensively in this thesis) can be said to have anticipated a key aspect of presentism when he wrote, in 1991, that 'the "past" is always actually synchronic with the present; the "past" is simply the way the universe thinks its antagonism.'[88] But a key theoretical figure for presentism (along with Derrida) is Walter Benjamin. In his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940), Benjamin noted that 'history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*].'[89] This recognition is at the core of the presentist critical ethos. Although 'there is [no] single, defined critical methodology called presentism,' the movement can be affiliated to 'a set of general principles':

> an approach to the past based on a self-conscious positioning of the perceiver in the present, aware of historical difference but aware as well of the approachable but real epistemological barrier between ourselves and the past, and deliberately choosing to highlight our presentness.[90]

DiPietro and Grady specifically advocate a presentism that is 'based on a kind of anachronism.' In fact, what underpins their critical approach to Shakespeare is the deliberate use of

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[86] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[87] Hugh Grady, 'Shakespeare Studies, 2005: A Situated Overview', p. 115. See also Hugh Grady, 'Introduction: A Postmodernist Shakespeare: The Current Critical Context', in *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf: Studies in Early Modern Reification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 1-25.

[88] Slavoj Žižek, 'Grimaces of the Real, or When the Phallus Appears', *October* 58 (1991), 44-68, p. 61.

[89] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, translated from the German by Harry Zorn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 261.

> an anachronism that reinserts the presence of experience back into the past, to speak in meaningful ways about the history and continuity of the literary or dramatic experience, and the historicity of that experience in the present. A critical and productive use of anachronism, a deliberate 'presentism', offers one way of disrupting that 'violent hierarchy' between present and past, collapsing the distance between them in a double gesture that both inverts and defamiliarises.[91]

Registering the Viewer's Eye Within the Literary Scene: Anachronism as a Key Tool of Presentist Criticism

DiPietro and Grady's definition of anachronism as that which 'reinserts the presence of experience back into the past' is crucial to the developments in the following chapters. In contrast with the typically historicist preoccupation with the authorial present of literature, anachronism here features as the registration of the viewer's eye within the literary scene. Although it is generally overlooked, the function of the critic in the elaboration of the reality referred to as 'Shakespeare's anachronisms' is crucial. A key aim of the thesis is to demonstrate the extent to which the experience of the untimely is primarily an effect of interpretation. From this perspective, the main function of anachronisms (insofar as that they are acknowledged as such) is to reveal the presence of the critic in a given work. In this sense, the thesis is not so much interested in examining the discrete instances that have been referred to as being anachronistic in Shakespeare's works—although it addresses the critical genesis of many of those instances. Rather, it sets out to investigate the theoretical and cultural implications of the concept of anachronism for literature. Anachronism here features as that which is experienced as untimely at a particular point in space and time. In other words, anachronism is that which eludes presence (as a very broad category of experience) in the experience of literature.

Literature as an Experience of Displacement: Derrida and the Questioning of Presence

Presence constitutes the central theme of the thesis. The idea that literature is haunted by a core of untimeliness that precludes presence is the main guiding thread throughout. The following chapters explore the ways in which Shakespearean drama can be said to make presence elusive. If the displacement of presence is a key motif of poststructuralism, it is particularly persistent in Derrida's work. In fact, 'presence has become highly suspect in the wake of Derrida,' DiPietro and Grady point out.[92] Overall, the thesis shares Derrida's project, as spelt out in *Of Grammatology* (1967), 'to make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words "proximity", "immediacy", "presence" (the proximate [*proche*], the own [*propre*], and the pre- of presence).'[93] Crucial in the following chapters is Derrida's approach to 'literature as a certain experience of displacement, a questioning of any and every sense of place.'[94] It would be difficult to write about this displacement without referring to some key concepts of Derridean terminology—although Derrida himself would no doubt have objected to the very idea of a Derridean terminology. Thus, *différance* is 'neither a word nor a concept,' Derrida insisted.[95] If literature involves a certain experience of displacement, this is a direct effect of *différance*. As he put it in *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), *différance* describes 'the operation of differing which at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence.'[96] One of Derrida's most important contributions to literary criticism is the recognition of *différance* as a constitutive feature of textuality. *Différance* is what

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[92] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[93] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated from the French by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 70.

[94] Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, p. 45.

[95] Jacques Derrida, 'Differance' [1968], in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, translated by David Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 129-60, p. 131.

guarantees that 'a text remains […] forever imperceptible,' he wrote in the opening lines to 'Plato's Pharmacy' (1968).[97] We have to reckon with the idea that 'the text is not a presence,' he noted elsewhere.[98] In fact, 'there is no present text in general,' Derrida had suggested in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' (1966): 'there is not even a past present text, a text which is past as having been present. The text is not conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence.'[99] Such a recognition can only have a tremendous impact on our approach to textuality as it inevitably challenges a number of assumptions about the relationship between text and history.

THE TEXT'S ITERABILITY AS THE 'SIGNATURE OF THE THING "SHAKESPEARE"'

In an interview from 1989, Derrida used the example of Shakespeare to describe this relationship:

> Here the example of Shakespeare is magnificent. Who demonstrates better that texts fully conditioned by their history, loaded with history, and on historical themes, offer themselves so well for reading in historical contexts very distant from their time and place of origin, not only in the European twentieth century, but also in lending themselves to Japanese or Chinese transpositions?
>
> This has to do with the structure of a text, with what I will call, to cut corners, its iterability, which both puts down roots in the unity of a context and immediately opens this non-saturable context onto a recontextualization. All this is historical through and through.[100]

The notion that the text is based on a structure of iterability implies that it can be re-presented endlessly, within any given linguistic, cultural or historical context. In other words, the text lends itself to any transposition; and as such, it can be said to be

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[97] Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, translated from the French by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), p. 63.

[98] Jacques Derrida, 'Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion', translated from the French by Samuel Weber, in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, Ilinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 111-60, p. 137.

[99] Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference*, translated from the French by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 196-231, p. 211.

[100] Jacques Derrida, '"This Strange Institution Called Literature": An Interview with Jacques Derrida', translated from the French by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, in *Acts of Literature*, edited by

inexhaustible. As Derrida pointed out oftentimes, the fundamentally open quality of textuality is particularly apparent in Shakespeare's plays—or at least in the ways they are generally experienced (could there possibly be a better example than that of *Hamlet* to illustrate the text's structure of iterability?). In *Specters of Marx* (1993), he wrote: 'this is the stroke of genius, the insignia trait of spirit, the signature of the Thing "Shakespeare": to authorize each one of the translations, to make them possible and intelligible without ever being reducible to them.'[101] Thus, the iterability of a text is what conditions its non-saturability, its perpetual openness to re-contextualisation or new translations. This is precisely what Derrida meant when he wrote, in *Of Grammatology*, that '*there is nothing outside of the text*.'[102] This statement, too often misinterpreted in academic circles and beyond, has largely contributed to shaping Derrida's reputation as a determinist thinker for whom there is nothing but language. It is undeniable that, generally speaking, Derrida's writing requires unusual levels of attention and intellectual rigour on part of the reader (his logic is so uncompromising that it can be hard to follow at times). But when he wrote that '*there is nothing outside of the text*', Derrida certainly did not mean that everything is linguistic and that we are enclosed in language. This phrase, he would note later, has 'for some become a slogan, in general so badly misunderstood, of deconstruction.' Therefore, and in order to clear all misunderstanding, he re-formulated the infamous statement, suggesting instead that 'there is nothing outside context.'[103] Or, in a slightly different formulation, 'there is nothing but context.'[104] 'Context' (or, indeed, the text), Derrida specifies, could be

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[101] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 22.

[102] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 158.

[103] Derrida, 'Afterword', p. 136.

[104] Jacques Derrida, 'Biodegradables', translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry* 15(4)

'speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not.' In this sense, 'deconstruction would be the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualization.'[105] On a very superficial level, it might appear that Derrida is saying exactly the same thing as new historicists—namely that there is nothing but context. But while new historicism's definition of 'context' is systematically bound to a specific historical period, Derrida's remains open-ended. 'Thus, as Derrida suggests, all reading is historical through and through, but there is no direct access to any past context,' DiPietro and Grady remark.[106]

The Text as an Open-Ended Collection of Non-Saturable Contexts

The proposition that 'no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation' is a powerful leitmotiv in Derrida's work.[107] In *Mémoires: For Paul de Man* (1986), he insisted that 'everything depends upon contexts which are always open, non-saturable.'[108] In fact, this notion of non-saturability had already been developed in 'Signature Event Context' (1972):

> Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of the opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring.[109]

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[105] Derrida, 'Afterword', p. 136.

[106] DiPietro and Grady, 'Presentism, Anachronism and the Case of *Titus Andronicus*', p. 54.

[107] Jacques Derrida, 'Living On', translated from the French by James Hulbert, in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman, Joseph Hillis Miller, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 81.

[108] Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires: For Paul de Man* [1984], translated from the French by Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler and Eduardo Cadava (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 115.

[109] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated from the French by

The critical developments in the present thesis are dictated by a recognition of the non-saturability of signs. The idea that 'there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring', in particular, is crucial for the critique of historicism that is deployed throughout. As DiPietro and Grady remark, 'every reading of Shakespeare in our own time is a citation, a relocation of a text from its original to an entirely new context—including all "historicist" readings, which necessarily construct new contexts in our present.'[110] The perpetual movement of relocation that determines textuality means that there can be no definitive reading of a play by Shakespeare (or of any other text). All readings inevitably construct new contexts in our present. However, the operation of re-contextualisation which underlies all criticism is often silenced, especially in the case of historicist readings. In such readings, the narrow context of the text's official moment of production becomes an artificial anchoring point for the text's ultimate meaning. But, from the beginning, such an anchoring point is subverted by the ongoing process of deconstruction. Deconstruction corresponds to the recognition that the only stable characteristic of the text is its irreducibility—a text elicits a multiplicity of contexts which define it, every time in a different way. The fundamental *différance* that haunts the text guarantees that no centre of absolute anchoring can be assigned to it; this notably means that, within the semantic field of the text, complete historical presence is impossible.

The Theatre of the Impossible: Introducing the Untimely Aesthetics of Shakespearean Drama

Nicholas Royle notes that there is 'a fascination that Shakespeare and Derrida evidently share with the motif of "the impossible" or what Derrida calls, in his essay on *Romeo*

and Juliet, "the theater of the impossible".'[111] In this essay from 1986 ('Aphorism Countertime'), Derrida notably suggests that Shakespeare's drama testifies to the sense that '*the impossible happens*.'[112] The motif of the impossible is inextricably bound up with deconstruction. In fact, 'the least bad definition' of deconstruction is the 'experience of the impossible,' Derrida once suggested.[113] Deconstruction, John Caputo argues, is 'the relentless pursuit of *the* impossible, which means, of things whose possibility is sustained by their impossibility, of things which, instead of being wiped out by their impossibility, are actually nourished by it.'[114] Viewed in the light of deconstruction, Shakespeare's theatre can indeed be described as a relentless pursuit of the impossible. In its staging of long lost historical scenes, this uncanny theatre 'strive[s] with things impossible,' to use Ligarius' memorable formula in *Julius Caesar* (2.1.324). But far from being wiped out by their impossibility, these 'things' are instead nourished by it. The repeated (almost compulsive) acknowledgement of the distance between past

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[111] Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, p. 39.

[112] Jacques Derrida, 'Aphorism Countertime', translated from the French by Nicholas Royle, in *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge and Jacques Derrida (London: Routledge, 1992), 414-33, p. 422.

[113] Jacques Derrida, 'Afterw.rds: Or, at Least, Less Than a Letter About a Letter Less', translated from the French by Geoffrey Bennington, in *Afterwords*, edited by Nicholas Royle (Tampere, Finland: Outside Books, 1992), 197-203, p. 200. Deconstruction is also 'what happens,' Derrida explained in a lecture delivered in English at a conference held at the University of California, Irvine in 1987: 'deconstruction is neither a theory nor a philosophy; it is neither a school nor a method. It is not even a discourse, nor an act, nor a practice. It is what happens, what is happening today in what they call society, politics, diplomacy, economics, historical reality, and so on and so forth. Deconstruction is the case' ('Some Statements and Truisms About Neo-Logisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms', translated from the French by Anne Tomiche, in *The State of 'Theory': History, Art and Critical Discourse*, edited by David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 63-95, p. 85). Rehearsing Derrida's insights, Nicholas Royle dispels a common myth of literary criticism by pointing out that 'deconstruction is not a method, a tool or technique for reading texts, especially not for reading texts' (*Jacques Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 85). Rather, and as Derrida himself pointed out, 'there is always already deconstruction, at work *in* works, especially in *literary* works' (Derrida, *Mémoires*, p. 123). In his 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' (1983), Derrida explained that 'deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. *It deconstructs it-self. It can be deconstructed.* [*Ça se déconstruit.*] The "it" [*ça*] is not here an impersonal thing that is opposed to some ecological subjectivity. *It is in deconstruction* (the *Littré* says, "to deconstruct it-self [*se déconstruire*] … to lose its construction"). And the "se" of "se déconstruire," which is not the reflexivity of an ego or of a consciousness, bears the whole enigma' (Jacques Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', *Derrida and* Différance, edited by David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1-5, p. 4).

[114] John Caputo (editor), *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (Fordham:

and present in the dramas does not nullify the aesthetic value of Shakespeare's theatre. Rather, and this is the central claim of the thesis, the untimely (and, by extension, the impossible) figures as an aesthetic category in its own right in this theatre of alienation. 'How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport?', Brutus marvels after Caesar's downfall (3.1.115). By acknowledging the representational plot in which they partake, Shakespearean characters can be, and have been, said to register the differential quality of the whole literary experience.[115] This is one of many possible ways of illustrating Derrida's sense that Shakespeare's theatre stages the impossible. '*Le théâtre de l'impossible*,' as it is referred to in Derrida's original essay, conjures up the French expression *être le théâtre de* (literally 'to be the theatre of'), which can be translated as 'to be the scene of' or 'to be the locus of'.[116] In its relentless staging of 'things impossible', Shakespeare's theatre registers the madness of representation: that is, representation is mad precisely because it is impossible. Following Derrida's insight, the thesis considers Shakespeare's theatre as the locus of the impossible. In particular, it aims at demonstrating how this theatre welcomes the impossible as an aesthetic category. The theme of the impossible in Shakespeare is closely related to that of the untimely, which manifests itself through the aestheticisation of *différance* in the dramas. The untimely, as it is addressed in the thesis, is that which crystallises the inherent gap that divides signs from within. A central concern throughout is to determine the extent to which this gap can be said to be integrated as part of the aesthetics of the drama. It should perhaps be noted that the term 'aesthetics' is used in a very broad sense in the thesis. What is referred to as 'aesthetic' here does not imply a subjective judgement of value about what is beautiful or artistically pleasing to the senses. Rather, 'aesthetics'

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[115] See John Drakakis, '"Fashion it thus": *Julius Caesar* and the Politics of Theatrical Representation', *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1992), 65-73.

[116] Jacques Derrida, 'L'aphorisme à contretemps', in *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987),

describes how a work of art is perceived at a particular point in history—thus conjuring up an objective, historically-defined reality. The aesthetics of a literary work is here viewed as the direct result of interpretation. In other words, the aesthetics of any work (like its meaning) is constructed in the present. By examining 'the aesthetically productive temporal fissures that anachronism produces,' the thesis makes a case for the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama—although it would be possible, alternatively, to speak of an aesthetics of impossibility.[117]

The Foreclosure of the Hermeneutic Field in Historicist Criticism: The Instances of Julius Caesar *and* Hamlet

Chapter 1 can be viewed as an extension of the present introduction in that it provides a general overview of the topic of anachronism in Shakespeare criticism. The chapter notably suggests that the theoretical implications of anachronism for literature have not yet been fully explored. Throughout the twentieth century, historicist critics have repeatedly argued that specific anachronistic instances unveil the inalienable presence of the author's historical moment within the works. A key effect of this exclusive contextual determination is to question the validity of the historical planes that are seemingly posited by the plays' settings. Thus, *Julius Caesar* is not 'really' about Caesar's Rome, critics have suggested—Caesar's Rome is only a superficial historical layer that defines the artistic form of Shakespeare's play. Underneath it, there lies another, supposedly more 'real', historical layer: that of Shakespeare's London. However, the thesis suggests that *all* historical layering testifies to a loss of presence. In this sense, Shakespeare's London cannot provide the original framework that needs to be retrieved in order to be able to fully elucidate *Julius Caesar*. The same reasoning applies to all the plays that are addressed in the thesis. The assignment to literature, in

any context, of a fixed and exclusive core of historical reality inevitably results in the foreclosure of the hermeneutic field. This notion is illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3, which focus respectively on *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. The characteristic untimeliness that has been found to pervade these two plays is generally explained in view of the historical moment of their production. However, and as the two chapters suggest, the defamiliarisation effect incurred by potential anachronisms is primarily the effect of the viewer's own cultural biases (whether the viewer in question is a reader, a critic, a playgoer or anything else). In order to illustrate this notion, Chapter 2 adopts an essentialistic approach to *Julius Caesar* that could be described as deliberately naïve. The chapter suggests that, far from being the effect of an objective historical reality (namely that of Shakespeare's late Elizabethan moment), the play's untimeliness can in fact be read on the plane of character psychology as it is experienced in the present of interpretation. The focus on the characters' distinct obsession with the disjointedness of time is presented as an alternative to the model of systematic historical contextualisation provided by much recent criticism of the play. The chapter explores the (admittedly quaint) idea that, prior to any operation of historical determination, the diegetic world of the play 'in itself' is haunted by an aesthetics of untimeliness. Such an overtly essentialistic reading is deployed only in order to demonstrate that *Julius Caesar*, like all literature, fundamentally resists historical foreclosure. It should be noted right away that, from the perspective of the thesis as a whole, the chapter deliberately resorts to notions that are problematic. For instance, it assumes that there is such a thing as a play 'in itself' *qua* positively defined ontological centre that transcends all contexts. It also takes it for granted (rehearsing, with more than a touch of irony, the default strategy adopted by many literary critics past and present) that there is such a thing as a uniform audience addressed by the play (the all-encompassing critical 'we'—a staple of literary

criticism—is repeatedly used throughout the chapter). These notions are obviously questioned in subsequent chapters; for one of the key concerns of the thesis is to challenge the idea of literature as having an inalienable core of presence. With this aim in mind, Chapter 3 explores the notion of 'Hamlet' as a multi-faceted signifier that eludes definitive historical elucidation. There is no 'in itself' to *Hamlet*, the chapter argues—in fact, this absence of a stable ontological core is treated as the play's one and only defining feature. Instead, the drama's meanings are seen to be produced through a dazzling array of critical perspectives in the perpetually moving present of interpretation. And although it refuses to be amalgamated into an organic whole, the oceanic hermeneutic field of *Hamlet* contributes to the elaboration of a fragmented literary aesthetics—this is the chapter's central proposition. In the absence of a stable semantic core, the fragmented quality of the critical field of *Hamlet* illustrates another facet of the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama.

THE AESTHETICISATION OF THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF PRESENCE IN HENRY V

Chapter 4 returns to the question of character by focusing on the Chorus in *Henry V*. The chapter specifically examines the intersubjective relation that binds the Chorus with the audience it repeatedly invokes throughout the play. The critical strategy that is deployed throughout is characterised by non-identification with the audience addressed by the Chorus through the play. Audience identification constitutes the subjective grid *par défaut* of the majority of the play's criticism. The main effect of such an identification is that it collapses the 'we' used by many critics and the phenomenon often referred to as 'the audience' into a single, monolithic entity. The chapter questions the validity of terms such as 'we' or 'the audience' to refer to fixed realities. Thus, the particular assumption that there can be such a thing as a stable audience is repeatedly

challenged. In order to do so, the Chorus is considered as the main subject of *Henry V* (as opposed to 'us' *qua* audience *par défaut*—as was the case in the chapter on *Julius Caesar*). The chapter specifically examines how the Chorus attempts to circumscribe its audience in space and time through the use of linguistic markers of presence. But the Chorus's rhetoric of presence only emphasises the absence of the supposedly authentic historical scene it invokes. Ultimately, the chapter argues that the dramatisation of this absence, through the figure of the Chorus, represents a key feature of the aesthetics of impossibility (or untimeliness) in Shakespeare's theatre. The theoretical implications of the impossibility of presence in *Henry V* are also examined thoroughly in the chapter. Although—or rather precisely *because*—it remains inscrutable, the invoked audience features as the key instance upholding the Chorus's fantasy of historical presence. Seen through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this ghostly audience occupies the function of the 'big Other'—the symbolic instance that regulates social interaction. By essence elusive, the big Other testifies to the constitutive displacement that underlies subjectivity.

Mediation as Key Factor of Différance*: Lacan's Big Other*

Aiming to illustrate the radical shift that lies at the very core of subjectivity, Chapter 5 returns to an audience-based mode of experience. From the perspective of a given audience, the big Other is the instance that looks at 'us' precisely from the point 'we' are watching. In other words, the big Other is what guarantees that, from the beginning, subjectivity is displaced. 'The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am […] in the picture,' Jacques Lacan pointed out in one of his seminars.[118] The chapter uses the

[118] Jacques Lacan, 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*', in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* [1973], edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth:

examples of the ghost in *Hamlet* and the witches in *Macbeth* to illustrate the notion of a spectral gaze that circumscribes audiences within the space of representation. The chapter engages with the theories of Slavoj Žižek, paying particular attention to his reading of Lacan in view of contemporary popular culture. For Žižek, the big Other stands for the inherent mediation of enjoyment. A pervasive feature of mass entertainment, mediation testifies to the sense that, within any given representational space, presence is impossible (whether there *are* any non-representational spaces is another question that probably deserves a book-length study). The chapter pays close attention to the concept of interpassivity, which is concerned with how enjoyment is not an intrinsic function of the subject. Ultimately, the big Other stands for the instance that takes over the process of enjoyment for the subject. With its interpassive Chorus, *Henry V* illustrates the extent to which staged entertainment is inherently mediated. Thus, on the one hand, the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama can help us identify the core of mediation that underlies the contemporary entertainment industry. On the other hand, specific examples from our own present can illustrate the notion of untimely aesthetics within the framework of Shakespeare's works.

The Subjectivities of Literary Criticism: Meaning as a Location of Change

Throughout the thesis, the constitutive displacement that characterises subjectivity is illustrated through a variety of subjective modes. In many ways, the present work can be viewed as an investigation into the subjectivities of literary criticism—which constitute the overarching preoccupation of the thesis. In this sense, the adoption of a different subjective mode in every chapter serves a specific purpose: it points out that the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama is essentially the effect of interpretation (as opposed to authorial intention). This plurality also aims at promoting the fact that

there are many different ways (all valid) that the plays can be looked at, many different ways in which the untimely aesthetics can be experienced in the present of interpretation (it should be remembered at all times that the assertion of the fundamental openness of the interpretive field throughout the thesis specifically aims at contesting the hegemony of new historicism in Shakespeare studies). In other words, the untimely aesthetics is not here presented as an intrinsic feature of the drama. Rather, it is the result of deliberate critical positions. As Grady puts it, 'aesthetic paradigms have a paradoxical relation to temporality—they always construct art in the present for us in a form peculiar to the specific era of cultural history in which they are situated.'[119] This means that the present of interpretation remains unfixed; it is open and in perpetual motion (in the title of his essay, Grady pays tribute to the 'moving aesthetic' of the 'now'). In this sense, the focus on different levels of perception in each chapter of the thesis demonstrates in a practical way that what is generally referred to as 'the present' is at heart a plural experience. As Belsey writes in *The Subject of Tragedy*, 'the subject, however defined […] does not stay in place. Meaning, the condition of subjectivity, is a location of change.'[120]

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[119] Hugh Grady, '*Hamlet* and the Present: Notes on the Moving Aesthetic "Now"', *Presentist Shakespeares*, edited by Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 142.

CHAPTER 1 – 'VIOLATOR OF CHRONOLOGY': *SHAKESPEARE'S ANACHRONISMS* IN CON-TEXT(S)

> When you consider a major achievement of writing such as a play by Shakespeare, you are continually reinterpreting it. This object is there and it's like a sputnik, it turns round, and over the years different portions of it are nearer to you, different bits are further away. It's rushing past you and you are peeling off those meanings. In that way a text is dynamic. The whole question of what Shakespeare intended doesn't arise, because what he has written not only carries more meanings than he consciously intended, but those meanings are altered in a mysterious way as the text moves through the centuries. If you dig into it you find some new aspect, and yet you never seize the thing itself.
>
> – Peter Brook, 'Shakespeare on Three Screens'[1]

I- SHAKESPEARE, ANACHRONISM AND THE CRITICISM

A. ANACHRONISM AS THE UNIVERSAL FATE OF LITERATURE

Investigating the topic of anachronism in literature requires that we take into account two defining contexts. The first context, which could be referred to as the authorial moment, looks back at the historical conditions in which a text was written: literature is addressed as the product of material and cultural contingencies. However, the meaning of a literary work cannot be reduced exclusively to the historical moment of its production. Underlying the idea of literature is a constantly shifting present that gestures towards another crucial literary moment: that of 'reading'. This second context corresponds to the critical or interpretive moment. The present chapter suggests that, in order to make sense of what has been called 'Shakespeare's anachronisms', both authorial and interpretive moments need to be addressed—although more emphasis is put on the latter, as will soon be made clear. The thesis's preoccupation with literature as an essentially interpretive process springs from the sense that a text 'exists' through the cultural conditions in which it is received and distributed. Accordingly, this chapter

[1] Peter Brook, 'Shakespeare on Three Screens', quoted in Roger Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film*

is not so much concerned with text (e.g. 'Shakespeare's works') as with *con*-text, namely the web of invisible threads through which a text is woven into existence at a particular time. In this sense, it can be said that textuality has a temporality of its own, which always implicitly refers to a 'present', but every time a different one—for there are as many presents as there are readings or theatrical representations. The *différance* that springs from this endless division of the present within itself is a crucial aspect of literature, explored in this chapter. Thus, the notion of 'Shakespeare's anachronisms' is not viewed in terms of discrete, disconnected instances but rather as evidence of the intrinsic disjointedness of literature itself. In many ways, the starting point here is the sense that it is not possible to think about literary anachronisms without first recognising anachronism *as* the universal fate of literature. As soon as we start thinking about its implications, 'anachronism ceases to be a local and occasional phenomenon; it becomes a universal fate,' Thomas Greene suggests.[2]

The genre labels that have been used extensively to classify Shakespeare's plays are artificial and often misleading—e. g. *Hamlet* as 'tragedy', *Henry V* as 'history play', *etc*. Thematically, the plays themselves can be said to be concerned with an irremediable overlapping of genres; a good example would be Polonius' pompous distinction, in *Hamlet*, between 'tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastorical-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical [and] tragical-comical-historical-pastoral' (2.2.379-381). Such systematic labelling can only distract us from the fact that all Shakespearean writing is, by essence, 'historical'. The vast majority of the plays deal with a historical context (a 'setting') that is brought to *a* present, that of a reader or a playgoer at a given time. With their multi-layered temporality, Shakespeare's plays address the disjointedness of the present in relation to 'the dark backward and abysm of

[2] Thomas McLernon Greene, 'History and Anachronism', *The Vulnerable Text: Essays on Renaissance*

time', thus problematising the sense of an irrecoverable gap between past and present (*The Tempest*, 1.2.50). On many occasions, they fashion themselves in terms of a deliberate operation of *re*-presentation of the past to a present readership or theatrical audience. For instance, the epic tirades of the Chorus in *Henry V* draw our attention to the self-conscious theatrical strategy that consists in 'jumping o'er times' and 'Turning th'accomplishment of many years / Into an hour-glass' (Prologue, 29-31). In *Stages of History*, Phyllis Rackin suggests that a central feature of Shakespeare's theatre is 'the consciousness of anachronistic distance from a lost historical past.'[3] Such a recognition undermines the very possibility of investigating the so-called topic of 'Shakespeare's anachronisms'—for the good reason that *everything* in Shakespeare is anachronistic. The notion of theatre as a historiographic project is thwarted from the beginning, as the numerous metadramatic references in the Chorus of *Henry V* illustrate. For this very reason, it seems difficult—not to say impossible—to say anything at all about 'Shakespeare's anachronisms' (which *ones*, anyway?). It seems more interesting and feasible, on the other hand, to historicise the concept of anachronism in relation to Shakespeare criticism. Where does the idea of 'Shakespeare's anachronisms' originate from? What historical conditions allowed it to appear? At what point did 'Shakespeare' and 'anachronism' become associated in the criticism and in popular culture? What can be the meaning of such crystallisation? As should now be clear, the aim here is not to compile an exhaustive list of *all* the anachronisms that appear in Shakespeare's plays—an impossible task as there will always be more anachronisms than can be counted. Rather, the chapter looks at what critics mean when they refer to 'Shakespeare's anachronisms'. The thesis's interest in the moments in which a literary text is performed,

[3] Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 88. Rackin's study has been very helpful for the elaboration of this chapter. A thought-provoking 'attempt to historicize Shakespeare's historical practice,' it explores Shakespearean historiography and its socio-cultural context (p. ix). See in particular the chapter on 'Anachronism and

received, interpreted and criticised leads to a thorough questioning of what every act of criticism reveals about the context of its production.

B. THE CONSTITUTIVE ANACHRONISM THAT HAUNTS LITERARY CRITICISM

From the seventeenth century, commentators have been eager to pick on temporal and geographical inconsistencies in Shakespeare's plays. One of the most famous and earliest recorded examples is Ben Jonson's reported comment that 'Sheakspear in a play brought in a number of men saying they had suffered Shipwrack in Bohemia, wher there is no Sea neer by some 100 Miles.'[4] For Jonson, this *anachorism* (a derivative of anachronism that signals a geographical misplacement) testifies to Shakespeare's lack of a formal education.[5] Following in the tracks of Jonson, many critics went on a systematic anachronism-hunt in Shakespeare's plays. In most cases, this type of critical project is grounded in the implicit sense that under the anachronistic blemishes lies a pure, accurate historical drama: getting rid of the anachronisms should allow us to retrieve the primal, unspoilt historical scene. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critics did not address the possibility that anachronisms could have been part of a deliberate strategy of dramatisation of the historical distance between past and present. However, the powerful sense of anachrony that pervades Shakespeare's work invites us to reconsider the relation between literary texts and their historical sources.

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[4] 'Conversations with Drummond', *Ben Jonson*, edited by Charles Harold Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 138. In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare blithely contravenes the most elementary neoclassical rules: the play stages kingdoms hundreds of miles apart, features several subplots and spans over sixteen years. Although some of these 'errors' appear in Robert Greene's *Pandosto* (the source for the play's main plot), a common view now is that 'Shakespeare added most of them, provocatively, to make the action even more implausible' (*The Winter's Tale*, edited by John Pitcher (London: Arden, 2010), p. 61).

[5] Critics have pointed out many other instances of anachorism in Shakespeare's plays. For instance, in the first act of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Valentine takes a sea-voyage from Verona to Milan, though

What have been viewed as discrete anachronistic instances might actually be entry points into the uniformly anachronistic backdrop composed by Shakespeare's meta-historical writing. The notion that, since the seventeenth century, anachronisms have been generally treated as an undermining feature of literary works is examined in the present chapter. Historical accuracy itself is often used as a critical barometer to assess the intrinsic quality of literary texts, and especially those dealing with official recorded history in one way or another. The intense scrutiny to which Shakespeare's historiography has been subjected provides a very good example of the hegemonic status of the authorial moment in literary criticism—the notion of a gap between 'historicist' and 'presentist' approaches to textuality is deeply ingrained in critical practices. In some aspects, the present thesis springs from the conviction that such a gap is artificial and that it can be bridged through a rigorous critical historicisation, which implies that we carefully historicise every act of criticism. This particular methodology is rooted in the recognition that, no matter what we do, 'our modernity is sure to betray us in ways we can neither predict nor control,' as Jonas Barish warns in an essay investigating 'Some Shakespearean Anachronisms'.[6]

Because the interpretive moment is a defining feature of literature, this requires that literary criticism itself should be scrutinised, challenged and historicised. Historicising critical practices entails that we acknowledge the extent to which these practices are conditioned by their own historical moment. Amongst other things, this means applying to historicist criticism the same methods that it uses to investigate so-called 'primary' texts—such distantiation precisely destabilises notions of 'primary' and 'secondary' textuality. A central motif in this thesis is the sense that Shakespearean

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[6] Jonas Barish, 'Hats, Clocks and Doublets: Some Shakespearean Anachronisms', *Shakespeare's Universe: Renaissance Ideas and Conventions*, edited by John Mucciolo (Hants: Scolar Press, 1996),

drama can be viewed as reflecting on the aesthetics of its own representation: this is notably illustrated in its compulsive staging of theatre in the act of representing itself. In a way, this introductory chapter obeys a similar metadramatic logic by questioning the processes through which literature is passed on, represented and interpreted through time. Investigating the theme of anachronism in relation to literature implies that we take into account the overarching anachronism that haunts every critical operation: towards the end of the twentieth century, critics have started to realise that 'whether a given representational work contains an anachronism depends upon the kind of representation it is and this in turn depends upon how we interpret the work.'[7] Recently, Jeremy Tambling has emphasised the idea that 'reading creates anachronistic thinking' and that 'who defines what is anachronistic is crucial.'[8] Along the same lines, Rackin notes that 'all historical narratives are ideologically motivated' and that 'it is therefore necessary to historicize historical practice, to focus more on the temporal and social site on which a historical narrative is constructed than upon the historical facts it purports to represent.'[9] Relying on the premise that literary criticism is shaped by the historical conditions in which it is produced, this chapter sets out to historicise the practice of critics—mainly those who talk about anachronism in relation to Shakespeare's works, but not exclusively—since the beginning of the seventeenth century. Putting every act of literary criticism back in its cultural context, whenever possible, can help us grasp the theoretical implications of the concept of anachronism.

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[7] Annette and Jonathan Barnes, 'Time Out of Joint: Some Reflections on Anachronism', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47(3) (1989), 253-61, p. 257.

[8] Jeremy Tambling, *On Anachronism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 13 and 1.

C. A 'Disgrace to the Stage': Shakespeare's Anachronisms in the Eighteenth Century

In the eighteenth century, a fashionable mode of criticism consisted in scanning Shakespeare's English history plays for anachronisms. The two *Henry IV* plays, in particular, proved extremely popular with regard to that practice. In the first part of the play, King Henry rebukes Prince Harry: 'Thy place in Council thou hast rudely lost' (3.2.32). In a footnote to his edition of *1 Henry IV*, Edmund Malone observes that 'the prince's removal from the council in consequence of his striking the Lord Chief Justice Gascoigne [took place] some years after the battle of Shrewsbury (1403).' Thus, the event could not have taken place in the time span covered by the play, Malone is eager to point out: therefore, 'our author is guilty of an anachronism.'[10] This remark mirrors a preoccupation with historical chronology that prevailed in much eighteenth-century criticism. Critics were puzzled by the intrusion of Elizabethan commodities in plays supposedly set in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. 'But take my pistol if thou wilt,' Falstaff advises Hal at the end of *1 Henry IV* (5.3.51). Although firearms were invented in China in the twelfth century, they were not transmitted to Europe before the late Renaissance.[11] Commenting on this anachronism, Samuel Johnson notes that 'Shakespeare never has any care to preserve the manners of the time'—'pistols were not known in the age of Henry' but 'they were, in our author's time, eminently used by the Scots,' he points out in a footnote.[12] These considerations by some of the most respected eighteenth-century Shakespeareans sum up the period's generally hostile

[10] The reference originally appears in Malone's sixteen-volume edition of the works (1790) and is reprinted in *A New Variorum Edition of Henry the Fourth Part I*, edited by Samuel Burdett Hemingway (Philadelphia and London: Joshua Ballinger Lippincott, 1936), p. 210n.

[11] Joseph Needham, *Science & Civilisation in China*, volume 5 [Chemistry and Chemical Technology], part 7 ['Military Technology; The Gunpowder Epic'] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1-3.

[12] The reference originally appears in Samuel Johnson's edition of 'The Plays of William Shakespeare'

disposition towards what was viewed as temporal deviations: they are 'faults' perpetrated by a 'violator of chronology,' to use Johnson's memorable expression.[13] In his survey of anachronism in Shakespearean drama, the English antiquary Francis Douce also deplores the playwright's 'absurd violations of historical accuracy.' These manifold 'errors', as he calls them, should be hunted down because they are 'transgressions against the rules of chronology.' Throughout the essay, they are variously referred to as 'incongruities,' 'whimsicalities,' 'blemishes,' 'impostures on the public' and even a 'disgrace [to] the stage.' As an example, Douce refers to Shakespeare's *dramatis personae* lists, which he suggests almost always consist in 'a medley of ancient and modern names that is often extremely ridiculous.'[14] The French critic Paul Stapfer later suggested that Douce's survey of Shakespearean anachronism was 'written chiefly in the cavilling spirit of a mere pedant' and that it 'enters into none of those higher considerations that the subject admits of.'[15] Both Douce and Stapfer provide a tentative, but of course by no means exhaustive, list of what they see as 'Shakespeare's anachronisms'. The fact is that such a list cannot ever be exhaustive and can only ever remain incomplete. This is the shopping list syndrome—a shopping list, its very possibility, depends on everything that is not on it but *could* potentially be on it. 'By definition the list has no taxonomical closure,' Derrida remarks in *Positions*.[16] 'Faced with the ghostliness of Derrida's shopping list,' Nicholas Royle observes, 'we

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[13] Johnson uses the expression in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare's plays. Reprinted in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, edited by Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 333.

[14] Francis Douce, 'On the Anachronisms and some other Incongruities of Shakspeare', *Illustrations of Shakspeare, and of Ancient Manners: With Dissertations on the Clowns and Fools of Shakspeare; on the Collection of Popular Tales Entitled Gesta Romanorum; and on the English Morris Dance* (London: Richard Taylor, 1807), pp. 281-96.

[15] Paul Stapfer, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity: Greek and Latin Antiquity as Presented in Shakespeare's Plays*, translated from the French by Emily Jane Carey (London: Kegan Paul, 1880), p. 107.

[16] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, translated from the French by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University

must reckon with the sense that there might be nothing to it, in it or on it (no "contents") and/or that it might in fact be endless, an interminable shopping list.'[17] For this very reason, any attempt at drawing up a comprehensive list of Shakespeare's anachronisms is doomed to failure. Ultimately, Douce's judgemental remarks on Shakespeare's dramas illustrate the extent to which literary criticism is contingent on its own cultural moment.

II- Shakespeare Through the Ages: From Timeless Genius to Emblem of *Différance*

A. 'Guided Only by His Genius': Romantic Shakespeare in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

At the other end of the critical compass is the vision of Shakespeare as a timeless genius who transcends social and historical determinations—a vision that originated outside England towards the end of the eighteenth century. The development of this model of authorship owed much to German Romanticism. The reason that this cultural movement became inextricably bound up with Shakespeare can only be understood in relation to its historical background. As Jonathan Bate explains in *The Genius of Shakespeare*,

> the two principal features of German political and cultural life in the middle of the eighteenth century were that the language of the nobility was French and that a unified nation as such did not exist, since the German-speaking territories were divided into an array of independent sovereignties.[18]

If it were to regenerate itself, German national culture had to challenge the domination of French Enlightenment values. Thus, it was the urge to find an alternative aesthetic to the French neoclassical model that led Germany to adopt Shakespeare as its national poet: '"classical" German literature […] had its origins in a combination of anti-French sentiment [and] Shakespearean inspiration,' Bate observes. This is a very good example

[17] Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 83.

of how the reception of 'Shakespeare' in a particular place at a particular time (in this case Germany in the 1770s) is determined by very specific historical and material contingencies. If 'Shakespeare' was turned into an ideological weapon against French cultural hegemony, Bate insists that 'this was the most significant sense in which he was "used" and "made alive" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,' both in Germany and in Britain.[19] By the end of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare was (and, in many ways, still is) predominantly perceived as a universal genius who transcends temporal and geographical specificities. This reputation for universality meant that any dramatic inconsistencies could now be accounted for through 'the genius of Shakespeare.'[20] As the German scholar Wilhelm Creizenach noted, 'in most cases, [Shakespeare's] anachronisms appear to have been due to the indifference of genius rather than to intention.'[21]

Even though dismissed as irrelevant, the anachronisms remained mostly perceived as fallacious occurrences through the Romantic era. Such dismissal is a prominent feature of both British and German criticisms from the eighteenth century onwards. For the two nationalities, 'Shakespeare' also attains the status of national icon in the same period, which is certainly no coincidence. Both Britain and Germany have used it as a powerful token to reinforce their cultural identity, and more specifically as a weapon against French neoclassical culture. Thus, the sense that 'the eighteenth-century deification of Shakespeare was premised upon a demonization of classical French

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[19] Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, p. 183.

[20] Bate notably argues that 'Shakespeare is not an example of genius: he is the premiss for genius' (p. 316). Because 'the genius of Shakespeare is not co-extensive with the life of William Shakespeare,' this means that 'a knowledge of the "pre-life" and the "after-life" of his art is essential to an understanding of his power.' Bate's joint reflection on the *origins* and *effects* of 'Shakespeare' is in keeping with the focus, in this chapter, on the authorial and interpretive moments of literary criticism (p. x).

[21] Wilhelm Michael Anton Creizenach, *English Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1916), pp. 156-57. Written in the late nineteenth century, the original study (*Das englische Drama im Zeitalter Shakespeares*) figured in a five-volume anthology, *Geschichte des neueren Drama*

culture' leads Bates to the conclusion that, in the period, 'Romanticism and Shakespeare idolatry were the two sides of the same anti-Gallic coin.'[22] As Hugh Grady explains, 'Shakespeare's reputation grew steadily from decade to decade [in the eighteenth century], under a number of impulses, including a growing anti-French English nationalism […] and a growing empirical consciousness that refused to accept the neo-classical "rules" as absolute.'[23] Perhaps as a reaction against this demonisation, royalist French culture started to define itself against Shakespeare and what Voltaire called his 'monstrous farces.'[24] Voltaire, one of the most respected French intellectual figures at the time, dismissed the playwright as a 'barbaric mountebank' and a 'drunken savage.'[25] However, the relation between the French thinker and the English dramatist is more ambivalent than is generally assumed—a mixture of attraction and repulsion, which is well exemplified in Voltaire's own controversial translations of the plays.[26] As a young Anglophile, Voltaire had once praised the inclusiveness of England, a land where 'Jew, Mohametan and Christian transact together as if they shared the same religion.'[27] Later, he would also depict London as a place where 'chair-bearers, sailors, coachmen, dumpy shopkeepers, butchers, and even clerks […] found in Shakespeare's tragedies everything

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[22] Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, pp. 183 and 230.

[23] Hugh Grady, '*Hamlet* and the Present: Notes on the Moving Aesthetic "Now"', *Presentist Shakespeares*, edited by Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 145. See also Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 99-222.

[24] Voltaire, 'A Shakespeare Journal', *Yale French Studies* 33, 'Shakespeare in France' (1964), 5-13, p. 10 ('Lettre à d'Alembert' (1776)).

[25] *Ibid.* ('Lettre à d'Argental' (1776)); Nicholas Clement, quoted in Jean Jules Jusserand, *Shakespeare in France Under the Ancient Régime* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1899), p. 368. For a thorough account of Voltaire's epistolary ramblings on Shakespeare, see Richard Wilson, 'Making Men of Monsters: Shakespeare in the Company of Strangers', *Shakespeare in French Theory: King of Shadows* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). Wilson notably argues that the 'French resistance to Shakespearean monstrosity was rooted in racist ideology' (pp. 242-43).

[26] On Voltaire's translations of Shakespeare, see Philip Cranston, '"Rome en Anglais se prononce Roum…": Shakespeare Versions by Voltaire', *MLN* 90(6) (1975), 809-37.

[27] Voltaire, 'Letters Concerning the English Nation' (1733), quoted in Robert Winder, *Bloody Foreigners:*

that appeals to curiosity.'[28] Significantly, what the young Voltaire admired in Shakespeare was the common notion that he 'did not even speak Latin and was guided only by his genius.'[29] Even the older Voltaire had to admit, somewhat reluctantly, that Shakespeare's work contained 'a few traces of genius' that 'begged grace for the rest.'[30] The term 'genius' recurs in a poem where the French thinker refers to the English playwright, admittedly in less sympathetic terms, as 'That ape of genius, sent / By Satan among men to do his work.'[31] Although Voltaire was often critical of Shakespeare, it is very significant that he should refer to him repeatedly in terms of his supposed 'genius'. Thus, in the late eighteenth century, critics in England and Germany extolled 'Shakespeare's genius' unconditionally; and French critics, in spite of their reservations, felt compelled to address the playwright in terms of his 'genius'.

B. 'Shakespeare Without a Muzzle': The Politicisation of Shakespeare as a Key Feature of Nineteenth-Century Literary Discourses

With its mixed genre, its disregard for traditional unities and its constant mingling of sublime and grotesque, Shakespearean drama fell short of the rigid standards of French neoclassicism. For these reasons, it seemed rather unlikely that it would ever thrive in France. However, the rise of Romanticism in Europe caused neoclassical culture to recede. In 1827, the French composer Hector Berlioz noted in his memoirs that 'the success of Shakespeare in Paris—to which the enthusiastic support of the new school of writers led by Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and Alfred de Vigny contributed—took

[28] Voltaire, 'A Shakespeare Journal', p. 8 ('Appel à toutes les nations de l'Europe' (1761)).

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 7 ('Discours sur la tragédie, à Milord Bolingbroke' (1730)).

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 8 ('Appel à toutes les nations de l'Europe').

[31] Quoted by Hector Berlioz in his memoirs—see *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz, Member of the French Institute, Including his Travels in Italy, Germany, Russia and England, 1803-1865*, edited and translated

Paris by storm.'[32] The tide of European Romanticism had finally washed over France. Berlioz's account of his own encounter with the Bard—'The advent of Shakespeare'—strikes a number of Romantic clichés:

> Shakespeare, coming to me unawares, struck me like a thunderbolt. The lightning flash of that discovery revealed to me at a stroke the whole heaven of art, illuminating it to its remotest corners. I recognized the meaning of grandeur, beauty, dramatic truth, and I could measure the utter absurdity of the French view of Shakespeare which derives from Voltaire […] and the pitiful narrowness of our own worn-out academic, cloistered traditions of poetry. I saw, I understood, I felt… that I was alive and that I must arise and walk.[33]

The 'advent of Shakespeare' in France in the 1820s can indeed be compared to a thunderbolt. It provides a very good example of the fact that the reception of Shakespeare in a particular country at a particular time is inextricably bound up with the prevailing politics of the moment. 'In France in the 1820s, as in Germany in the 1770s,' Bate remarks, 'Shakespeare is imagined as not just an antidote to the prescriptions of Voltaire's classicism, but a saviour of the artistic spirit, a bringer of sight, feeling and freedom—a freedom that is linked to political emancipation.' Thus, when it eventually reached France, 'Shakespeare' not only became a symbol of artistic freedom but was also 'in the vanguard of a republican and Bonapartist revolution,' Bate notes.[34] In *Shakespeare in French Theory*, Richard Wilson contrasts French and Anglo-Saxon attitudes by suggesting 'how in France Shakespeare has been seen not as a man for the monarchy but a man of the mob.'[35] If Shakespeare became a revolutionary figure in France, it was mainly the feat of Victor Hugo, who claimed the Bard for his ultra-liberal political views. In *William Shakespeare* (1864), Hugo claimed to unleash, for the first time in France, 'Shakespeare without a muzzle' through the medium of his son's highly

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[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[34] Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, p. 232-33.

politicised translations of the plays.[36] Hugo introduces the translations in the following terms: 'let it not be forgotten that true Socialism has for its end the elevation of the masses to the civic dignity, and that, therefore, its principal care is for moral and intellectual cultivation. […] That is why Shakespeare must be translated in France.'[37] By quipping that 'Shakespeare is a socialist,' the French poet Charles Baudelaire would later ridicule Hugo's use of the Bard for his own political agenda.[38]

The appropriation and politicisation of 'Shakespeare' is a central feature of the literary discourse of a number of 'European' countries in the nineteenth century. Viewed from our twenty-first century perspective, the nineteenth-century 'Shakespeare' cultural construct crystallised political issues whose implications, in retrospect, are undeniably European. As we have seen, it was instrumentalised repeatedly in order to exacerbate antagonisms between France, Germany and Britain. The commodification of Shakespeare reminds us that the question of anachronism is inextricably bound up with political form. The poet and critic August Wilhelm von Schlegel, a foremost leader of German Romanticism, played a key role in importing Shakespeare to Germany in the early nineteenth century. In fact, his renowned translations can be seen as the starting point of the 'Shakespeare genius' phenomenon in Germany. In the spring of 1808, Schlegel delivered several lectures in Vienna on the topic of dramatic art and literature. In his lecture on Shakespeare, he undertook 'to prove that Shakespeare's anachronisms are, for the most part, committed of set purpose and deliberately.' This argument anticipates much twentieth-century criticism (and especially Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, addressed later on in this thesis). Significantly, Schlegel argues that 'it was frequently of importance to [Shakespeare] to move the exhibited subject out of

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[36] Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), p. 211.
[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 295-96.

the background of time, and bring it quite near to us.'[39] In his lecture, Schlegel implies that anachronism can be considered as an authorial strategy that problematises the question of historical distance. The idea that Shakespeare's plays 'move the exhibited subject out of the background of time, and bring it quite near to us' has far-reaching implications as it questions what we think is familiar by *re*-presenting 'the exhibited subject' to us. Whether Shakespeare's anachronisms are due to the 'indifference of genius' (Creizenach) or 'committed of set purpose and deliberately' (Schlegel), the question of authorial intention—or indeed lack thereof—remains central in German criticism.

C. 'Anachrony Makes the Law': French Theory, Différance *and Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century*

The first half of the twentieth century is characterised by a complete lack of interest in Shakespeare's anachronisms. In his influential survey, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (1910), Mungo William MacCallum observed that 'anachronisms in detail are of course abundantly unimportant' and that 'they may be disregarded' for the reason that 'it is not such trifles that interfere with fidelity to antiquity.' This view epitomises the treatment of anachronism in much twentieth-century literary criticism. However, MacCallum suggests that 'perhaps they deserve notice only because they add one little item to the mass of proof that the plays were written by a man of merely ordinary information, not by a trained scholar'—the widespread idea that Shakespeare was 'of merely ordinary information' is generally traced back to Ben Jonson's eulogic

[39] August Wilhelm von Schlegel, 'The Art of Shakespeare's Romantic Drama', from *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1808), translated from the German by John Black (London: Henry George

declaration that the playwright had 'small Latin and less Greek.'[40] The main reason that anachronisms were viewed as 'unimportant trifles' in the early twentieth century was that there was a greater mystery yet to be solved: what loomed large behind most critical investigations of Shakespeare's works was the question of authorship.

If 'anachronism-hunting has been out of fashion with scholars in recent times,' the classical historian Patricia Easterling remarked in 1985, it is 'for the good reason that it can easily seem like a rather trivial sort of parlour game.'[41] Because it has been approached mostly from a narrow, critically conservative perspective, anachronism is often perceived as a trivial topic in literary criticism. This might be the reason why, as Rackin pointed out in 1990, 'during the last fifty years, criticism has had almost nothing to say about Shakespeare's use of anachronisms.'[42] There is a notable exception, however: in *Shakespearean Meanings* (1968), Sigurd Burckhardt was probably the first critic to address the striking clock of *Julius Caesar* as a deliberate anachronism: no longer 'Shakespeare's most notorious boner,' the clock becomes a 'touchstone', a hint to the sense that 'time is now reckoned in a new, Caesarean style.'[43] This essay seems to have unearthed a temporal mode that lay dormant all along in Shakespeare's Roman play. Once again, this landslide critical shift can be interpreted in the light of its cultural moment. Shakespeare's historical writing is a hybrid genre that problematises the relation between historicity and textuality. While it has often been pointed out how history invades the formal structure of texts, it is easy to overlook the flip side of this

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[40] Mungo William MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (London: Macmilllan, 1910), p. 82. Ben Jonson, 'To the Memory of My Beloved Master, William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us', *The Works of Ben Jonson*, volume 3, edited by Francis Cunningham (London: Chatto & Windus, 1910), pp. 287-89.

[41] Patricia Elizabeth Easterling, 'Anachronism in Greek Tragedy', *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies*, 105 (1985), 1-10, p. 1.

[42] Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 89.

[43] Sigurd Burckhardt, 'How Not to Murder Caesar', *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton: Princeton

phenomenon: the fact that textuality itself is what underlies all historiography (this becomes a key new historicist tenet in the 1980s).

Published in 1968, Burckhardt's book appeared at a turning point in European politics—which obviously includes Europe's literary and cultural politics. The emergence of new theories about literature and textuality uncovered new implications regarding texts and their meaning. Derrida's work, in particular, has had an unprecedented impact on the way we read texts. In 1967, Derrida published three books that would have a tremendous impact on the institution of literary criticism, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. In *De la grammatologie*, *La voix et le phénomène* and *L'écriture et la différence*, Derrida introduces *différance*, his famous neologism deriving from the French verb *différer*, which means both 'to differ' and 'to defer'.[44] *Différance* marks the recognition that the production of textual meaning is governed by heterogeneous features—namely difference and deferral. From a linguistic perspective, difference notably implies that signs can never fully summon forth what they mean: they can only be defined dialogically, namely through their relation with other signs from which they differ.[45] The consequence of this originary difference is that meaning is forever deferred through an endless chain of signifiers. Marking the extent to which a text is never at one with itself, *différance* can be said to describe the uncanny asynchrony haunting textuality. This recognition—which constitutes the central theoretical framework of the present thesis—might explain why critics, in the late 1960s,

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[44] The three books were translated into English in the 1970s and published as *Speech and Phenomena* (1973), *Of Grammatology* (1976) and *Writing and Difference* (1978). See also 'La différance', in *Tel Quel: Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 41-66. The essay was translated in 1973 and features in *'Speech and Phenomena' and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, translated from the French by David Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 129-60.

[45] This concept was originally developed by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure—see his *Course in General Linguistics* [1916], translated from the French by Wade Baskin and edited by Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). This influential book was compiled by his students Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Based on notes taken from Saussure's lectures at the University of Geneva between the years 1906 and 1911, it is generally regarded as the starting point of

started toying with the idea that it is perhaps no accident that a '*clock strikes*' in the middle of a play supposedly set in ancient Rome (*Julius Caesar*, 2.1.192). Studies about temporality in Western literature hardly ever fail to mention Shakespeare's clock, often presenting it as *the* arch-anachronism.

The conceptualisation of literature's disjointed temporality—especially in view of Shakespeare's works—is inextricably bound up with the developments of French theory in the second half of the twentieth century, when the overarching legacy of Enlightenment thinking gave way to new ideas about presence, meaning and subjectivity, which were no longer to be seen in essentialist terms but rather as an effect of difference. As implied earlier, the construction of Shakespeare as a timeless genius both in Britain and Germany was rooted in a latent francophobia. The key function of the Shakespearean text in the theories developed by many French thinkers in the second half of the twentieth century can be seen as a response to this cultural ostracism. Once again, the English Bard was being used (probably not on a conscious level though) as a tool to re-shape the cultural identity of a European nation: it was France, this time, which instrumentalised Shakespeare in the wake of its so-called 'May 1968 revolution'. The French reaction to German and British cultural models first consisted in declaring the traditional model of authorship developed by these two nations as obsolescent. In Michel Foucault's famous essay, 'What is an Author?' (1969), Shakespeare features as a crucial symbol for what Roland Barthes had called the 'death of the author'.[46] Derrida himself would later revisit a similar theme: in *Spectres of Marx* (1993), 'the Thing "Shakespeare"' features as the emblem of a 'hauntology', whereby the author remains shrouded in a veil of undecidability—very much like the ghost of Hamlet's father,

[46] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', translated from the French by Donald Bouchard, *Screen* 20.1 (1979), 13-29, p. 18. See also Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' [1967], in *Image-Music-Text*,

concealed 'from top to toe' behind its armour (*Hamlet*, 1.2.228).[47] For Derrida, *Hamlet* is a play where 'anachrony makes the law': this is directly linked to the figure of a ghost that 'de-synchronizes' and 'recalls us to anachrony.'[48] The elective affinity between Shakespearean drama and twentieth-century French theories has become a critical motif since the 1980s—especially in the Anglo-Saxon academic world.[49] In *Shakespeare in French Theory* (2007), Richard Wilson looked at 'French theory in the shadow of Shakespeare' by exploring 'the uncanny idea that literary theory shadows Shakespearean theatre.'[50]

III- The Implications of Anachronism for Literary Criticism and Its Practitioners

A. 'The Renaissance discovery of Time', or the Alleged Emergence of a New Subjectivity in the Period

From the second half of the twentieth century, historians and literary critics started to argue that the Renaissance saw the development of a genuinely new and complex subjectivity which marked a historical shift towards 'modernity'—this is precisely the reason why the period has been labelled 'early modern'. A key attribute of this new subjective mode detected by critics is the perception of historical difference. This is

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[47] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 22.

[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

[49] See for instance Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986) and, by the same author, *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). See also Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* [1987] (New York and London: Routledge, 2010). Garber notably points out 'the uncanny extent' to which francophone thinkers like Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man are 'haunted by Shakespeare.' She also emphasises 'the way in which Shakespearean texts—and especially the most canonical texts of Shakespearean tragedy—have mined themselves into the theoretical speculations that have dominated our present discourses, whether in literature, history, psychoanalysis, philosophy, or politics' (p. xxiii).

[50] Wilson, *Shakespeare in French Theory*, p. 1. Cf. also Jonathan Gil Harris, *Shakespeare and Literary*

notably illustrated by the apparition of a hybrid dramatic genre which was to become one of the defining features of the Elizabethan stage: the history play. As they were 'played out in the theater, the problems of historiographic representation were redefined and intensified,' Rackin argues: 'a new sense of anachronism emphasized the absence of the historical past and its alienation from the history-writing present.'[51] Thomas Stearns Eliot had made a similar point in his famous essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1921), where he suggested that 'the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.'[52] Some fifty years later, the historian Peter Burke would develop this idea in *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (1969), which posits that Renaissance thought is characterised by a 'sense of history.' One of the main factors of this sense of history, Burke argues, is the 'sense of anachronism, or sense of historical perspective, or sense of change, or sense of the past.'[53] In *The Vulnerable Text* (1986), Thomas Greene notes that the 'prominence [of anachronism] in Renaissance criticism is remarkable, because it is one of the few concerns of that era which are not anticipated in some degree by ancient criticism.'[54] Indeed, the possibility to determine what is historically correct depends on the capacity to conceptualise what is historically inaccurate or out of place—in other words, what is anachronistic. Thus, in the second half of the twentieth century, anachronism takes on a new meaning for critics: it becomes no less than the very condition of historical perception, allowing the subject to situate itself historically. In contrast with the Renaissance, 'medieval men lacked a sense of the "differentness" of the past,' Burke

[51] Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 22.

[52] Thomas Stearns Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1921), *The New Anthology of American Poetry: Modernisms 1900 – 1950*, edited by Steven Gould Axelrod, Camille Roman and Thomas Travisano, volume 2 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 432.

[53] Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), p. 1.

[54] Thomas McLernon Greene, 'History and Anachronism', *The Vulnerable Text: Essays on Renaissance*

argues.[55] Thus, 'the Middle Ages never knew that they were the Middle Ages'; by contrast, 'the Renaissance was quite conscious of the fact that it was the Renaissance.'[56] Because they rely on artificial periodicisation, Burke's assumptions are questionable; but they are representative of the predominant outlook on the early modern period in recent times. Indeed, historians and literary critics have repeatedly put forward the idea that

> one of the intellectual advances achieved by what has been called 'the Renaissance discovery of Time' was the realisation that the most interesting thing about the past is what makes it the past. A secularised historiography—involving recognition of anachronism, historical development and the relativity of truth—marks a decisive break with medieval thought.[57]

The early modern period clearly fashioned itself, and has been seen subsequently, as an enterprise of recuperation of the past—*renaissance* means 'rebirth' in French.[58] The conjuration of Helen of Troy in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, for instance, constitutes a famous locus of such 'Renaissance self-fashioning,' in Stephen Greenblatt's established phrase.[59] A typical motif of late Elizabethan drama, the invocation of the past in a play testifies to a very keen awareness of the potential of theatre to dramatise the distance between past and present. The episode in Marlowe's play also illustrates the early modern fascination with classical antiquity, which was looked back to as a golden age.

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[55] Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), p. 6.

[56] Peter Burke, 'The Idea of the Renaissance', *The Renaissance* (London: Longmans, 1964). See also, by the same author, 'The Renaissance Sense of Anachronism', *Die Renaissance als erste Aufklärung III*, edited by Enno Rolph (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 1998), 17-35.

[57] Paul Dean, 'Tudor Humanism and the Roman Past: A Background to Shakespeare', *Renaissance Quarterly* 41(1) (1988), 84-111, p. 84. See also Ricardo Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972) and Walter Ullman, *Medieval Foundations of Renaissance Humanism* (London: Paul Elek, 1977).

[58] The term 'Renaissance' was coined in 1855 by the French historian Jules Michelet, who used it to talk about the sixteenth century (*Histoire de France au seizième siècle: Renaissance*, volume 7 (Paris: Chamerot, 1855)). Jacob Burckhardt later expanded on Michelet's conception and popularised the term in his classic work, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* [1860], translated from the German by Samuel George Chetwynd Middlemore (Teddington: The Echo Library, 2006).

[59] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* [1980] (Chicago and

In *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity*, Charles and Michelle Martindale note that 'Shakespeare, though not a learned man, wrote in an age saturated with matters classical' and that 'much that was written and thought was dominated by the classical tradition.' According to them, this might explain why 'one third of Shakespeare's plays are set in the ancient world' and why 'he has constant recourse to classical mythology and history, and to classical ideas.'[60] As is often acknowledged, Homer and Ovid were the main literary models for late sixteenth-century English playwrights. For his historical sources, Shakespeare relied heavily on the Greek biographer Plutarch and his *Parallel Lives*—a collection of biographies of prominent Greeks and Romans. It has been noted, however, that classical antiquity frequently appears anachronistically in his plays and in those of other playwrights in the period. From his antiquarian perspective, Douce was particularly puzzled by the fact that 'about the age of Elizabeth, the dramatists in particular seem to have been remarkably inattentive to the unities of time and place.'[61] The treatment of Greek antiquity in Shakespearean drama has always left critics baffled. One of the most famous instances is the anachronistic reference to Aristotle in *Troilus and Cressida* (2.2.162-6)—punctilious critics are always eager to point out that the Trojan War took place several centuries before the Greek philosopher was even born. Thus, in 1698, the famous theatre critic Jeremy Collier used the argument that '*Shakespear* makes *Hector* talk about *Aristotle's* Philosophy' as evidence of 'the immorality and profaneness of the English stage.'[62] And in 1712, the English dramatist John Dennis remarked that 'in the same Play mention is made of *Milo*, which

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[60] Charles and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. vii.

[61] Douce, 'On the Anachronisms and some other Incongruities of Shakspeare', p. 282.

[62] Jeremy Collier, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage: Together with*

is another very great Fault in Chronology.'[63] In the preface to his edition of the plays, Samuel Johnson remarked that Shakespeare's Greek antiquity is ridden with anachronisms: 'we need not wonder to find Hector quoting Aristotle,' he fulminates, 'when we see the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined with the gothic mythology of fairies.'[64] However, this type of approach prompts a number of questions. For instance, why focus on distinct occurrences rather than acknowledge that Shakespeare's re-presentation of ancient Greece, as a whole, is indeed anachronistic?

B. From Shakespeare's Time to Our Own: Anachronism as Metadramatic Reflection on the Representability of History

If I may be allowed to jump back in time briefly, anachronisms have been spotted everywhere in late Renaissance drama—not only in Shakespeare's plays. Johnson himself admitted that 'Shakespeare, indeed, was not the only violator of chronology':

> for in the same age [Philip] Sidney, who wanted not the advantages of learning, has, in his *Arcadia*, confounded the pastoral with the feudal times, the days of innocence, quiet and security, with those of turbulence, violence, and adventure.[65]

According to Johnson and other critics, 'violation of chronology' was not the feat of an isolated, uneducated man from Stratford: rather, it was a widespread activity in Renaissance England in the 1590s. Besides, there is strong evidence that chronological and geographical misplacements did not go unnoticed in the period. As early as the late

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[63] John Dennis, 'An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear: With Some Letters of Criticism to the Spectator', *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, edited by Edward Niles Hooker, 5 volumes (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939-43), II, 1-17, p. 8.

[64] Adams, *Critical Theory Since Plato*, p. 333.

[65] *Ibid.*. This is especially ironic in view of Sidney's warning, in *The Defence of Poesy* (1595), that writers of stage plays must observe the unities of time, place and action. Following Aristotle's *Poetics* and Italian neoclassical critics, he suggested that a play must have one main action, that the stage should not be used to represent more than one place and that events should take place over no more than twenty-four hours (Philip Sidney, 'The Defence of Poesy', in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 243). On questions of rules and types in Shakespearean drama, see *The Winter's Tale*, edited by John Pitcher (London: Arden,

1570s, Sidney himself was criticising the new 'customs' of the Elizabethan stage, where, he remarked, it would not be unusual to see 'two armies fly in, represented with four swords & bucklers: and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?'[66] In the prologue to his revised edition of *Every Man in his Humour*, Ben Jonson observed that Shakespeare's chaotic temporality 'serve[s] the ill customs of the age.' He gives a few examples of these 'ill customs' as they appear in the English history plays:

> To make a child now swaddled, to proceed
> Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed,
> Past threescore years; or, with three rusty swords,
> And help of some few foot and half-foot words,
> Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars.

And while, on Shakespeare's stage, the Wars of the Roses are fought 'with three rusty swords,' the chorus of *Henry V* shamelessly 'wafts you o'er the seas.'[67] Jonson's criticism of Shakespeare's historiography anticipates the stance of eighteenth-century critics like Johnson, who complained that the Bard 'had no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age or nation, without scruple, the customs, institutions, and opinions of another, at the expense not only of likelihood, but of possibility.'[68] Although he was averse to chronological misplacements, Jonson is himself 'guilty' of several anachronisms in his Roman play *Sejanus*.[69] Contrary to his famous rival, Jonson was very anxious to respect the traditional unities of time and place as prescribed in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Jonson's attacks on Shakespeare's alleged lack of historical realism illustrate the extent to which historical chronology was a topical issue in the period. But

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[66] Philip Sidney, 'The Defence of Poesy', in *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Renaissance and the Early Seventeenth Century*, second edition, edited by Joseph Black, Leonard Connolly and Kate Flint (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2010), 268-96, p. 292.

[67] Ben Jonson, 'Every Man in His Humour', in *The Works of Ben Jonson*, edited by Barry Cornwall (London: Edward Moxon, 1927), p. 1.

[68] Adams, *Critical Theory Since Plato*, p. 333.

[69] See for instance the clock mentioned by Silius in the first act of the play: 'Observe him, as his watch observes his clock' (Ben Jonson, *Sejanus His Fall*, edited by Philip Ayres (Manchester: Manchester

let us bring this anachronistic digression into the seventeenth century to a close and go back to where we were (a thesis on the topic of anachronism will be pardoned, I hope, for not always strictly adhering to established historical chronology!).

In the first half of the twentieth century, the question of Shakespeare's anachronisms features mainly in the form of intertextual allusions, as in James Joyce's *Ulysses*: 'Why is the underplot of *King Lear* in which Edmund figures lifted out of Sidney's *Arcadia* and spatchcocked on to a Celtic legend older than history?' The answer is rather straightforward:

> That was Will's way, John Eglinton defended. We should not combine a Norse saga with an excerpt from a novel by George Meredith. *Que voulez-vous?* More would say. He puts Bohemia on the seacost and Makes Ulysses quote Aristotle.[70]

While the idea of 'Shakespeare's anachronisms' seems to have become established as a commonplace of the Western academic unconscious in the twentieth century, the topic of anachronism in itself received virtually no attention until the 1980s. Mentioning 'striking clocks in *Julius Caesar*, references to (e.g.) Turks, and Nero, in *King Lear*, Hector in Troilus mentioning Aristotle,' Easterling notes that 'it is well-known that there are things in Shakespeare that have no parallel in Greek tragedy.' In her survey of anachronism in Greek tragedy, she suggests that 'Shakespeare's imaginative effort to evoke antiquity deserves to be taken very seriously' for the reason that 'his Romans are now seen to be far more than just "Elizabethans in togas".'[71] A major shift in the perception of Shakespeare's anachronisms occurred in the late 1980s when literary critics started to consider seriously the possibility that Shakespeare and his contemporaries had a 'sense of anachronism,' in Burke's memorable phrase. In a 1987

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[70] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922), edited by Morris Leopold Ernst and John Munro Woolsey (New York: Modern Library, 1961), p. 211.

[71] Patricia Elizabeth Easterling, 'Anachronism in Greek Tragedy', *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 105

essay, Rackin presents anachronism as ‘a crucial Shakespearean strategy’ that consists in ‘the manipulation of the temporal relationship between past events and present audience.’ From this perspective, anachronism becomes a theatrical tool whose main function is to ‘dramatize the distance and the intersection between past and present, eternity and time, and to ponder the problematic nature of history itself.’[72] In other words, anachronism invites a reflection on the representability of history within our own modernity.

C. Anachronism as Registration of the Viewer’s Eye Within the Representational Scene

A common assumption associated with the ‘modern’ is that people *from the past* could not possibly conceptualise time the way ‘we’ do *now*. The sensation that our present perception of space and time is inherently superior to that of past ages is a typical locus of ‘modernity’ (i.e. what is contemporary to a perceiving subject at a given time). In many ways, the very concept of modernity relies on the implicit sense that *now* surpasses *then*: the implied superiority of the present over the past is precisely what underlies the possibility for subjects to identify themselves as ‘modern’ in ‘the present’. Modernity is an odd concept in that it refers to a constantly shifting reality; as such, it is closely linked with the critical present of interpretation. As an intrusion within a specific scene, the viewer’s eye constitutes the necessary anachronism through which representation becomes complete. For Jeremy Tambling, ‘the anachronistic […] is not simply the past surviving in the present’: it is ‘something in the present itself, or in “the modern”’ that guarantees that ‘the moment is always split, always disjointed.’[73] The sensation that Renaissance people understood the past as distinct from the present has

[72] Phyllis Rackin, ‘Temporality, Anachronism, and Presence in Shakespeare’s English Histories’, *Renaissance Drama* 27 (1986), 101-23, p. 103.

far-reaching implications in terms of how we read literature. For Thomas Greene, the emergence of a distinction between history and literature is precisely what inaugurates modern subjectivity:

> One might begin to talk about history and literature in our tradition by returning to the moment when they were first perceived to be interdependent. This occurred roughly at the opening of the early modern period; it may not be too much to say that this occurrence permitted modern history to begin.[74]

From Greene's point of view, Jonson's rants about Shakespeare's lack of historical consistency give voice to a profound cultural change: the recognition of the distinctness between history and literature. And what guarantees this distinctness is the awareness of anachronism: for 'the issue of anachronism […] marked both the emergent boundary between history and fiction and the cultural transformation that produced it,' Rackin explains.[75] For Rackin, the conceptualisation of anachronism is no less than one of the greatest 'innovation[s] in English Renaissance historiography.'[76] And in Shakespeare's plays specifically, anachronism is to be viewed as part of a literary strategy that formalises 'the recognition of temporal distance that alienate[s] a nostalgic present from a lost historical past.'[77] Recently, anachronisms have been recognised to have wider implications than eighteenth-century critics originally thought. There is now wide recognition amongst critics that 'Shakespeare's anachronisms are in fact of different kinds, and it is not easy to determine which are simple errors due to lack of knowledge alone.'[78] And the concept of anachronism itself has been used to name 'a range of temporal anomalies, from backwardness to prematurity, regression to anticipation, the

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[74] Greene, 'History and Anachronism', p. 218.

[75] Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 90.

[76] Rackin, 'Temporality, Anachronism, and Presence in Shakespeare's English Histories', p. 104.

[77] Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 91.

[78] Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity*, pp. 123-24. As Barish observes, 'the fact is that most of Shakespeare's anachronisms are discreet, sometimes to such a point that editors today do not

"primitive" to the future perfect.'[79] Thus, anachronism has become a trope that signals temporal dislocation in a wide range of contexts—not only literary but also social, cultural or political.

However, the present thesis does not consider anachronism in terms of temporal anomalies. Rather than indicating that something is anomalous in a given scene (whether textual or anything else), anachronism is here defined as the registration of the critic within the framework of representation. Thus, if anything can be said to be anomalous or supplementary in the scene (or the 'seen'), it is precisely the viewer's eye—not the scene itself. In this sense, the thesis fully adheres to Jacques Lacan's theory of subjectivity, in which 'the subject becomes a kind of virus infecting the picture.'[80] During his seminar on 'The Line and the Light' (1964), the French psychoanalyst remarked: 'if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called the stain, the spot.'[81] Unlike Rackin, who sees anachronism 'in' Shakespeare as the result of a deliberate dramatic strategy, the thesis presents it as a direct effect of interpretation: in other words, anachronism is the manifestation of untimeliness within the subjective grid of the critic. This notion is illustrated in the next chapter on *Julius Caesar*, which suggests that the untimeliness that might be (and perhaps in the majority of cases *is*) experienced in the play is a reflection of our own critical moment (which is often experienced as disjointed). Broadly speaking, this moment could be referred to as Derridean. As suggested earlier, Derrida's insights have profoundly affected, or perhaps even infected, the institution of

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[79] Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany: State University of New York, 2009), p. xiv.

[80] Anne Marsh, 'Psychoanalysis: The Gaze and the Photo-graph', *The Darkroom: Photography and the Theatre of Desire* (Victoria: Macmillan, 2003), p. 42.

[81] Jacques Lacan, 'The Line and the Light', *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* [1973], edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth:

literary criticism, and by extension the institution of literature itself. For Nicholas Royle, 'it is difficult to think of a figure in literary and cultural theory more important than Jacques Derrida. Although highly controversial, his writing has transformed contemporary thought and his work on deconstruction cannot be ignored.'[82] Once we become aware of the structural *différance* that haunts textuality (and it is very hard, after Derrida, to deny it is happening), it seems difficult to revert back to a 'pre-deconstruction' approach to texts—precisely because deconstruction (and, for the same reason, *différance*) is always already happening.[83] The next chapter explores the notion that textuality reflects our own mental predispositions back to us. The acknowledgement of the asynchrony that haunts literature can be deeply disturbing on a psychological level. It can cause a great deal of anxiety, which is inevitably manifested in the mental experience of the text itself. If, when we read *Julius Caesar*, we hallucinate about 'the all-white face of a handless clock,' in Hélène Cixous's ominous phrase, this reveals the extent to which 'we too […] have an all-white, uncertain face.'[84]

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[82] Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, backmatter.

[83] See footnote 113 in Chapter 1 of this thesis, 'Shakespeare or the Theatre of the Impossible'.

[84] Hélène Cixous, 'What Is It o'Clock? Or the Door (We Never Enter)', *Stigmata* [1998] (London and

II

Historical Presence as the Negative Ontological Centre of Shakespearean Drama

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In or around 1599, Shakespeare wrote what are often considered to be some of his most inspired works, including *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. Both plays contain references to the time being 'strange-disposed' or 'out of joint'; they are 'sister-plays' in their 'out of jointedness by the clock,' Nicholas Royle notes (*Julius Caesar*, 1.3.33; *Hamlet*, 1.5.189).[1] The drive towards historical contextualisation in much recent criticism has led commentators to elucidate this out-of-jointedness on an exclusively historical plane. Thus, the characteristic untimeliness that haunts the diegeses of *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* has been understood to be a direct reflection of Shakespeare's late Elizabethan or early Jacobean moment. Anachronisms, in particular, are often read in the light of specific political or religious upheavals in the period. For instance, the intrusion of a striking clock in *Julius Caesar* is generally used to illustrate the idea that the play is unquestionably anchored in its historical moment of production. Likewise, the numerous allusions to purgatory in *Hamlet* testify to the play's topicality at the end of the sixteenth century, in a time of bitter confessional struggles. Underneath the two-dimensional surface of Caesar's Rome or pre-Christian Denmark is an early modern reality that figures as the genuine ontological core of Shakespeare's drama—this, at least, is a typical historicist outlook (thoroughly documented in the next two chapters). In this type of approach, anachronisms are treated as gateways towards a 'real' historical present (Shakespeare's), as opposed to the 'fake' historical setting of the dramas. Thus, anachronisms stand for the inclusion of the Elizabethan present within a pseudo-ancient scene (thereby declared obsolete)—specific examples will be provided

[1] Nicholas Royle, 'The Poet: *Julius Caesar* and the Democracy to Come', *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*

in the chapters. Invested with an authentic core of presence, this historical reality determines the ultimate meaning of Shakespeare's drama.

A striking feature of this approach is the self-effacing mechanism on which it relies: the authorial present is asserted at the expense of the critic's own present. In other words, this type of criticism obliterates the extent to which its own subjective point of view is always already inscribed in the object of its investigation. Specifically, the operation that consists in labelling something an anachronism betrays the presence of the critic within the hermeneutic scene—as a *perceived* discrepancy, an anachronism primarily testifies to the observer's own cultural biases. If anachronisms create a powerful effect of defamiliarisation, as it has often been suggested, this crucially encompasses the early modern dimension of Shakespeare's authorial moment. From 'our' contemporary point of view (a moment that is by essence in perpetual movement), the dramas are no more anchored in Elizabethan England than they are in Caesar's Rome or pre-Christian Denmark. Generally speaking, the profusion of anachronisms in *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* (within the experiential dimension of the viewer, at least) testifies to the recognition of the intrinsic disjointedness of the theatrical medium, and by extension of literature itself. These plays do not only distantiate themselves from the so-called 'original' scene of Caesar's Rome or pre-Christian Denmark. Ultimately, the dramas also assert a fundamental disjunction between themselves and the other so-called 'original' scene of late Elizabethan England. The idea that the dramatic structure of Shakespeare's theatre is often dependent on a core of untimeliness or absence is a key concern in the present thesis. Accordingly, the next two chapters examine the extent to which *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* can be said to resist being assigned a core of historical presence. In both chapters, the notion that the dramas might reflect specific aspects of Shakespeare's historical moment is duly examined, with close attention to the

criticism. However, the main concern, ultimately, is to explore why and how they ultimately resist such historical foreclosure. The guiding thread throughout is the sense that *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* challenge established ideas about presence and meaning, not only in relation to Shakespearean drama but to literature itself.

The two chapters specifically try to provide credible alternatives to new historicism and its predictable methods of early modern contextualisation. The chapter on *Julius Caesar* starts by suggesting that the play crystallises the untimeliness of different historical moments: Caesar's Rome, Shakespeare's London and modernity (taking into account the perpetual slippage that this concept inevitably implies) all resonate within what is referred to as the 'psychic realm' of the play. In fact, this untimeliness can be made relevant to any given historical period, as it is essentially the result of an arbitrary operation of critical association. But prior to any act of historicisation, the intra-diegetic realm of the play appears to be characterised by a powerful sense of temporal derangement. Exploring this disjointed subjective mood, the analysis moves inwards, with a deliberate focus on the mental world of the characters—as if those characters were indeed 'real' human beings. The psychological approach that is adopted in the chapter on *Julius Caesar* challenges the primacy of a pseudo-'original' historical context, asserted in most historicist readings of the play. The chapter adopts a peculiar critical position in that it relies on two essentialist assumptions:

1- that there can be such a thing as a play 'in itself';
2- that there can be such a thing as an undifferentiated audience (referred to through the personal pronoun 'we').

These two notions are thoroughly challenged in subsequent chapters though. Although it is by no means representative of the critical stance of the thesis as a whole, the superficial position adopted in Chapter 2 aims at pointing out that there are possible

critical alternatives to new historicism. The idea that the criticism is the central factor in the construction of the meaning of literary works becomes central in the chapter on *Hamlet*, which takes direct issue with new historicist critical methods (and specifically with Stephen Greenblatt's best-selling book, *Hamlet in Purgatory*). Shakespeare's most famous play not only resists historical foreclosure: rather, it frustrates *all* attempts at narrowing down its meaning to a specific hermeneutic level (whether it is historical, psychological, discursive or anything else). The result of a multitude of contradictory points of view, *Hamlet*'s meaning is fundamentally fragmented. The chapter argues that this fragmentation is precisely what defines the play's aesthetics. Amalgamated into a dissonant unity, the fragmented meanings eventually turn out to be meaningful fragments. While this fragmentation has been viewed repeatedly as a defect of Shakespeare's work (that is, as a regrettable but ultimately forgivable by-effect of the author's alleged raw, unpolished genius), the next two chapters treat all the critical 'fragments' as meaningful components that participate in the elaboration of an aesthetics of untimeliness.

Chapter 2 – 'Pathological Interiority': Human Character and Psychological Time in *Julius Caesar*

> What time is it? is the best-known fateful question, the one we repeat ten times an hour with automaton lips, and time doesn't pass, the one we listen to with the tips of our ears, the gravest question in its familiar appearances, the question that admits our anxiety without our knowledge, the most wily, the least recognizable, the one that announces. Something is going to happen. And we don't know if it isn't already, the thing, the hour, already on the way to happening, already there, a little to the left, we find ourselves on a terrestrial platform, held back, there to the left in the sky, this isn't the moon, it's the all-white face of a handless clock, and we too we have an all-white, uncertain face.
>
> – Hélène Cixous, 'What Is It o'Clock? Or the Door (We Never Enter)'[1]

Introduction

Of all Shakespeare's plays, *Julius Caesar* is probably the one that is most readily associated with the concept of anachronism. Critics and editors have long pointed out that Shakespeare's Rome features a cornucopia of Elizabethan artefacts, including doublets, sleeves, feather hats and sweaty nightcaps.[2] Even for non-specialists, the clock that strikes in Act II of the play has come to epitomise the very idea of literary anachronism. Because of its strong historical affinities with Shakespeare's London in the late 1590s, *Julius Caesar* has also featured as a privileged object of investigation for historicism. Thus, the play's 'strange-disposèd time' has been read as a reflection of major political and religious upheavals that took place at the end of the sixteenth century (1.3.33). For James Shapiro, *Julius Caesar* testifies to the sensation that 'Shakespeare came of age when time itself was out of joint.'[3] The present chapter starts by examining the proposition that the time was out of joint in late 1590s England and that this historical phenomenon can be said to be crystallised in *Julius Caesar*. After

[1] Hélène Cixous, 'What Is It o'Clock? Or the Door (We Never Enter)', *Stigmata* [1998] (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 76.

[2] See, for instance, Richard Wilson, *Julius Caesar* (London: Penguin, 1992).

[3] James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005),

providing a detailed overview of the play's alleged topicality, the analysis moves away from historical context in order to investigate issues of human character in literature. Specifically, the chapter examines the argument that, prior to any operation of historical contextualisation, there is a profound sense of temporal derangement inscribed within the diegetic realm of the play.

In her epic essay on *Julius Caesar*, Hélène Cixous points out that the play is haunted by a question that the characters keep repeating over and over: 'What is it o'clock?'.[4] Building on Cixous' insight, the chapter looks at this untimeliness from the perspective of character psychology without resorting to historical context. Reversing the historicist strategy that views characters as reflections of an authentic core of historical reality, the analysis treats context as a springboard towards the *psychic reality* of the characters. A key phrase in this chapter, the 'psychic reality' of the characters of *Julius Caesar* is defined as a direct effect of the aesthetics of Shakespearean characterisation as it manifests itself in the present of interpretation. The recognition in much contemporary criticism that fictional characters are not 'real' and that therefore they cannot be said to have psychological depth is here deliberately bypassed. Although this has been stated earlier, it seems important to stress once again that such an approach is *not* representative of the thesis as a whole—in fact, the notion of an inalienable 'in-itself' through which literary works are supposedly anchored is the main bone of contention in all subsequent chapters. By contrast, the critical method that is here adopted consists in what may be called a productive essentialism: the psychic reality of the characters of *Julius Caesar* is considered from the point of view of an undifferentiated audience, referred to through the personal pronoun 'we'. This reality conjures up the cognitive experience of the inner intellectual life of the characters by

readers or audiences of *Julius Caesar*. Of course, all readers and audiences are here assigned—in what is in effect a totalitarian *Anschluss* of the field of interpretation—the same experiential grid. Whether such a critical positioning is 'wrong' (especially insofar as it is deliberate) in view of the undefined (and possibly undefinable) ethics of literary criticism is irrelevant, within the boundaries of this chapter at least.

Moving away from the play's early modern topicality eventually allows the focus to shift onto the depth of Shakespeare's characterisation in *Julius Caesar*. Thus, the chapter focuses on the psychological dimension of the play, treating it (for the purposes of the analysis) as a self-contained reality. In spite of being problematic on many levels, such a character-based approach emphasises the obsession with time that is inscribed within the diegetic realm of the play. The sense of the radical openness of the future, in particular, features as a key theme throughout. 'There is a "to"-effect to *Julius Caesar*,' Nicholas Royle writes in his landmark essay on the play—a formula that encapsulates the characters' uncanny obsession with what is to come.[5] The tentative psychological reading of the play that is deployed in this chapter notably challenges the default historicist framework within which *Julius Caesar* has been embedded. Such a reading is preoccupied with human character and the (subjective) time of the mind (as opposed to supposedly objective historical time). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's sensation that, in *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's Romans are 'human beings, human from head to foot' provides a blueprint for the critical perspective that is here adopted.[6] At odds with historicist methodologies, the analysis moves resolutely inwards, towards the muddy waters of character psyche. Eventually, the mental realm of *Julius Caesar* is addressed in terms of what Charles Bernheimer calls 'pathological interiority'—a mode

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[5] Nicholas Royle, 'The Poet: *Julius Caesar* and the Democracy to Come', in *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 3.

[6] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Shakespeare und kein Ende!' (1807-1816),

of experience that provides a first instance, within the thesis, of how Shakespearean drama can be read in terms of an aesthetics of untimeliness.[7]

I- 'WHAT IS IT O'CLOCK?'—MOVING IN THROUGH HISTORICAL LAYERS

A. TIME OUT OF JOINT IN ENGLISH CULTURE: ANACHRONISM AS NATIONAL INSTITUTION

'In or about December 1910, human character changed,' Virginia Woolf famously declared in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1924).[8] An unmistakable expression of this change, she argued, was the generational rift that divided Edwardian and Georgian writers over the question of literary character. Marking the advent of modernism, December 1910 had tolled the death knell for the traditional Edwardian character—'we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature,' Woolf predicted in her essay.[9] Transcending mere issues of literary style, the historical change at hand seemed to reach beyond the world of fiction. Woolf's preoccupation with what makes character 'real' sprang from the sense that literary form is shaped by actual human interaction. Looking back to the fateful date, she noted:

> All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature.[10]

As her subsequent writing testifies, the idea of an irreversible historical shift having occurred early on in the twentieth century had made a strong impression on Woolf's imagination. When 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' reached publication, she was finishing her masterpiece, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). The novel opens on a cold morning—'fresh as if

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[7] Charles Bernheimer, 'Introduction: Part I', *Dora's Case: Freud—Hysteria—Feminism*, edited by Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 1.

[8] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', *Collected Essays*, volume 1, edited by Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth, 1966), p. 319.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 337.

issued to children on a beach,' Clarissa Dalloway observes on her way to buy flowers for her party that evening. Her train of thought flows uninterrupted until the gigantic tolling of Big Ben breaks in: 'There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air.' For Clarissa, the 'irrevocable hour' materialises the odd 'feeling […] that something awful [is] about to happen.'[11] And indeed, something peculiar does happen later that day, when a stranger called Septimus takes his own life by jumping out of a window. Clarissa's ominous foreboding might sound strangely familiar to us; this is perhaps because it rehearses a theme that has haunted English literature for a long time now: the disjointedness of historical time. It is the very same theme which prompts Woolf's idea that 1910 marked a fundamental change in human character. For the historian Peter Stansky, this disturbing sensation can be explained on the grounds that, 'unexpectedly and perhaps belatedly, England in 1910 entered the story of a modernism that since the turn of the century had had a number of its major events occur on the Continent.'[12] Although such an assumption is questionable (turning points in history are rarely tidy, self-contained events), it draws attention to a strange feeling of historical belatedness that recurs in English culture.[13]

Incidentally, the 'irrevocable hour' that sets the tone for *Mrs Dalloway* conjures up another uncanny literary moment in another English masterpiece. In Shakespeare's

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[11] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, edited by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 3-4.

[12] Peter Stansky, *On or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and Its Intimate World* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 1.

[13] This feeling of belatedness can be mapped in view of the development of clock-making—for Lewis Mumford, it is not the steam engine but the clock that constitutes 'the key machine of the modern industrial world' (quoted by Carlo Cipolla in *Clocks and Culture, 1300-1700* (New York: Walker, 1967), p. 60). Relying on textual evidence, David Landes suggests that clocks were invented in the thirteenth century (*Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 55-56). Paraphrasing Cipolla, Phyllis Rackin remarks that 'by the sixteenth century domestic clocks and watches had become relatively common, and pocket watches had appeared. In the development of clock-making as in the development of modern historiography, England lagged behind the continent, but by the last two decades of the sixteenth century, both the new technology and the new historiography had become established there' (*Stages of History: Shakespeare's English*

play *Julius Caesar*, the irrevocability of Caesar's assassination is sealed by the august striking of a clock that marks the play's 'strange-disposèd time' (1.3.33). As it has often been noted, the sensation that 'The time is out of joint' is a recurring leitmotiv in Shakespeare's late Elizabethan plays; by suggesting that 'Shakespeare came of age when time itself was out of joint,' critics have emphasised the historical resonance of this dramatic theme (*Hamlet*, 1.5.189). Richard Wilson, for instance, argues that '*Julius Caesar* is theatre that reflects upon its own conditions of existence, its moment of production, and its cultural position within other forms of play and recreation.'[14] It was Sigurd Burckhardt who first put forward the idea that the intrusion of a modern clock in the formal setting of a so-called 'Roman' play testifies to the fact that 'Shakespeare had something in mind.'[15] What exactly did the playwright have in mind when he decided to write a play set in Julius Caesar's time? On reading Plutarch's historical account, he might have been struck by unnerving analogies between Caesar's Rome and late Elizabethan England. In *Parallel Lives*, the Greek historian alludes to Caesar's landmark institution of the Julian calendar in 46 BC—a reform aimed at sorting out discrepancies that had developed in the traditional Roman calendar. 'The ordinaunce of the kalender, and reformation of the yeare' by Caesar was 'a great commoditie unto all men,' Plutarch comments; but it was also 'the chiefest cause that made him mortally hated' (for 'the Roman conservatives felt it to be an arbitrary and tyrannical interference with the course of nature,' Burckhardt explains).[16] By the end of the sixteenth century, the Julian calendar (also the Christian calendar) had drifted off the celestial cycle by almost ten days. In order to set the time right, Pope Gregory XIII decreed a new

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[14] Wilson, *Julius Caesar*, p. 41.

[15] Sigurd Burckardt, *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 5.

[16] From Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* (1579), cited in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, volume 5 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 79-80;

calendrical reform; a papal bull (*Inter gravissimas*) was issued in 1582 and the Gregorian calendar was adopted in the same year by Catholic countries. As in Caesar's time, the reform encountered a great deal of resistance—in people's minds, the Julian calendar was inextricably bound up with Christ's revelation. Elizabeth I was initially willing to go along with the change but her bishops, determined not to follow the lead of the Pope, convinced her to stand firm. Thus, 'at the turn of the century […] a situation existed in Europe exactly analogous to that of Rome in 44 BC,' Burckhardt remarks; 'it was a time of confusion and uncertainty, when the most basic category by which men order their experience seemed to have become unstable and untrustworthy, subject to arbitrary political manipulation.'[17] In 1582, time had become literally 'strange-disposed' or 'out of joint' as England was effectively lagging ten days behind its continental neighbours. 'Like the Romans of Julius Caesar's age, Shakespeare and the Elizabethans were compelled to live, work and worship in Caesar's time,' Steve Sohmer observes. Thus, Queen Elizabeth's decision to stick to the old calendar had far-reaching consequences; for 'with her decision, England became a national anachronism.'[18] This single historical event may account for the profusion of anachronisms in the work not only of Shakespeare but that of other writers in the late Elizabethan period (Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* being another good example). In fact, it has been suggested that the conceptualisation of anachronism is no less than the great 'innovation in English Renaissance historiography.'[19]

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[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Steve Sohmer, *Shakespeare's Mystery Play: The Opening of the Globe Theatre, 1599* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 77 and 20.

[19] Phyllis Rackin, 'Temporality, Anachronism, and Presence in Shakespeare's English Histories', *Renaissance Drama* 27 (1986), 101-23, p. 104. For a thorough analysis of this critical phenomenon, see

B. Temporal Crisis in Late Elizabethan England: Julius Caesar *as Historical Document*

The modern currency of the word 'anachronism' can be traced back to a work by French scholar Joseph Justus Scaliger, *De emendatione temporum*. As Herman Ebeling remarks, it is hardly a coincidence that the first edition of this 'epoch-making work' appeared in 1583 (a year after Pope Gregory's approval of the new calendar): 'it was an auspicious time for the "father of chronology" to bring before the world of scholars a work on chronology of stupendous learning, in which numerous errors in ancient history were corrected.'[20] In Scaliger's study, educated Englishmen would have found a manifesto that theorised the spell of untimeliness that had struck England the year before. The book's publication provides a landmark point of reference for the now fashionable argument that 'Shakespeare's plays appear just when anachronicity becomes noticeable' and for the no less fashionable idea that 'anachronism, in literary terms, starts with Shakespeare.'[21] A second edition of Scaliger's study came out in 1598: revised and enlarged, it reached a much wider readership in England. For a number of religious and political reasons, the national sentiment of belatedness seems to have climaxed at the turn of the century, more than fifteen years after the calendrical reform.[22]

Nowhere is the dramatic awareness of England's 'strange-disposèd time' more palpable than in *Julius Caesar*, critics have suggested—the play was apparently written

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[20] Herman Ebeling, 'The Word Anachronism', *Modern Language Notes* 52(2), 120-21.

[21] Jeremy Tambling, *On Anachronism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 4-5.

[22] For an overview of this delayed historical phenomenon, see James Shapiro's book, *1599*, mentioned earlier. In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Stephen Greenblatt also talks about a 'fifty-year effect' to characterise this feeling of historical disjointedness: 'perhaps there is what we might call a fifty-year effect, a time in the wake of the great, charismatic ideological struggle in which the past is all dying out and the survivors hear only hypocrisy in the sermons and look back with longing at the world they have lost' (Princeton and

some time between 1598 and 1599.[23] In the eyes of many critics, its alleged heightened sensitivity to its own historical moment takes the shape of countless references to Elizabethan artefacts and customs. With its distinctly early-modern artefacts, *Julius Caesar* is profoundly uncanny—even more so if viewed as a rigorous historical account of Julius Caesar's life (a preposterous idea, admittedly). John Dover Wilson's dutiful reminder, in his Cambridge edition of the play, that 'togas had no sleeves' sums up the improbable status of *Julius Caesar* as a 'history' or 'Roman' play, as it is often referred to.[24] Even more powerful, the intrusion of a modern clock in what is supposed to be 'Caesar's Rome' disrupts rigid assumptions about historical time and its representation. But, as the Arden editor observes, 'the anachronism of a striking clock in 44 BC is only distressing to those shut off from imaginative time' as 'the dramatic action is more "here and now" than "then".'[25] Although *Julius Caesar* is officially 'set' in pre-Christian Rome, editors and critics have often claimed that Shakespeare's London intrudes repeatedly into the play. A key example of this pattern is Murellus' memorable description of Pompey parading through the streets of Rome amidst 'walls and battlements,' 'towers and windows' and 'chimney tops' in the first scene of the play (1.1.37-39).[26] The ill-fated tribune then embarks on a passionate plea to the Roman crowd:

> Have you not made an universal shout,
> That Tiber trembled underneath her banks
> To hear the replication of your sounds
> Made in her concave shores?

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[23] David Daniell (editor), *Julius Caesar* (London: Arden, 1998), pp. 12-15.

[24] John Dover Wilson (editor), *Julius Caesar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), p. 5.

[25] Daniell, *Julius Caesar*, p. 209n.

[26] For Daniell, 'the vivid scene, not in Plutarch, has the mark of occasions in London' and the reference to 'chimney tops' confirms the general sensation that 'the picture is more London than Rome' (*Ibid.*, p.

(1.1.43-46)

This passage is often read as an allegorical reference to the Globe theatre and its playgoers in Shakespeare's time. In the Arden editor's view, 'the huge sudden sound from a crowd, and its echo across the river, make the first of many references to the experience of playgoing on London's Bankside, additionally appropriate if *Julius Caesar* opened the new Globe there.'[27] The widely accepted idea that *Julius Caesar* was chosen to inaugurate the Globe theatre in 1599 is based on Thomas Platter's famous account of a performance, 'the tragedy of the first Emperor Julius Caesar,' which he would have seen in a 'straw-thatched house' in September that year.[28] But whether what the Swiss doctor saw was a first performance of Shakespeare's play remains ultimately uncertain.

In *Shakespeare's Mystery Play*, Steve Sohmer has raised the possibility that *Julius Caesar* opened the Globe earlier that year, on 12 June—the date of the summer solstice according to the Julian calendar, coinciding exceptionally with a new moon. Because of its powerful astrological implications, the date confirms the sense that the play was produced both 'at the height of the English Julian calendar controversy, and in response to that controversy,' Sohmer argues.[29] Often associated with crosswords, weather forecast and Sudoku in our own time and on our side of the planet, astrology has undergone a drastic devaluation over the last four hundred years. In early modern England, though, astrology was ever-present in human affairs, to the point that 'scarcely any new venture was undertaken without an astrologer's pronouncement,' Keith Thomas observes in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.[30] The conjunction of the sun

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[27] Daniell, *Julius Caesar*, p. 159n.

[28] Edmund Kerchever Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, volume 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), pp. 364-65.

[29] Sohmer, *Shakespeare's Mystery Play*, p. 25.

and moon (an astrological phenomenon known as syzygy) is considered to be extremely propitious for new ventures. Thus, 'to open a theatre on the summer solstice, coinciding with the sun-moon-earth conjunction and exceptional high tides, on a date which was astrologically promising, would show wisdom.'[31] The discrepancy in the Julian calendar caused Midsummer day to fall on 12 June 1599 (instead of 21 June). If *Julius Caesar* opened the Globe on that date, as Sohmer has suggested, the second line of the play might well have produced a powerful response in the audience: for '"Is this a holiday?" was a question that touched a deep cultural nerve,' Shapiro remarks.[32] The play's tribunes, it has been suggested, would have reminded Elizabethan audiences of the London City fathers, who opposed the public theatres and objected to working men turning the day into a holiday—for 'by the 1570s it was unclear whether St George's Day, along with other days printed in red ink on the calendar, remained a holiday.'[33] Seen from this perspective, the play seems to echo the inevitable confusion with dates brought about by the calendrical imbroglio. One of the most striking instances of 'strange-disposèd time' occurs in the famous 'orchard scene':

> BRUTUS Is not tomorrow, boy, the ides of March?
> LUCIUS I know not, sir.
> BRUTUS Look in the calendar and bring me word.
> (2.1.40-42)

As it appears in most contemporary editions of *Julius Caesar*, Brutus' question is the result of an unfortunate emendation by the eighteenth-century editor Lewis Theobald. In the folio text from 1623, Brutus' question figures as follows: 'Is not tomorrow, boy, the *first* of March?' Based on the assumption that 'his question to Lucius would have been familiar to all Elizabethans,' the Arden edition (one of the very few modern editions of *Julius Caesar* to do so) leaves the line unaltered—for the reason that Brutus' address

[31] Daniell, *Julius Caesar*, p. 16.

[32] Shapiro, p. 170.

simply indicates that 'he needs to know what calendar he is working under.'[34] If most modern editors silently correct the line, it is because they assume Shakespeare made a mistake in the timeline of his play.[35] But as the scene opens, Brutus (not Shakespeare) appears in a state of profound confusion:

> I cannot by the progress of the stars
> Give guess how near to day […]
> When, Lucius, when?
> (2.1.2-5)

Although the orchard scene is set on the eve of the ides of March (15 March), Brutus is unable to tell what time or even what day it is; this temporal crisis is embodied in the repeated interrogative pronoun 'when'.

C. 'What is it o'clock?': Untimeliness as Key Diegetic Feature of Julius Caesar

Far from being an isolated instance, Brutus' confusion on the eve of Caesar's assassination gestures towards a more general phenomenon of temporal derangement suffusing *Julius Caesar*—a play 'bathed in the light of a handless clock,' in Hélène Cixous's evocative phrase. Prior to any historical parallel with Shakespeare's time, this uncanny sensation lies at the very heart of the play's diegesis and manifests itself in the characters' unnerving obsession with time. As Cixous grasped, the structural untimeliness of *Julius Caesar* is encapsulated in a single question that recurs throughout: 'What is't o'clock?'

> O this sentence disguised as a cliché, 'what time is it?'—see how it sounds ceaselessly as soon as the play begins, each goes around asking the other what

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[34] Daniell, *Julius Caesar*, p. 21.

[35] Others, following Theobald, explain away F's 'first' as a misreading of a manuscript contraction. Thus, the Penguin edition notes: 'F reads *first* which is clearly an error, probably due to the compositor reading the abbreviation "i^{s}" (for "ides") as "ist"' (Norman Sanders (editor), *Julius Caesar* (London: Penguin,

> time it is (What is it o'clock?). As though one knew! What are they all up to, even the smallest roles, the walk-ons, looking at their watches all the time?[36]

As the clock strikes at the beginning of Act II, Brutus pricks up his ears anxiously:

> BRUTUS Peace! Count the clock.
> CASSIUS The clock hath stricken three.
> TREBONIUS 'Tis time to part.
> (2.1.192-94)

In the wake of the clock's uncanny signal, Brutus' injunction opens a breach in the historical surface of the play. The intrusion of time causes ripples throughout Act II: 'What is't o'clock?', Caesar asks his murderers; 'What is't o'clock?', Portia asks the soothsayer (2.2.114; 2.4.24). If anachronisms in Shakespeare prove to be 'loopholes', as Nicholas Royle suggests, it is perhaps because they disrupt the conventional expectation of a uniform literary aesthetics. One might think of 'loopholes' as

> a term that would refer to the slits in the walls of the castle as well as to forms of ambiguity or double-meaning (the loophole as a way out of a contract, for example). This second sense of 'loophole' is what, up 'to' Derrida, might have been called an anachronism. The *OED* dates the first figurative use of 'loophole' to 1663. But anachronism, in Shakespeare as in Derrida, proves a loophole.[37]

In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida sensed that Hamlet's acknowledgement of the disjointedness of time

> opened one of these breaches, often they are poetic and thinking peepholes [*meurtrières*] through which Shakespeare will have kept watch over the English language; at the same time, he signed its body, with the same unprecedented stroke of some arrow.[38]

Although Derrida's work is littered with references to Shakespeare—for whom he had 'infinite admiration and gratitude'—he admitted, in an interview with Derek Attridge, that he was not a 'Shakespeare expert':

> I would very much like to read and write in the space or heritage of Shakespeare, in relation to whom I have infinite admiration and gratitude; I would like to

[36] Cixous, 'What Is It o'Clock?', p. 76.

[37] Royle, 'The Poet', p. 3.

[38] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New*

> become a 'Shakespeare expert'; I know that everything is in Shakespeare: everything and the rest, so everything or nearly.[39]

The 'unprecedented stroke of some arrow' which Derrida associates with Hamlet's remark *does* have a precedent though: an oddly similar arrow was cast in *Julius Caesar*, through the recognition that the time is 'strange-disposèd'. As Royle notes, '*Julius Caesar* is a sort of sister-play to *Hamlet* in its out of jointedness by the clock.'[40] In fact, the sense of untimeliness arguably reaches a much more critical level in *Julius Caesar*, where the same arrow is cast again and again through Shakespeare's multitudinous 'poetic and thinking peepholes'. 'What is't o'clock?'. For Royle, the compulsive repetition of this arrow-shaped question embodies an effect of what he calls the 'iteraphonic', whereby

> the words of one character eerily repeat, singularly, without that character's knowledge or control. […] 'What is't o'clock?' Iteraphonically this question recurs, or occurs twice, in separate scenes involving two characters who never hear each other speak.[41]

The fact that Caesar and Portia never hear each other speak makes the iteraphonic effect even more arresting: their ghostly communication illustrates the extent to which, in *Julius Caesar*, words flow out of control and propagate in a manner that makes one think of telepathy. 'What is't o'clock?'. The answer, of course, is 'not yet'—for, in this uncanny play, 'the hour is always not-yet and imminent,' Cixous muses.[42] What might be experienced as imminent in the first two acts is the assassination of Caesar, the foreknowledge of which is tied in to an extra-diegetic dimension. The self-reflexive awareness of potential audiences watching or reading *Julius Caesar* belongs to this dimension. From the beginning, the imminence of Caesar's death haunts the 'audience

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[39] Derek Attridge (editor), *Acts of Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 67.

[40] Royle, 'The Poet', p. 4.

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

unconscious' (past, present and future). From the perspective of Elizabethan or more contemporary audiences, the repeated question signals that one of the foundational events of Western civilisation is about to be re-presented. For these audiences, Caesar's murder is a certainty, for the good reason that it has already happened. On the other hand, there is no such conviction for the characters in the first two acts of *Julius Caesar*; for them, 'What's to come is still unsure' (to borrow Feste's formula in *Twelfth Night*) (2.3.45). There is a crucial distinction between the future of potential audiences and that of the characters in the play. Derrida uses two different terms in order to distinguish between what he sees as two different types of futurity:

> In general, I try to distinguish between what one calls the future and 'l'avenir'. The future is that which—tomorrow, later, next century—will be. There is a future which is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, 'l'avenir' (to come), which refers to someone who comes, whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival. So if there is a real future beyond this other known future, it's l'avenir in that it's the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival.[43]

Derrida's distinction between the future and the 'avenir' provides the basis for the exploration, later on in this chapter, of the uncanny temporality experienced by the characters in the play.

II- Shakespeare's Rome: Different Planes of Reality

A. The 'Romanness' of Shakespeare's Romans

As the Romantic critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge expressed a long time ago, looking at literary characters and how they perceive the worlds in which they navigate

[43] This remark features in Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman's 2002 film *Derrida*. For a transcript of the film, see Gil Kofman, 'DERRIDA - Screenplay', *Derrida: Screenplay and Essays on the Film*

fundamentally entails a 'willing suspension of disbelief' on the part of the onlooker.[44] Coleridge here makes the rather sweeping statement that, if we are to engage with literature at all, it is essential that we acknowledge the core of 'realness' underlying the diegetic realm. For the statue to come to life, 'It is required / You do awake your faith,' Paulina warns her (intra-diegetic and, potentially, extra-diegetic) audiences at the end of *The Winter's Tale* (5.3.94-95). In her role as a grand priestess, Paulina stands for literature's supposed universal demand that we awake our faith so that characters can come to life 'for real'. Perhaps as a result of criticism's inherent reliance on categorisation, the experience of literature has been reduced to two domains of reality that are generally viewed as mutually exclusive: thus, historical contextualisation often seems to exclude the examination of psychological character and its potential for literary depth. However, and this is a key assumption in this chapter, these two critical levels of reality are dependent on one another. That *Julius Caesar* is set in pre-Christian Rome is hardly questionable: there are common people, tribunes and patricians, all Roman; there are multiple references to the Capitol (the ultimate symbol of Rome) and the great Julius Caesar himself roams the streets of this antique world. But, as Gary Miles wonders, 'How Roman Are Shakespeare's "Romans"' exactly? In a painstaking effort to 'situate the terms of ancient discourse within the sociopolitical context according to which Romans structured and interpreted their lives,' Miles recognises that

> on one level the question of Shakespeare's historicity is not open to clear and decisive answers. We cannot say with confidence what Julius Caesar was 'really' like, because […] this is a matter of substantial disagreement and confusion among the ancient sources themselves.[45]

[44] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, volume 2 (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), p. 2.

[45] Gary Miles, 'How Roman are Shakespeare's "Romans"?', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989), 257-83,

As Miles suggests, the historical reality of Julius Caesar—and by extension that of the Romans at large—is strikingly elusive. However, there has always been intense debate around the question of whether Shakespeare's Romans are genuine. As Terence John Bew Spencer observes, 'Shakespeare has, at various times, received some very handsome compliments for his ancient Romans; for his picture of the Roman world, its institutions, and the causation of events.'[46] As early as 1664, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, praised the verisimilitude of the so-called 'Roman plays':

> & certainly *Julius Caesar*, *Augustus Caesar*, and *Antonius*, did never Really Act their parts Better, if so Well, as [Shakespeare] hath Described them, and I believe that *Antonius* and *Brutus* did not Speak Better to the People, than he hath Feign'd them; nay, one would think that he had been Metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman, for who could Describe *Cleopatra* Better than he hath done.[47]

In 1680, the Irish poet Nahum Tate assured his readers that Shakespeare 'never touches on a Roman Story, but the Persons, the Passages, the Manners, the Circumstances, the Ceremonies, all are Roman.'[48] This view was later made popular by Alexander Pope, who remarked that in *Julius Caesar*, 'not only the Spirit, but Manners, of the *Romans* are exactly drawn.'[49] Echoing Pope, Paul Arthur Cantor more recently set out to investigate what he called the 'Romanness' of Shakespeare's Romans.[50] But as new historicists, cultural materialists and Marxist critics have been keen to observe from the 1980s onwards, 'Shakespeare does not always adhere to "Romanness"' in his 'Roman'

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[46] Terence John Bew Spencer, 'Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans', *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957), 27-38, p. 27.

[47] Quoted in Gwynne Blakemore Evans, Appendix B, 'Records, Documents, and Allusions', in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 1847.

[48] Nahum Tate, address prefatory to 'The Loyal General, A Tragedy' (1680), *The Shakspere Allusion Book: A Collection of Allusions to Shakspere from 1591 to 1700*, edited by Clement Mansfield Ingleby, Lucy Toulmin Smith and Frederick James Furnivall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 266.

[49] Quoted by Spencer in 'Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans', p. 27.

[50] Paul Arthur Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1976),

plays.[51] In *Julius Caesar*, particularly, the apparent consistency of a Roman spatio-temporal order is turned topsy-turvy by traumatic incursions of historical time. In this sense, 'What is't o'clock?' can be said to signal the unavoidable intrusion of 'the audience' into the text—it becomes a mere rhetorical question that stands for the exterior gaze embedded in every literary process.[52] Focused on a certain level of 'authentic' historical reality, this type of reading has become a critical commonplace in the twenty-first century.

B. 'Rome' as a Multi-Layered Signifier

By contrast, the more traditional emphasis on the intrinsic or self-evident 'Romanness' of Shakespeare's Romans now risks being viewed as a naïve, easily subverted essentialism. In his famous essay, 'The Romans in Films', Roland Barthes debunks the farcical obsession with verisimilitude in Joseph Leo Mankiewicz's film adaptation of *Julius Caesar* from 1953. Barthes' focus on a specific 'performance' of the play (a filmic one) and its material conditions illustrates his general concern with how meaning is produced in modern culture. In *Mythologies*, he examines the semiology of the process of myth creation in contemporary Western society; and Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* provides a graphic example of this process. For Barthes, the film's explicit 'Romanness' is a myth that can be read through a number of key signs, the most overarching of which is the fringe worn by all the actors, which he refers to as the 'mainspring of the Spectacle'.

> What then is associated with these insistent fringes? Quite simply the label of Roman-ness. We therefore see here the mainspring of the Spectacle—the *sign*—operating in the open. The frontal lock overwhelms one with evidence, no one

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[51] Paul Noah Siegel, *Shakespeare's English and Roman History Plays: A Marxist Approach* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1986), p. 123.

[52] For a representative example of this audience-oriented type of historicist criticism, see Phyllis Rackin,

> can doubt that he is in Ancient Rome. And this certainty is permanent: the actors speak, act, torment themselves, debate ‘questions of universal import’, without losing, thanks to this little flag displayed on their foreheads, any of their historical plausibility.[53]

By relying on pseudo-Roman fringes to impart ‘historical plausibility’, Mankiewicz’s film provides an arch-essentialist reading of *Julius Caesar*, which is guilty of overindulging in verisimilitude, Barthes argues. There is a shared assumption underlying the essentialist and the historicist approaches though: whether for or against the authenticity of Shakespeare’s Romans, they both hinge on the notion that there is a genuine core of ‘Romanness’ available or known to us. As Gary Miles has demonstrated in his historical overview of ancient Rome (quoted above), this is far from being the case. In many ways, the original reality of the historical Romans is irretrievable—because of confusion amongst the ancient sources mainly, but also because of a ceaseless, palimpsestic rewriting of ‘Rome’ and ‘the Romans’ through the centuries. In his landmark study, *Shakespeare’s Rome*, Robert Miola writes:

> Neither Rome nor Romans […] could be so easily fitted into categories or so summarily reduced. Conscious of the city’s multi-faceted diversity, Shakespeare did not insist on any exclusive, dogmatic interpretation, but drew upon various attitudes, stories, and traditions as he pleased.[54]

And as Spencer appropriately points out,

> the part played by Shakespeare himself in creating our notions of the ancient Romans should not be forgotten. It has become difficult to see the plays straight, to see the thing in itself as it really is, because we are all in the power of Shakespeare’s imagination, a power which has been exercised for several generations and from which it is scarcely possible to extricate ourselves.

Thus, while ‘it is well known […] that Shakespeare created the fairies,’ Spencer does not rule out the idea that ‘Shakespeare also practically created the ancient Romans.’[55] In *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity*, Charles and Michelle Martindale describe the

[53] Roland Barthes, ‘The Romans in Films’, *Mythologies* [1957], translated from the French by Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), p. 24.

[54] Robert Miola, *Shakespeare’s Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 11.

circular process whereby 'Englishmen form their view of Rome partly from Shakespeare's plays, and then congratulate him on the veracity of his portrait.'[56] Such a recognition has far-reaching implications in terms of how we approach the diegetic world of Shakespeare's Rome—the most obvious one being that the pseudo-original historical event and its 'copy' become loosely reversible. As Marjorie Garber points out in her aptly-named essay 'A Rome of One's Own', the very *idea* of Rome, from the beginning, has the status of a quotation or a revenant: 'like any instated view of a civilization and its artefacts, the idea of Rome is from the first belated, already a nostalgic and edited memory when it first appears.'[57] Garber is here referring to Sigmund Freud's 'failed analogy' in *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

> Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past—an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one.[58]

As a psychical entity, 'Rome' encompasses a multitude of temporal realities which 'continue to exist' alongside one another through the ages. From this perspective, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Freud's *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, Garber's *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers* or Julius Caesar's *Commentaries* can all be said to add up to a multi-faceted *idea* of Rome. Such a recognition should bring us to the inevitable conclusion that no one historical site can sensibly be privileged when considering 'Rome' as a concept—and especially through the lens of a literary work. This is guaranteed, for instance, by the realisation that 'one of the archaeological layers of

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[56] Charles and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 125.

[57] Marjorie Garber, 'A Rome of One's Own', *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* [1987] (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), p. 70. See also, by the same author, 'Roman Numerals', in *Symptoms of Culture* (London: Penguin, 1999), 179-98.

[58] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, edited and translated from the German by James

Freud's Rome is Shakespeare's Rome. And in Shakespeare's plays "Rome" is self-evidently "in quotation", already idealized, historicized, and put in question.'[59] Along the same lines, Richard Wilson notes that 'the realization that history is a story is already implicit in Shakespeare's version of the death of the Roman dictator.'[60] For Goethe, this intrinsic self-questioning is evident in Shakespeare's glib approach to 'outward costume':

> No one despised outward costume more than he; he knew very well the inner human costume, and here all are alike. They say he hit off the Romans admirably; but I don't find it so, they are all nothing but flesh-and-blood Englishmen, but they are certainly human beings, human from head to foot, and the Roman toga sits on them perfectly well.[61]

That Shakespeare's Romans are 'flesh-and-blood Englishmen' is definitely not the main message here. Goethe is keen to point out that the inconsistency of 'outward costume' proves that Shakespeare's chief dramatic concern lies in the 'inner human costume'—a concern echoed in Samuel Johnson's remark that the playwright's drama may 'require Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men.'[62] By implying that historical time can be taken for granted, such a perspective challenges the typical shying away, in many recent historicist accounts, from the intradiegetic frame of literary works. Goethe's reflections imply that the outward-going movement (that is, from text to context) that underlies most historicist methodologies can be reversed for the reason that historical context

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[59] Garber, 'A Rome of One's Own', p. 72.

[60] Wilson, *Julius Caesar*, p. 1.

[61] Goethe, 'Shakespeare und kein Ende!'. 'Niemand hat das materielle Costüm mehr verachtet als er; er kennt recht gut das innere Menschencostüm, und hier gleichen sich alle. Man sagt, er habe die Römer vortrefflich dargestellt; ich finde es nicht; es sind lauter eingefleischte Engländer, aber freilich Menschen sind es, Menschen von Grund aus, und denen passt wohl auch die römische Toga.' The English translation cited above appears in Friedrich Nietzsche's essay 'The Use and Abuse of History', *Untimely Meditations*, translated from the German by Reginald John Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 85-86.

[62] Samuel Johnson, 'Preface to Shakespeare' [1765], in *Dr. Johnson on Shakespeare*, edited by William

invariably leads back to the psychic world of the characters—a pattern that is magnified in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

C. Unmasking the Politics of Representation: Julius Caesar *as Postmodern Metadrama*

In the historical reality of a performance of the play *Julius Caesar*, there is a mesmerising self-reflexivity underway: the characters seem to know that they are part of an overarching representational scheme. In Brutus' words, Caesar's assassination is 'our performance' (2.1.134). However, the conspirators' sense of self-aware theatricality culminates after the deed:

> CINNA Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!
> Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the streets.
> CASSIUS Some to the common pulpits, and cry out
> 'Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement!' […]
> BRUTUS Then walk we forth even to the market-place,
> And, waving our red weapons o'er our heads,
> Let's all cry 'peace, freedom, and liberty!'
>
> (3.1.78-111)

The conspirators do not merely shout 'peace, freedom and liberty' in the aftermath of Caesar's assassination: rather, they self-consciously ask their Roman audience to 'proclaim [and] cry it about the streets'. If they do so, it is because they know that Caesar's assassination, as a standalone event, does not convey a self-evident message: in order to produce meaning, it needs to be supplemented through a process of representation. '*"*Peace, freedom, and liberty!*"*'—the inverted commas that circumscribe Brutus' grandiose formula can be understood to indicate the characters' keen awareness of the power of representation and the extent to which it fashions reality. Along those lines, John Drakakis argues that '*Julius Caesar* is not so much a celebration

of theatre as an unmasking of the politics of representation *per se*.'[63] On a certain level of reality (the one which is concerned with theatricality's ability to comment on its own representational function), this statement can be said to take the play at its word. *Julius Caesar* thus becomes a meditation on its own representability, on its own potential to be staged in different places and in different times. In this specific domain of reality, the characters' 'Romanness' (as artificial as it might be) becomes a mere factor of *différance* whose function is to emphasise the play's structural alienation from the Roman setting it posits: ultimately, the gap between past and present, between ideas and action is what comes to define the play's aesthetics. As Richard Wilson puts it, '*Julius Caesar* processes the Roman past through the Elizabethan present, with an eye always to future audiences.'[64] Such an intricate, multi-layered temporality culminates in a monumental exchange between Brutus and Cassius following the assassination:

> CASSIUS How many ages hence
> Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
> In states unborn and accents yet unknown!
> BRUTUS How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport?
>
> (3.1.113-15)

Seen from the angle of the historical reality of *Julius Caesar*, the 'lofty scene' that Brutus talks about inscribes a 'real' Elizabethan present within a 'fake' Roman past: in other words, the historical site of the play's production (Shakespeare's England) is registered as the anchoring point for the interpretive process. While immersed in its foundational Elizabethan moment, the play also keeps 'an eye always to future audiences', in Wilson's phrase. Such a mental projection, whereby the play envisions potential audiences to come, remains firmly rooted in Shakespeare's authorial moment. On the level of this particular temporal plane, the 'acting over' of the conspirators'

[63] John Drakakis, '"Fashion it thus": *Julius Caesar* and the Politics of Theatrical Representation', *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1992), 65-73, p. 72.

[64] Richard Wilson, 'Introduction', *New Casebooks: Julius Caesar*, edited by Richard Wilson (New York:

'lofty scene' is a key metadramatic moment, through which the play predicts its own dazzling reiteration 'In states unborn and accents yet unknown'. However, the systematic elucidation of the play's diegetic world through a fixed historical discourse has obvious limitations. The main risk is that characters end up featuring as mere allegorical amalgams that gesture towards a more or less encrypted Elizabethan kernel of reality.

The notion that Shakespeare's drama remains fundamentally open to a plurality of interpretive discourses constitutes the ideological core of the present thesis. From this angle, the sense of futurity that pervades *Julius Caesar* cannot be contingent on the Elizabethan present for the reason that it operates on several planes of reality—as opposed to the spatio-temporally set frame of reality that underlies historicist criticism. 'Emphasizing the difference between "acting", "seeming", "appearing", "fashioning", "construing", and being, the language of the play suggests the maddeningly elusive and complicated nature of reality,' Miola proposes.[65] In much recent criticism, the self-contained logic of a critical act often seems to be legitimated by a foundational decision that designates either historicity or textuality as its undeconstructible site of origin. By definition, historicist criticism relies on the sense that every text is historically determined. In discursive (or so-called 'deconstructionist') accounts, on the other hand, historical events are seen as always already textualised. Too often taken out of its original context, Derrida's oft-quoted aphorism that '*there is nothing outside of the text*' has come to emblematise this factionalist type of approach.[66] However, it is worth emphasising the fact that Derrida himself always distanced himself from the simplistic

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[65] Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 78.

[66] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [1967], translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD:

and reductive notion that there is nothing outside textuality.[67] In a late interview, Derrida was asked: 'What's the most widely held misconception about you and your work?' His reply challenges a number of assumptions that are often associated with his work:

> That I'm a skeptical nihilist who doesn't believe in anything, who thinks nothing has meaning, and text has no meaning. That's stupid and utterly wrong, and only people who haven't read me say this. It's a misreading of my work that began 35 years ago, and it's difficult to destroy. I never said everything is linguistic and we're enclosed in language. In fact, I say the opposite, and the deconstruction of logocentrism was conceived to dismantle precisely this philosophy for which everything is language. Anyone who reads my work with attention understands that I insist on affirmation and faith, and that I'm full of respect for the texts I read.[68]

But let us come back to *Julius Caesar*. A textual reading of the play could start by acknowledging how, prior to any historical contextualisation, the play's syntax is haunted by a maddening sense of futurity (*always* keeping in mind that this is only one of many possible approaches to the play). But, as Derrida points out, such a reading (no matter how 'textual' it claims to be) does not have to bow to the radical notion that 'everything is linguistic and we're enclosed in language'. Such a reading can be 'full of respect', of 'affirmation and faith' for the texts it addresses. In the context of a discursive approach, giving the world of character all the attention it deserves is one of

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[67] For a discussion of this statement and its 'original' meaning (the one intended by Derrida at least), see the introduction to this thesis, 'Shakespeare or the Theatre of the Impossible'.

[68] Kristine McKenna, 'The Three Ages of Jacques Derrida: An Interview with the Father of Deconstructionism' (2002), available at http://www.kirbydick.com/derrida/LA_Weekly_-_Kristine_McKenna.pdf [accessed 18 October 2012]. In an earlier interview, Derrida had already remarked: 'I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the "other" and the "other of language"' ('Deconstruction and the Other', in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, edited by Richard Kearney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) p. 123.). In another interview, Derrida points out the extent to which deconstruction is in effect a 'protest against linguistics': 'the first step for me, in the approach to what I proposed to call deconstruction, was a putting into question of the authority of linguistics, of logocentrism. And this, accordingly, was a protest against the "linguistic turn", which, under the name of structuralism, was already well on its way. […] Deconstruction was inscribed in the "linguistic turn", when it was in fact a protest against linguistics!' ('I Have a Taste for the Secret', Jacques Derrida in conversation with Maurizio Ferraris and Giorgio Vattimo, in Derrida and Ferraris, *A*

many ways of paying tribute to the fundamental openness of *Julius Caesar* and its infinite potential for meaning—as opposed to the radical and rather nihilistic suggestion that 'text has no meaning'. By paying close attention to character psyche, Royle's essay testifies to the openness of the hermeneutic field of *Julius Caesar*. Thus, Royle declares that 'there is a "to"-effect to *Julius Caesar*,' which culminates in the frantic repetition of the preposition 'to' throughout the play. According to Royle, the play's semiotics are haunted by a sense of 'movement towards' that manifests itself through the recurring temporal adverbial phrases '*to*day', '*to*night' and '*to*morrow'—'the "to" of "tomorrow" conveys that sense of movement towards which eerily transfers, iterates and reiterates itself in the "to" of "today" and "tonight".'[69]

> CICERO Indeed, it is a strange-disposed time. […]
>   Comes Caesar to the Capitol tomorrow?
> CASCA He doth.
>
> (1.3.33-37)

On the plane of syntax, the strangeness of the 'strange-disposed time' that Cicero talks about initiates an uncontrollable dissemination. In Cicero's question, the uncanny association of the present tense with the marker of futurity 'tomorrow' testifies to the sense that, in Shakespeare's play, 'the "to" of "tomorrow" is not to come: it "comes" already.'[70] Although it pays close attention to the play's linguistic markers, Royle's essay on *Julius Caesar* is anything but strictly textual. It remains attuned to the idea that words like 'tomorrow' do not exist on their own as free-floating signifiers and that, crucially, they are spoken by characters in a play. In the psychological dimension of *Julius Caesar* (the one that is posited and examined in this chapter at least), the characters appear to be haunted by the future and its radical openness. 'How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport?'—on a certain level, this is a genuine question that voices a

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[69] Royle, 'The Poet', p. 4.

deep-seated anxiety regarding what is *to* come. Such anxiety is palpable at the very heart of the play's diegesis.

III- A WORLD OF PHANTASMA: MAPPING OUT CHARACTER PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

A. A LESSON IN CHARACTER: EXPLORING THE INNER HUMAN COSTUME

Exploring what Goethe called the 'inner human costume' in *Julius Caesar* implies that we take a step forward and consider Shakespeare's Romans not merely as historical puppets or textual constructs but as 'human beings, human from head to foot'. It is required we do awake our faith. In this strangest of plays, nothing is ever so certain when it comes *to* 'tomorrow'. As the clock strikes, the conspirators remain profoundly unsure about what is *to* come: 'But it is doubtful yet / Whether Caesar will come forth today or no,' Cassius warns his co-conspirators (2.1.193-94). His remark illustrates the extent to which the 'to'-effect of *Julius Caesar* is inextricably bound up with the psychological world of the characters, where what 'will come forth today' remains characteristically unknowable. Thus, whether the conspirators will have Antony '*to* friend' is very uncertain in the aftermath of Caesar's demise.

> BRUTUS I know that we shall have him well to friend.
> CASSIUS I wish we may. But yet have I a mind
> That fears him much; and my misgiving still
> Falls shrewdly to the purpose.
> (3.1.144)

What comes today remains suspended in the radical openness of the *avenir*. 'Ironised by the knowledge that there can be no such knowledge, no grounds for such knowledge,' Royle notes, 'the "to" is the mark of interruption, the very disjunction with the future.'[71] This subjective sense of disjunction between the diegetic present of the characters and the future is precisely what all the characters brood over in *Julius Caesar*. It has often

been suggested that the complexity and depth of the characters in *Julius Caesar*—and subsequently *Hamlet*—marks a turning point in the development of Shakespearean characterisation, which is often read in parallel with the emergence of what has been called a 'modern subjectivity' in the early modern period. Like *Julius Caesar*, '*Hamlet* seems to mark an epochal shift not only in Shakespeare's own career but in Western drama,' Stephen Greenblatt remarks: 'it is as if the play were giving birth to a whole new kind of literary subjectivity.'[72] In so-called 'old' historicist criticism (i.e. pre-new historicism), the intensity of Shakespeare's psychological world is repeatedly understood as an artistic echo of this perceived historical shift. But for self-styled new historicists like Greenblatt, Shakespeare's drama is a catalyst for historical change: far from being mere reflections, representations are viewed as shaping reality. Of course, the pseudo-universal concept of reality that new historicism silently enthrones is problematic: for in the end, it remains inevitably attached to a narrow domain of reality (historical).[73]

'Reality', as an overarching concept, remains characteristically elusive within the frame of language. Acknowledging the existence of several levels of reality (historical, textual, psychological, *etc*.) opens up the possibility for literary criticism not to be constrained by grand narratives. Rather than limiting itself to a specific critical discourse, the present thesis embraces this prolific plurality. As pointed out before, the psychological stance adopted in this chapter does not define the ethos of the whole thesis; instead, it should be viewed as an experiment in a specific subjective mode. A post-historicist psychological account of Shakespearean drama can emphasise the extent

[72] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Introduction to *Hamlet*', *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean Elizabeth Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: Norton, 1997), p. 1661. On this topic, see Greenblatt's landmark book, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* [1980] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See also Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Routledge, 1985).

[73] For a detailed overview of new historicism in the field of Shakespeare studies, see the introduction to

to which character identity directly shapes our reading of the plays. In *The Time Is Out of Joint*, Agnes Heller suggests that

> every categorization violates the Shakespearean universe simply because in this universe in a crucial sense *identity reigns supreme*. Each Shakespearean character is identical with himself or herself. […] It is precisely the complexity of identity constitution, along with the problematization of this identity by the characters themselves and by others, that allows for unpredictability, diversity, and uniqueness.[74]

Shakespearean characters often problematise their own identity as well as that of other characters; and, as Heller remarks, this is particularly relevant to *Julius Caesar*. When Caesar draws the portrait of Cassius for Marc Antony, he gives what may be called 'a lesson in character.'[75]

> CAESAR Antonio.
> ANTONY Caesar.
> CAESAR Let me have men about me that are fat,
> Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep a-nights.
> Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look.
> He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.
> ANTONY Fear him not Caesar, he's not dangerous.
> He is a noble Roman, and well given.
> CAESAR Would he were fatter! But I fear him not.
> Yet if my name were liable to fear,
> I do not know the man I should avoid
> So soon as that spare Cassius. He reads much,
> He is a great observer, and he looks
> Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays,
> As thou dost, Antony; he hears no music.
> Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort
> As if he mocked himself, and scorned his spirit
> That could be moved to smile at anything.
> Such men as he be never at heart's ease
> Whiles they behold a greater than themselves,
> And therefore are they very dangerous.
> I rather tell thee what is to be feared
> Than what I fear, for always I am Caesar.
>
> (1.2.191-213)

[74] Agnes Heller, *The Time Is Out of Joint: Shakespeare as Philosopher of History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 34.

Caesar's analysis is fascinating not only in terms of what it tells us about the character of Cassius but also in terms of what it tells us about Caesar himself. Shakespeare's Caesar is 'the best judge of human character,' Heller observes: 'he wants to understand the temperament, the character, the morality, the ideas, the psychology of a man in its entirety.'[76] In Shakespeare's play, Caesar is portrayed as cold, fearless, robotic and intensely analytical: 'I rather tell thee what is to be feared / Than what I fear, for always I am Caesar,' he tells Marc Antony. These traits of character reach a climax in Caesar's final declaration, before the multiple stabbing occurs:

> I am constant as the Northern star
> Of whose true fixed and resting quality
> There is no fellow in the firmament.
>
> (3.1.60-62)

B. Psychic Dysfunction as Characteristic Symptom of Shakespeare's Rome

The idiosyncratic identity of Shakespeare's Caesar shines through in the Roman statesman's little 'lesson on character'—one of the dramatist's unmistakable psychological contributions to the historical narrative of Plutarch, Heller points out.

> Almost the whole of this splendid characterization is Shakespeare's invention, based on a few sentences from Plutarch's *Brutus and Caesar*. And even these sentences are entirely changed in meaning by Shakespeare. In Plutarch (in *Brutus and Caesar*) Caesar says that he fears most the pale-visaged and carrionlike people such as Brutus and Cassius. Yet Shakespeare's Caesar does not fear anyone, and he speaks only of Cassius and not of Brutus. There is not even a hint in Plutarch that Caesar, the excellent judge of character, also considers Cassius a good judge of character […]. Cassius, Caesar says, looks through the deeds of man; he cannot be misled; he sees the motivation behind the act and therefore cannot be deceived. And Cassius will live up to every bit of Caesar's characterization in Shakespeare's play.[77]

In many aspects, the characterisation of the Roman statesman in *Julius Caesar* appears as a grotesque parody of Plutarch. The Greek biographer's passing reference to Caesar's

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[76] *Ibid.*

visceral fear of 'pale-visaged and carrionlike people' provides Shakespeare with the perfect pretext to endow his own Caesar with a fetish for lean men: 'Let me have men about me that are fat, / Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep a-nights,' he commands. Marc Antony's suggestion that Cassius is a 'noble Roman' remarkably fails to distract Caesar's attention from his homoerotic attraction/repulsion towards the suspected conspirator: 'Would he were fatter!' If, in the mind of Shakespeare's Caesar, men who are 'spare' (like Cassius) are dangerous, it is primarily because they are dangerously attractive. Cassius has 'a lean and hungry look' and he 'reads much': he is 'a great observer' who 'looks / Quite through the deeds of men'. In a word, he is an intellectual. And in Shakespeare's Rome, the intellectual features as a scapegoat figure that needs to be sacrificed. As a fictional construct, this idea of Rome rests on the stereotype that there is no space for intellectuals in a society that defines itself through a warring patriarchal order. And yet, is it not mad that all the main protagonists in *Julius Caesar* are intellectuals—and *especially* Caesar? His clever little 'lesson in character' testifies to the fact that he is himself the thinker *par excellence*: the elaborate speech that denounces Cassius' inveterate intellectualism betrays Caesar's own over-analytical tendencies: like Cassius, 'he looks / Quite through the deeds of men'. If Caesar wants to be surrounded by fat men only, it is perhaps because men like Cassius remind him too much of himself, the 'hook-nosed fellow of / Rome' (*2 Henry IV*, 4.2.37). In the world of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, physical leanness is associated with intense, excessive thinking—Caesar's mistrust of Cassius has to do primarily with the latter's unusual intelligence. Amongst Shakespeare's Romans, intellect is construed as a pathological feature, as an incurable disease that proliferates. In order to ward off what is widely perceived as a psychic dysfunction, the nobles tend to displace it onto other characters—this often happens in the mode of the return of the repressed. Caesar's

branding of Cassius as a 'dangerous' thinker is spoken as an aside to Mark Antony; and Cassius himself (or any other character) clearly does not hear the cursing remark. However, when Cassius refers to a wandering poet as a 'cynic' later on in the play, it is as if he obeys a silent urge to pass on *the mark*; the same poet is summarily dismissed by Brutus as a 'jigging fool' (4.2.185-88). Although they view themselves as warriors, it is rather striking that Shakespeare's Romans come across as overcautious, self-reflexive intellectuals (even the plebeians pun like crafty Elizabethan dramatists!). Ultimately, this crisis of identity can only be solved through the displacement of Rome's overflowing intellectualism onto a straw man: the poet. The murder of Cinna the poet in Act III illustrates the extent to which the 'intellectual' is a highly symbolical figure in Shakespeare's Rome: it has to be eradicated, torn to pieces, so that the city-state can extricate itself from its crippling conceptualism.[78]

In *Julius Caesar*, Rome is portrayed as a diseased entity. A close psychological analysis of the characters reveals a world that is riddled with mental illness. If Caesar wants men about him who are fat, it is because he knows that physical emaciation is an unmistakable sign of overthinking (and men, like Cassius, who think too much are dangerous). Like Caesar, most academics know from experience that overthinking typically leads to a vast array of psychological disorders including anxiety, depression and insomnia. While entirely focused on Cassius, Caesar overlooks those very symptoms in Brutus, the play's arch-intellectual—and Caesar's true mirror image.[79] The generalised sense of mental distress that pervades *Julius Caesar* is crystallised in Brutus'

[78] On the role of sacrifice and mimetic desire in the order of society, see René Girard's essay 'Collective Violence and Sacrifice in *Julius Caesar*', in *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare* [1991] (London: Gracewing, 2000).

[79] Like Hamlet, Caesar fails to identify with his true mirror image. Too busy competing with Laertes,

compulsive exploration of interiority, which causes him to be 'with himself at war,' as he confesses to Cassius at the beginning of the play.

> If I have veiled my look,
> I turn the trouble of my countenance
> Merely upon myself. Vexèd I am
> Of late with passions of some difference,
> Conceptions only proper to myself.
>
> (1.2.39-48)

The unspecified 'conceptions' that Brutus talks about epitomise the psychic unrest that plagues Shakespeare's Rome. In this sense, it is quite puzzling that Brutus does not get marked by Caesar as 'pale-visaged and carrionlike', as he does in Plutarch. On the other hand, this omission reinforces the pathos that arises from Caesar's complete misevaluation of the psychology of Brutus at the crucial moment of the stabbing—'*Et tu, Brutè?*' (3.1.77). When he shares with Marc Antony his resolution to have only overweight 'sleep a-nights' around him, Caesar does not include Brutus in his 'axis-of-evil' speech—although the latter is in blatant conversation with Cassius as '*Caesar and his train*' parade blithely towards the Capitol (1.2.178). As an insomniac, Brutus embodies everything that Caesar is suspicious of in a (Ro)man. 'Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar / I have not slept,' Brutus muses in his orchard (2.1.61-62). And when the conspirators make their entrance, he confirms that the remark was not meant to be a mere rhetorical turn of phrase: 'I have been up this hour, awake all night' (88).

C. 'I Think': The Hallucinatory Dreamtime of Phantasma

What keeps Brutus awake at night is an ethical question: whether to kill or not to kill Julius Caesar. This fundamental misgiving about the necessity to 'take arms' is often considered to become fully-fledged in the character of Hamlet, who devotes a whole speech to 'the question':

> Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And, by opposing, end them.
>
> (*Hamlet*, 3.1.58-62)

This most famous of soliloquies encapsulates the Shakespearean psychological experience, whereby a character is trapped within the walls of their own psychological edifice (this is the very *essence* of the Shakespearean soliloquy). ‘Words, words, words’: fashioning himself as the prisoner of language, Hamlet loses grip on reality—a certain idea of it, at least (2.2.192). As many other characters illustrate, an excessive preoccupation with what is to come can lead to insanity; this is especially true when the subject of inquiry is death—‘The undiscovered country,’ as Hamlet calls it, ‘from whose bourn / No traveller returns’ (3.1.81-82). But whether the ‘question’ at hand is about killing a tyrant or killing oneself, the fundamentally unknown nature of ‘that sleep of death’ is the one thing that ‘Must give us pause,’ the prince of Denmark realises (68-70). Although his mind is settled over the murder of Claudius early on in the play, Hamlet’s compulsive overthinking prevents him from acting throughout. For Brutus too, thinking turns out to be a paralysing process that hinders action; for what keeps him awake at night is the same ‘pause’ that cripples Hamlet. In *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*, Hugh Grady points out that ‘Hamlet’s interior conflict throughout the play suspends him in an indeterminate, intermediate mental space up until his final moments.’ It is this very same indeterminate zone that preoccupies and ultimately overwhelms Brutus.[80]

> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
>
> (*Julius Caesar*, 2.1.63-65)

[80] Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009),

While pondering over Caesar's murder, Brutus acknowledges the maddening mental process—or 'interim'—that divides action from within and therefore nullifies it. In *The Vanishing*, Christopher Pye writes:

> To recognize the phantasmatic nature of such an interim, and to feel its resonances with Hamlet's more famously suspended act, one must read it not as the space between thought and action, as many an editor has, but as an undoing of the act as such.[81]

In other words, thought negates presence—this is one of many ways in which Shakespearean drama can be said to challenge presence as an overarching concept (and, as the introduction to the thesis has made clear, the challenging of presence is a key effect of anachronism in Shakespearean drama). If the 'interim' that Brutus talks about can be seen as a psychic process that marks the erasure of the act, Royle also suggests that it opens up 'a singularly nightmarish world of its own, rendering to itself a hallucinatory, hideous dreamtime.'[82] More specifically, this dreamtime is crystallised in the word 'phantasma', Royle points out. For Brutus, 'phantasma' refers to a mental space that is filled with nightmarish visions like the 'monstrous apparition' of Caesar's ghost (4.2.328). Induced by extreme sleep deprivation, the world of 'phantasma' erases the boundary between wakefulness and dream. As often, Shakespeare follows his historical source closely: 'Brutus was a careful man and slept very little,' Thomas North noted in his English translation of Plutarch.[83]

As in Caesar's description of Cassius, Shakespeare here picks on a minor detail from Plutarch's account and develops it into a central psychological locus of his characterisation. Shakespeare's Brutus is defined by his inability to sleep—a pattern that is inextricably bound up with his compulsive thinking. In his own account of Brutus,

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[81] Christopher Pye, *The Vanishing: Shakespeare, the Subject, and Early Modern Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 150-51.

[82] Nicholas Royle, 'Phantasma', *How to Read Shakespeare* (London: Granta Books, 2005), p. 37.

[83] Thomas North, *Plutarch's Lives* (1579), quoted in Martin Spevack (editor), *Julius Caesar*, updated

Plutarch goes on to explain: 'whilst he was in war and his head ever busily occupied to think of affairs, and what would happen, after he had slumbered a little after supper, he spent all the rest of the night in dispatching of his weightiest causes.'[84] It is easy to see how this terse portrait lays the ground for Shakespeare's characterisation of Brutus. If the Roman politician was kept awake at night, Plutarch observes, it is because he was 'ever busily occupied to think of affairs', worrying about 'what would happen'—about the *à-venir*, in other words. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus' intense brooding over what is to come turns into an obsessive psychological pattern. On the night before the final battle at Philippi, Plutarch specifies that, as 'he saw a wonderful strange and monstruous shape of a body coming towards him,' Brutus was 'thinking of weighty matters.'[85] The apparition of the ghost of Caesar is undoubtedly the most overwhelming phantasmal experience in the play. It is cued by a significant line which encapsulates Brutus' ongoing mental state: 'I think'—in fact, this line could be the motto of *Julius Caesar* (325). Brutus thinks too much; and, as he acknowledges, his psychological and physiological faculties are overstrained. His eyes are weak, or so he 'thinks' (the expression appears again two lines later): 'I think it is the weakness of mine eyes / That shapes this monstrous apparition' (327). As the ghost vanishes, Lucius too seems to be caught in the hideous dreamtime of phantasma: 'He *thinks* he is still at his instrument,' Brutus marvels—'Lucius, awake!' (343-44). In the psychic dimension of phantasma, poised between wakefulness and dream, thinking marks the subject's drifting from its perceived ontological centre. In *Julius Caesar*, this split from within culminates in Brutus' subjective experience of the interior interim. As Royle points out,

> there is a stressing of interiority in Shakespeare quite absent from North. We are consistently made aware of the inner world of Brutus' thought, feeling and perception. This sense of interiority is there already in the apparently casual self-

[84] *Ibid.*

> referring 'Let me see, let me see', and in the simple but inward-looking 'I think'.[86]

Brutus' compulsive introspection can be described in terms of what Charles Bernheimer calls 'pathological interiority'—the standard definition of hysteria in psychoanalysis, he explains. Although it is made obvious in Brutus, this syndrome of pathological interiority extends to most characters in *Julius Caesar*. Insofar as 'the concept of hysteria remains less descriptive than normative in our culture,' searching for hysterical symptoms (especially in female characters) remains problematic, Cynthia Marshall argues—for 'ascribing meaning to symptom in order to render the suspect interior of another person knowable, much as a decision as to character type allows comfortably summary conclusions about literature.'[87] In spite of this obvious critical hazard, Marshall suggests that the character of Portia can be read as developing the motif of pathological interiority in *Julius Caesar*; her self-inflicted wound in the thigh, in particular, 'directs attention inward, asserts an interior dimension to her character.'[88] At the beginning of Act II, Portia senses that her husband is hiding something from her. As evidence of her trustworthiness, she declares:

> I have made strong proof of my constancy,
> Giving myself a voluntary wound
> Here in the thigh.
> (2.1.298-300)

In her plea to Brutus, Portia is eager to challenge gender stereotypes. Not unlike Lady Macbeth, who asks the 'spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts' to 'unsex' her, Portia claims to be 'stronger than [her] sex' (*Macbeth*, 1.5.38-39; *Julius Caesar*, 2.1.295). As a result, Portia's 'voluntary wound' is generally viewed as pertaining to a distinctly

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[86] Royle, 'Phantasma', pp. 33-34.

[87] Cynthia Marshall, 'Portia's Wound, Calphurnia's Dream: Reading Character in *Julius Caesar*', *English Literary Renaissance* 24 (1994), 471-88, p. 479.

masculine set of Roman values (*virtūs*). However, the wound has also a more symbolic function as it crystallises the drive towards interiorisation in *Julius Caesar*:

> When Portia wounds her thigh, she directs attention inward, toward the vulnerable interior of her bodily self. As with any theatrical wound, the surface of spectacle is pierced. The character's body is presented as something that bleeds, feels pain, may die—something more 'real' than mere spectacle. One obvious place to turn in theorising about this interior dimension is psychoanalysis, which will see the wound and the dagger as, in various ways, symbolic. While psychoanalysis typically subsumes body to symbol, it will grant to Portia, in contrast to historicist criticism, an active (if unhealthy) inner life.[89]

Reading Portia's wound as 'real' implies that we see Portia as more than a mere theatrical character in a play. From a psychoanalytic point of view, such a wound is profoundly traumatic because it gestures towards 'something more "real" than mere spectacle': it guarantees that 'the surface of spectacle is pierced' by the humanity of Portia's body. This notably implies that the degree of 'realness' with which Portia's wound might be experienced by a specific audience during a given representation of the play becomes irrelevant (the human body here takes on the function of a theoretical tool). In this sense, the wound emblematises the exploration of what Goethe called the 'inner human costume' in Shakespearean drama. This type of psychological reading reverses the historicist trend in which characters are generally used as mere pretexts for topical intrusions of history. Considering the contextual historicity of a work of art as a given fact that may be taken on board or not, such a reading moves inwards—that is, towards the inner psychological depth of character. This type of psychological perspective opens up the possibility for a post-historicist criticism, whose defining feature would be an awareness of new historicism's strategies of objectification of literature. Underlying this approach is the sense that behind the surface of spectacle stand human beings called Portia or Brutus, reaching us in all their complexity:

'whereas a traditional historicist approach produces a strong, unified Portia, psychoanalysis would see her wound as symptomatic of a character marked by fragmentation, brokenness, neurosis,' Marshall points out.[90]

By setting a context-obsessed mode of criticism that sees Portia as a uniform, depthless character against a psychoanalytical approach which delves into her multi-layered fragmented self, Marshall echoes Woolf—'how serious a matter it is when the tools of one generation are useless for the next,' the modernist author marvelled in her essay on character.[91] As the writer explained on behalf of her own generation of writers, 'the Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use' and 'they have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things.'[92] In sharp contrast with an orderly Edwardian world picture, Woolf saw 'the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction' as 'the prevailing sound of the Georgian age'—an age that is essentially about 'the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure.'[93] And this spasmodic, obscure, fragmentary dimension, this sense of failure, is reflected in Woolf's characterisation. Thus, in *Mrs Dalloway*, there is 'an indescribable pause; a suspense […] before Big Ben strikes.'[94] Like Shakespeare's Brutus, Clarissa Dalloway cannot help but mark a mental pause preceding the clock's 'irrevocable hour'. This stretch of the mind or 'suspense' extends until the end of the novel in a ribbon-like stream of consciousness. If we can appreciate the accuracy or poignancy of Woolf's or Shakespeare's characterisation, it is often because we are able to relate to the characters and recognise their mental complexity. This is especially relevant in the case of staged violence, Marshall argues, insofar as it breaks the surface of spectacle; therefore, 'we need to set the theatrical moment of

[90] *Ibid.*, p. 479.

[91] Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, p. 331.

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 332.

[93] *Ibid.*, pp. 334 and 337.

physical violence against an exaggerated poststructuralist dictum that we have only language, and not each other, or even ourselves, in any preverbal way.'[95]

CONCLUSION

This chapter has aimed at providing a practical demonstration of how Shakespearean drama can be experienced in terms of an aesthetics of untimeliness. Exploring what has been referred to as the psychic realm of *Julius Caesar* has allowed us to recognise the ways in which the characters are haunted by the sense that time is 'strange-disposèd'. Instead of reading this untimeliness as the effect of an objective Elizabethan reality, as many critics have done, the chapter has approached the disjointed temporal dimension experienced by the characters as their own reality (as *the time of their lives*). The assignment to literary characters of an inner life—'something more "real" than mere spectacle', as Marshall puts it—implies that *Julius Caesar* possesses an inner core of truth. This is a problematic assumption in view of the thesis as whole, which fundamentally questions the existence of such an objective core of truth within literary works. While challenging the idea that there is an 'in-itself' to literature, the next chapter on *Hamlet* also values the inescapable subjectivity that marks every individual critical account. Perhaps the possibility for a post-historicism (and specifically for a post-new historicism) implies making peace with the notion that there can be no definitive, objective act of criticism. In this sense, the deliberate use, for specific critical aims, of essentialistic approaches might be seen to participate in such a post-historicist project. However, the next chapter adopts a very different critical strategy by suggesting that the aesthetics of untimeliness of Shakespearean drama can be read in view of the

multiple critical operations that surround, and eventually supplant, the so-called ‘original’ or ‘unmediated’ meaning of a work of art.

CHAPTER 3 – 'IMPERFECT PERFORMANCES': FRAGMENTED MEANINGS AND MEANINGFUL FRAGMENTS IN *HAMLET*

> 'That's why I like to listen to Schubert while I'm driving. As I said, it's because all the performances are imperfect. A dense, artistic impression stimulates your consciousness, keeps you alert. If I listen to some utterly perfect performance of an utterly perfect piece while I'm driving, I might want to close my eyes and die right then and there. But listening to the D major, I can feel the limits of what humans are capable of—that a certain type of perfection can only be realised through a limitless accumulation of the imperfect. And personally, I find that encouraging. Do you see what I'm getting at?'
>
> 'Sort of…'
>
> – Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*[1]

INTRODUCTION

What is *Hamlet* about? This question has baffled readers, critics and playgoers for a long time now. The meaning of *Hamlet* has proved characteristically elusive through the ages. As one of the central enigmas of modern literature, Shakespeare's most famous drama has elicited an unprecedented variety of interpretations. In '*Hamlet* and the Present', Hugh Grady writes:

> It still seems to be true that more has been written about this play than about any other work of literature. *Hamlet* thus remains a test-case of critical methodologies *par excellence* because it has been interpreted and re-interpreted for over three centuries without any sign of exhaustion. It is an ideal vehicle to illustrate the resistance of Shakespeare's works—and ultimately, of all cultural productions worthy of the name 'art'—to definitive interpretation. Instead, works like *Hamlet* are reinvigorated and re-interpreted from one age to the next as societies, culture and aesthetics change in an interconnected historical process.[2]

Grady's considerations on *Hamlet* provide the critical framework for this chapter, which examines the extent to which the play can be said to resist definitive interpretation.

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[1] Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*, translated from the Japanese by Philip Gabriel (London: Vintage, 2005), pp. 119-20.

[2] Hugh Grady, '*Hamlet* and the Present', *Presentist Shakespeares*, edited by Hugh Grady and Terence

More than a play, *Hamlet* is a multi-faceted signifier that challenges traditional notions of presence—the tag 'Hamlet' conjures up very different realities. The overwhelming predominance of interpretation in the experiential field of the play undermines the idea of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a complete literary object whose meaning is self-contained. Although the play's self-presence is often taken for granted, its supposedly unified ontological core is put into question by the material conditions of existence of the work: both *Hamlet*'s complex textuality and its intricate relation to its sources impart a powerful defamiliarisation effect. The structural alienation that underwrites the play culminates in its fundamentally undetermined spatio-temporal setting. Although the story of Hamlet is generally understood to be set in pre-Christian Denmark, the profusion of so-called anachronisms in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has led critics and editors to read the play against more contemporary cultural backgrounds—with a marked preference, perhaps unsurprisingly, for early modern England.[3]

The interpretation of works of art through their moment of production is a characteristic feature of historicist criticism (which has seen a revival in the last thirty years or so). In the present chapter, Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001) provides an instance of the critical exercise that consists in narrowing down *Hamlet* to an early modern plane of reality: the character of Hamlet, in particular, is treated as an autobiographical reflection of Shakespeare. There has been a growing unease around new historicist methods over the last decade; as explained in the introduction to this thesis, critics have started to point out that 'it is becoming harder and harder to distinguish much recent historicist criticism from an earlier generation's old

[3] See, for instance, Philip Edwards (editor), *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (Cambridge: Cambridge

historicism.'[4] In order to illustrate this point, the chapter goes on to look at Carl Schmitt's study of the play, *Hamlet or Hecuba* (1956), which claims that Hamlet is no less than King James himself. Together, Greenblatt's and Schmitt's accounts provide two graphic instances of historicism's tendency to foreclose the meaning of *Hamlet* by assigning an historically-bound meaning to it. Ultimately, however, they illustrate the extent to which Shakespeare's play resists being pinned down on a specific hermeneutic level. But while it frustrates categorical statements, *Hamlet* also leaves room for an infinite range of interpretations. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory, the chapter eventually suggests that the interpretive field, in all its chaotic diversity, is precisely what shapes the aesthetics of the play. In this sense, *Hamlet*'s fragmented meanings epitomise Benjamin's view of baroque drama as a 'picturesque field of ruins.'[5] And as Grady suggests, 'Benjamin's "presentist" proclivities' can help us to 'go beyond an almost exhausted New Historicism.'[6]

I- THE MEANING OF *HAMLET*: THE GREATEST QUESTION MARK

A. HAMLET*'S CRITICISM—CRITICISM'S* HAMLET

As anyone who has made the attempt knows, writing an essay on *Hamlet* is a veritable nightmare. Not only because *Hamlet* is such a dense and obscure play that it defies interpretation. But also because the play 'in itself' is indistinguishable from the superimposed layers of critical discourse that have shaped *Hamlet*'s meaning over time. On the one hand, there is little doubt that the play's legendary impenetrability is

[4] Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady, 'Presentism, Anachronism and the Case of *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare* 8(1) (2012), 44-73, p. 49.

[5] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [1928], translated from the German by John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 178. Benjamin borrows Karl Borinski's epxression in *Die Antike in Poetik und Kunsttheorie von Ausgang des klassischen Altertums bis auf Goethe und Wilhelm von Humbolt*, I (1914).

[6] Hugh Grady, '*Hamlet* as Mourning-Play: A Benjaminesque Interpretation', *Shakespeare Studies* 36

precisely what has made its meaning so contingent on added commentary. On the other hand, we should also bear in mind that this complexity has been fashioned by a maddening density and profligacy of critical discourses. The primacy of interpretation in the construction of meaning was emphasised by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*:

> We never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or—if the text is brand-new—through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions.[7]

In other words, what has been said about *Hamlet* through the centuries has inexorably tainted our perception of the play—and it is clearly an understatement to suggest that *a lot* has been said. In 1964 already, Jan Kott made the compelling observation that 'the bibliography of dissertations and studies devoted to *Hamlet* is twice the size of Warsaw's telephone directory.'[8] Against such a monumental interpretive backdrop, the contours of what some might like to call the 'play-in-itself' appear strikingly uncertain. The dazzling commentarial overflow imparts the odd feeling that the 'original', uncorrupted *Hamlet* has irremediably fallen in the bottomless pit of its own criticism (which is essentially the same thing as saying that there is no original, uncorrupted *Hamlet*). There is no safe place to be for critics when it comes to interpreting such a labyrinthine cultural object that has resisted totalising operations for over three centuries. The historical trajectory of *Hamlet* belies the assumption that the ultimate meaning of a literary work is self-contained—this would presuppose a core of immutable semantic presence within the work itself. From the outset, the idea of *Hamlet* as a meaningful, homogeneous literary object is challenged by an overflowing critical discourse that does

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[7] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. ix-x.

[8] Jan Kott, 'Hamlet of the Mid-Century', in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, translated from the German

not merely surround the play but rather inherently defines how we make sense of it. In this sense, '*Hamlet*'s criticism' can be said to function in the manner of a Trojan horse: it is always already within the walls of the fortress—that is, until we realise that it *is* the fortress itself ('Shakespeare is already in the château,' to use Nicholas Royle's memorable formula).[9] Through the inextricable relation between *Hamlet* and 'its' criticism, notions of primary and secondary textualities become blurred. A crucial implication of the established phrase '*Hamlet*'s criticism' is that of a top-down relation dominated by a master text that gives rise to a multitude of affiliated or even subordinated discourses. But in the case of *Hamlet*, this relation seems to be reversed: what we have in effect is a fantasised original semantic core whose meaning is ascribed retroactively by the criticism (but whether or not we can still call it 'criticism' is another question).

Before we even start thinking about '*Hamlet*'s criticism', we must specify what we mean when we talk about '*Hamlet*'—a haunting/haunted signifier that gestures towards a disconcertingly multifarious reality. Not only a play or even a literary object, 'Hamlet' is also fundamentally (and perhaps primarily) a cultural concept. If interpretive operations always precede and condition our experience of *Hamlet*, this crucially includes people who have never read the play or viewed it performed. Curiously, this all-inclusive dimension even seems to apply to people who have never heard of *Hamlet* or specifically know 'it' as a play by William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*'s overarching status in global culture allows the shockingly sweeping statement that most people in the so-called 'developed world' have experienced it in some way. It could well be true that 'after Jesus, Hamlet is the most cited figure in Western consciousness,'

[9] Nicholas Royle, 'The Poet: *Julius Caesar* and the Democracy to Come', *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*

as Harold Bloom once asserted.[10] Along the same lines, Richard Kearney claims that the play's perennial 'interlocking puzzles' ensure that '*Hamlet* the play survives to this day and Hamlet the prince is the most written about person in Western culture after Jesus and Napoleon.'[11] As a result of its pervasive quality, it is possible to experience *Hamlet* in various ways without ever interacting with a textual or theatrical manifestation of what is essentially an *idea*—rather than 'just' a play. For most people, it seems, *Hamlet* is a concept that is completely detachable from its literary or theatrical manifestations. It 'is', for instance, the idea of a man (Shakespeare himself quite often) holding a skull and making a clever speech about the human condition; alternatively, it 'is' the frozen picture of a beautiful young girl drowning in a luscious floral whirlpool. As Ann Thompson points out, these 'specific moments in the play appear over and over again as visual allusions in all kinds of contexts, serious, burlesque, or banal.'[12] These images have become powerful, timeless archetypes as a direct consequence of the ceaseless (re)interpretation of the play by influential critics and artists. While Ophelia's drowning was made famous by John Everett Millais' ubiquitous Pre-Raphaelite painting, the focus on Hamlet as an introspective melancholic is very much the legacy of Romantic criticism.[13]

B. Defamiliarisation Effect: The Fragmented Material Reality of HAMLET

If most latent ideas about *Hamlet* have been shaped by a dense and complex process of interpretive layering, our experience of the play (either on the page or the stage) is the

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[10] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), p. xix.

[11] Richard Kearney, 'Spectres of *Hamlet*', in *Spiritual Shakespeares*, edited by Ewan Fernie (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 161.

[12] Ann Thompson, '*Hamlet* and the Canon', in *Hamlet: New Critical Essays*, edited by Arthur Kinney (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 195.

[13] On the influence of Romantic criticism on Shakespeare, see Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*

result of a no less dense and complex editorial process. Prior to any critical operation (if such a thing is conceivable), the idea of a definitive, self-contained *Hamlet* is already questioned by the play's material proprieties. There are currently no less than three different texts that editors address as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: they are known as the first quarto (1603), the second quarto (1604-5) and the first folio (1623). In their Arden edition of the play, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor remark that 'the textual history of *Hamlet* is full of questions and largely empty of clear answers'—indeed, 'the only features that these three *Hamlet*s have in common are the name and designation of the chief character, and the fact that they are plays.'[14] To add another twist, the version of *Hamlet* that most people read today is a conflation of the second quarto and the folio texts. If we consider the conflated text as a version of the play in its own right (and there is no reason why we should not), that leaves us with four official *Hamlet*s. Amidst this textual maelstrom, it seems legitimate to ask, as Ann Thompson does: 'which words on which page of which text represent the true canonical *Hamlet*?'[15] For the play's complex textual history testifies to the vast editorial operation that underlies the tag '*Hamlet*' (when it is used to refer to a literary text written by Shakespeare). Specifically, the plurality of texts challenges the notion of a monolithic work that can be ascribed clear physical demarcations. 'What we call *Hamlet*, then, will hardly stay still even as a text,' David Bevington observes in his cultural history of 'Hamlet Through the Ages'. This constitutive hybridity is mainly due to the fact that 'from its inception as a play, the text of *Hamlet* interacted with a host of other shaping influences.'[16] As far as Shakespeare's drama is concerned, there is no consensus amongst scholars as to which

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[14] Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, 'Introduction', *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), p. 76.

[15] Thompson, '*Hamlet* and the Canon', p. 201.

[16] David Bevington, *Murder Most Foul: Hamlet Through the Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

text should be the authoritative one—depending on the method of investigation, both the second quarto and the folio appear as legitimate candidates. By refusing to be restricted to a single material entity, *Hamlet* (as if endowed with an uncanny will of its own) casts a shadow over its own presence. This mesmerising presence-as-absence creates a distantiation effect that participates in (and perhaps, for many readers and playgoers, unconsciously defines) the play's aesthetics. As Stephen Greenblatt writes in his introduction to the play in the Norton edition, '*Hamlet* is a monument of world literature, but it is a monument built on shifting sands.'[17] The play's characteristic self-questioning is especially apparent in view of the first quarto—or 'bad quarto', as it is often called. Unlike the second quarto and the first folio texts, the first quarto is generally considered to be an unauthorised version of the play, possibly based on an actor's account; it has stood in the shadow of the other texts for more than four hundred years. Although *Hamlet* often features as the canonical literary work *par excellence*, the first quarto challenges this supremacy from within. In this sense, reading the first quarto is an uncanny experience, Thompson and Taylor argue, as it 'offers the opportunity for defamiliarizing ourselves with *Hamlet* and for undergoing a continuous sequence of alienation effects: it is *Hamlet*, but not as we know it.'[18]

With regard to its sources, the play (in all its textual forms) seems to be toying with the very idea of *Hamlet* 'as we know it'—an idea that applies not only to readers and playgoers in the twenty-first century but also to early modern audiences. There is substantial evidence that, in Shakespeare's time, the story on which the play is based was already vastly popular. The oldest recorded source for the story of Hamlet is *Historiae Danicae*, written in Latin by a Dane called Saxo Grammaticus. Although

[17] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Introduction to *Hamlet*', *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean Elizabeth Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: Norton, 1997), p. 1659.

written around 1200, Saxo's work was first printed in Paris in 1514. 'The legend of Hamlet comes down to us from prehistoric Denmark,' Bevington notes; and 'like most such legends, its own early history is obscured in the mists of time. The oral versions of the story that must have circulated are lost to us. [...] We know nothing of Saxo's sources, but the story itself is by this time fully developed.'[19] François de Belleforest translated parts of Saxo into French in his *Histoires Tragiques* (1570), adding in some significant details.[20] But Shakespeare's *Hamlet* also has more direct antecedents on the Elizabethan stage, editors have argued. It was Edmund Malone who first suggested that there was a *Hamlet* on the stage in 1589—an idea based on Thomas Nashe's much-quoted prefatory epistle to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* ('English Seneca read by candlelight yields many good sentences, as *Blood is a beggar* and so forth, and if you entreat him fair in a frosty morning he will afford you whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches').[21] Because we do not know how much exactly—if anything at all—Shakespeare took from this 'Ur-*Hamlet*', scholars have pointed out the possibility that 'a number of details found in his *Hamlet* and not in Saxo or Belleforest were available to him in the lost play.'[22] In 1594, the theatrical entrepreneur Philip Henslowe recorded in his diary a performance of a play called *Hamlet* at Newington Butts.[23] Two years later, the dramatist Thomas Lodge wrote in *Wit's Misery and the World's Madness* (1596) about 'a ghost which cried so miserably in the theatre, like an oyster wife, "Hamlet, revenge!"' Thomas Kyd's play *The Spanish Tragedy*, probably

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[19] Bevington, *Hamlet Through the Ages*, p. 7.

[20] For an account of the 'prehistory' of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and its exact relation to Saxo Grammaticus and François de Belleforest, see Bevington's first chapter, 'Prologue to Some Great Amiss: The Prehistory of *Hamlet*', *Ibid.*, pp. 7-24.

[21] Thomas Nashe, *Works*, volume 3, edited by Ronald Brunlees McKerrow, reprinted with corrections and supplementary notes by Frank Percy Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 315.

[22] Bevington, *Hamlet Through the Ages*, p. 19.

[23] Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, edited by Reginald Anthony Foakes, second edition (Cambridge:

written between 1582 and 1592, also incorporates several elements of the traditional Hamlet story—which has led many critics to believe that he might be the author of the supposedly lost *Hamlet* ridiculed by Nashe. As it has often been observed, the numerous similarities between Shakespeare's play and Kyd's play can hardly be fortuitous: they both feature a play within the play, a ghost, a close friend called Horatio, a female suicide and a brother who kills his sister's lover. Thus, 'perhaps Shakespeare's play draws on Kyd's play, but perhaps both plays draw on the *Ur-Hamlet*,' editors are left to speculate.[24]

C. 'The Strangest Play Ever Written': Estrangement as Core Feature of Hamlet

Those historical antecedents and references all testify to the fact that the story of Hamlet would have been familiar to playgoers and readers in the late sixteenth century. Because of the inevitable epistemological gap incurred by a supposedly lost Elizabethan *Hamlet*, the closest and potentially most direct historical source that we have access to for Shakespeare's play is Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*. Editors often seem to agree that a crucial difference between Shakespeare and Belleforest is that 'Shakespeare updates the story to a Christian Renaissance Court' (that is, 'if Saxo/Belleforest is taken to be his major source,' which is hard to ascertain).[25] In his New Cambridge edition of *Hamlet*, Philip Edwards comments on what he calls a 'general change of great significance' initiated by Shakespeare:

> The setting of the story is moved from the pre-Christian times where Belleforest deliberately placed it to a courtly, modern-seeming period, in which, though England still pays tribute to Denmark, renaissance young men travel to and fro to complete their education in universities or in Paris.[26]

[24] Thompson and Taylor, 'Introduction', p. 70.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Punctilious critics often like to point out that Shakespeare's treatment of the story features myriad chronological inconsistencies: from the perspective of a pedantic, self-effacing observer, Hamlet's intention to go 'back to school in Wittenberg' may come across as an anachronism (1.2.113). The reference to a modern German university founded in 1502 in a story supposedly set in prehistorical Denmark puzzles rational minds. Throughout the history of Shakespeare criticism, this type of occurrence has been presented as a typically Shakespearean blunder.[27] However, Bevington recently pointed out that the 'updating' of the story of Hamlet to a Christian Renaissance court is already a characteristic feature in Belleforest's account:

> His setting is, anachronistically, more a court of Renaissance Europe, replete with palace, courtiers, and pages, than the abode of an ancient Scandinavian chieftain. By translating the Latin *stramentum*, straw, as the French equivalent of 'quilt,' he provides an elegant flooring in the Queen's chambers more suited to the French sixteenth century than to the Danish twelfth or thirteenth centuries. Belleforest provides a Christian justification for Hamlet's killing of his uncle, in that Fengon is guilty of 'an abominable guilt and twofold impiety,' his 'incestuous adultery and parricide murder.'[28]

A close examination of Belleforest's account contradicts the generally accepted view that the distinctly 'modern' setting of *Hamlet*—as well as the introduction of a Christian dimension—is Shakespeare's own original contribution to the age-old story. The modernisation of the story of Hamlet is already ongoing in Belleforest, whose setting clearly evokes 'a court of Renaissance Europe'. Bevington goes on to argue that

> Shakespeare is more interested in providing a plausible sixteenth-century Danish setting than are Saxo and Belleforest; Saxo's Denmark is of course that of an earlier era. The names of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, not in Shakespeare's sources, are those of aristocratic sixteenth-century Denmark.[29]

One might consider the spatio-temporal setting of an early modern play as an obvious, given fact that does not need to be discussed at great length—after all, some might

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[27] For a history of the treatment of anachronism by critics and editors in view of Shakespeare's dramas, see Chapter 1 of this thesis, '"Violator of Chronology": *Shakespeare's Anachronisms* in Con-text(s)'.

[28] Bevington, *Hamlet Through the Ages*, p. 12.

wonder, we are not dealing with a novel by Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner or James Joyce. Yet, it seems impossible for critics to come to an agreement regarding the 'actual' geographical setting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In his Oxford edition of the play, George Richard Hibbard rehearses the widespread opinion that 'the court where *Hamlet* unfolds is a Renaissance court, the seat of a centralized personal government.' But when it comes to locating this supposed Renaissance court, Hibbard's intricate elaboration shows how difficult it is to make even the simplest statement about *Hamlet*.

> Indubitably Danish in its explicit references to Elsinore, in its close relations with Norway, and in its conformity to the popular notion of the Danes, current in the England of the later sixteenth century, as a nation much given to drinking, it is, simultaneously, in its preoccupation with statecraft, intrigue, assassination, poisoning, and lechery, decidedly in keeping with the mental picture that many in the original audience of the play appear to have had of Italy.[30]

There is often an implicit assumption that *Hamlet* is set in pre-Christian Denmark: while Bevington believes that Shakespeare's intention was to provide 'a plausible sixteenth-century Danish setting', Hibbard suggests that the play's setting is both 'indubitably Danish' and Italian at the same time. Through the twentieth century, there has also been a tendency to read sixteenth-century England as the play's main subtext. While the anachronisms used to be seen chiefly as errors that depart from the play's formal setting, historicist critics have tended to read them as signposts that point towards an underlying core of early modern reality. Set against one another, these contradicting approaches illustrate the extent to which the play frustrates categorical statements. But although it inherently elicits contradiction, *Hamlet* also leaves room for an infinity of interpretations. Rather than subscribing to a particular time period and place (and perhaps a particular ideology), *Hamlet* often seems to embrace all time periods and all places (and perhaps all ideologies) at once. If '*Hamlet* is like a sponge,' as Jan Kott

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[30] George Richard Hibbard, 'General Introduction', *Hamlet*, edited by George Richard Hibbard (Oxford:

once remarked, it is because 'it immediately absorbs all the problems of our time.' This is perhaps why critics of all generations have invariably failed to ascribe a definitive spatio-temporal setting (let alone a *meaning*) to what Kott thought was 'the strangest play ever written.'[31]

II- NEW HISTORICIST *HAMLET*: STEPHEN GREENBLATT'S *HAMLET IN PURGATORY*

A. A PROTESTANT PLAYWRIGHT HAUNTED BY THE SPIRIT OF HIS CATHOLIC FATHER

Hamlet is both strange and estranging. It estranges readers, audiences and critics by systematically baffling their readings or theories. As Stephen Greenblatt remarks in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, '*Hamlet* is a play of contagious, almost universal self-estrangement.'[32] More than anywhere else, this self-estrangement can be sensed in the play's narrative, which is riddled with internal contradictions. For the father of new historicism, these inconsistencies are anything but fortuitous: rather, they are a manifestation of Shakespeare's deliberate inclusion of an early modern dimension in his drama. Greenblatt's characteristic preoccupation with the authorial intention concealed behind literary characters is crystallised in the following passage from *Hamlet in Purgatory*:

> The issue is not, I think, simply random inconsistency. There is, rather, a pervasive pattern, a deliberate forcing together of radically incompatible accounts of almost everything that matters in *Hamlet*. Is Hamlet mad or only feigning madness? Does he delay in the pursuit of revenge or only berate himself for delaying? Is Gertrude innocent or was she complicit in the murder of her husband? Is the strange account of the old king's murder accurate or distorted? Does the ghost come from Purgatory or from Hell?—for many generations now audiences and readers have risen to the challenge and found that each of the questions may be powerfully and convincingly answered on both sides. What is at stake is more than a multiplicity of answers. The opposing

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[31] Kott, 'Hamlet of the Mid-Century', p. 52.

[32] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p.

> positions challenge each other, clashing and sending shock waves through the play.[33]

As Greenblatt points out, there are fundamental questions in *Hamlet* that have baffled many generations of readers, audiences and critics. These questions about madness, revenge and murder arise from a systematic sense of contradiction that suffuses the play's narrative. Thus, there is a 'pervasive pattern' that guarantees that we are presented with 'radically incompatible accounts of almost everything that matters in *Hamlet*'. One might assume that the literary purpose of these incompatible accounts is to establish a backdrop of confusion that is in keeping with the climate of intrigue as well as the main protagonist's state of mind. However, when he argues that diegetic inconsistency in *Hamlet* is not gratuitous but 'a deliberate forcing together' of incompatible accounts, Greenblatt hints at something underlying pure literary effect. His sensation that there is more to the play than a mere 'multiplicity of answers' conjures up a an idea of authorial intention that is distinctly historicist. Thus, he argues that the pattern of contradiction that pervades the narrative of *Hamlet* points to a topical early modern reality that would be embedded in the ghost's ambivalence regarding its provenance: does it come from purgatory or from hell? As Greenblatt points out, this is one of the fundamental questions in *Hamlet* 'that may be powerfully and convincingly answered on both sides':

> In the ingenious attempt to determine whether the apparition is 'Catholic' or 'Protestant', whether it is a spirit of health or a goblin damned, whether it comes from Purgatory or from Hell—as if these were questions that could be decisively answered if only we were somehow clever enough—the many players in the long-standing critical game have usefully called attention to the bewildering array of hints that the play generates. Perhaps most striking is how much evidence on all sides there is in the play.[34]

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 240.

In spite of the ‘bewildering array of hints’ that invite the critic to take a stand and speak for the ghost’s confession, the question remains open. There is as much evidence to label the ghost as Catholic or Protestant, as coming from Purgatory or from Hell—as Hibbard notes in the Oxford edition of the play, this character is ‘a masterpiece of ambiguity.’[35] Although he alludes to the ghost’s apparent undecidability, Greenblatt nonetheless provides his own personal elucidation of *Hamlet*: a play where ‘a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament, is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost.’[36] The chiasmic relation between Hamlet and his father’s ghost is rooted in Shakespeare’s own family story, the new historicist critic argues. In April 1757, the owner of Shakespeare’s birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon decided to have the roof retiled. While at work, one of the builders found an old document underneath the tiling. The document, a ‘spiritual testament’ in fourteen articles, supposedly belonged to the playwright’s father John Shakespeare. Catholic in content, the testament makes explicit reference to purgatory. The signer also declares his firm intention to receive at his death the sacraments of confession, Mass, and extreme unction—for fear of an ‘accident’ or to be ‘surprised upon a sudden,’ the testament reads.[37] ‘There is a clear implication to be drawn from this document,’ Greenblatt believes: ‘the playwright was probably brought up in a Roman Catholic household in a time of official suspicion and persecution of recusancy.’ As far as the writing of *Hamlet* is concerned, the death of John Shakespeare meant that ‘in 1601 the Protestant playwright was haunted by the spirit of his Catholic father pleading for suffrages to relieve his soul from the pains of Purgatory.’[38] The culminating point of this narrative is

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[35] Hibbard, ‘General Introduction’, p. 38.

[36] Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, p. 240.

[37] James Gilmer McManaway, ‘John Shakespeare’s “Spiritual Testament”’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 18 (1967), 197-205.

the revelation that the Protestant young man from Wittenberg is none but Shakespeare and that the Catholic ghost is none but his father.

B. ‘Heavy Hints’—Or Why the Ghost (Supposedly) Comes from Purgatory

In his account of the play, Greenblatt argues that *Hamlet* contains ‘heavy hints that the Ghost is in or has come from Purgatory.’[39] Although it warns that it is ‘forbid / To tell the secrets of [its] prison-house,’ the ghost admits to being ‘Doomed for a certain term […], / Till the foul crimes done in [its] days of nature / Are burnt and purged away’ (1.4.10-14). Against an early modern backdrop of confessional struggles, the Ghost’s revelation that it needs to ‘purge’ its crimes is, in Greenblatt’s view, an unmistakable topical allusion. In the same speech, the Ghost laments the unholy conditions in which its death took place.

> Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand
> Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,
> Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
> Unhouseled, dis-appointed, unaneled,
> No reck’ning made, but sent to my account
> With all my imperfections on my head.
> O horrible, O horrible, most horrible!
>
> (1.5.74-80)

In his report to Hamlet, the ghost deplores the fact that it was summarily ‘dispatched’ in the absence of proper religious rituals: ‘unhouseled, dis-appointed, unaneled’—namely ‘without the sacrament of the Eucharist, without death-bed confession and absolution, and without the ritual anointing of extreme unction.’[40] The Ghost is explicit about its sentiment of having met its death in a state of ‘sin’, ‘with all [its] imperfections on [its] head’ and ‘no reck’ning made’: it was sent to the Last Judgement without having atoned

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

for its sins. From a traditional Catholic perspective, this is indeed 'most horrible', Greenblatt observes:

> Old Hamlet's condition is a grievous one—the term of his sufferings or their intensity vastly increased—because of the way he was dispatched, unprepared for death. […] That he can speak of 'imperfections' presumably means that his sins were not mortal; after all, he will eventually burn and purge away his crimes. But his inability to make a proper reckoning and his failure to receive the Catholic last rites weigh heavily against him.[41]

The seemingly 'grievous' post-mortem condition of Old Hamlet is rehearsed by his princely son later on in the play. In Act III, Hamlet stages a play that confounds Claudius and exposes him as a usurper. Halfway through the performance, the king 'rises' and storms out of the theatre as Polonius orders to 'Give o'er the play' (3.2.243-46). Walking in on Claudius at prayer in the next scene, Hamlet delivers an incredibly dense speech that rehearses the ghost's preoccupations in Act I of the play:

> Now might I do it pat, now a is praying,
> And now I'll do't,
> [*He draws his sword*]
> and so a goes to heaven,
> And so am I revenged. That would be scanned.
> A villain kills my father, and for that
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.
> O, this is hire and salary, not revenge!
> A took my father grossly, full of bread,
> With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
> And how his audit stands, who knows save heaven?
> But in our circumstance and course of thought
> 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged
> To take him in the purging of his soul,
> When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
> No.
> [*He sheathes his sword*]
> Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hint.
> When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
> Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,
> At gaming, swearing or about some act
> That has no relish of salvation in't,
> Then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven,
> And that his soul may be as damned and black

> As hell whereto it goes. My mother stays.
> This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.
>
> (3.3.73-96)

Echoing the Ghost, Hamlet here voices his own concerns about the 'audit' or spiritual account of his father, whose untimely death at the hands of Claudius left him in a state of sin: 'A took my father grossly, full of bread, / With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May.' In the context of a theological meditation on the state of the soul, the expression 'full of bread' is intriguing and rather incongruous. But, as Malone pointed out, 'fullness of bread' is listed as a state of sin in Ezekiel 16:49: 'Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness.'[42] By contrast, Claudius is 'fit and seasoned for his passage' as Hamlet is about to kill him. This sudden realisation causes the prince to change his mind: unwilling to 'take' the 'villain' 'in the purging of his soul', he '*sheathes his sword*'. Here again, Greenblatt argues that 'the word "purging" is striking, since it links prayer in this world (and the preparation or seasoning of soul for the "passage" to the other world) to the purgation that may or may not follow.'[43] Although Claudius has already sinned beyond help, killing 'this same villain' at prayer would 'send [him] to heaven', Hamlet believes. Thus, the prince would rather wait until Claudius is 'about some act / That has no relish of salvation in't'; this will ensure that when the usurper dies 'his soul may be as damned and black / As hell whereto it goes'.

If the Ghost is 'doomed' only 'for a certain term' to endure the pains of purgatory, Hamlet wants his uncle's pains to be endless: in other words, Claudius must go to hell. Comparing traditional theological perceptions of hell and purgatory, Greenblatt remarks:

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[42] Edmund Malone, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, volume 9 (London: Baldwin, 1790), p. 327n.

> In church teachings, the excruciating pains of Purgatory and of Hell were […] identical; the only difference was that the former were only for a certain term. That one difference, of course, was crucial, but the Catholic Church laid a heavy emphasis upon the horrors of purgatorial torments, so that the faithful would be as anxious as possible to reduce the term they would have to endure.[44]

In order to illustrate this idea, Greenblatt refers to the fifteenth-century morality play *Everyman*, which provides a vivid example of a 'last-minute attempt to alter the "reckoning" by substituting penitential pain in this life for the far more terrible pain that lies ahead.'[45] The medieval play dramatises the last moments of the life of Everyman: requiring 'a sure reckoning / Without delay or any tarrying,' God sends Death to summon the hero to give account of his life.[46] Taken by surprise, with all his imperfections on his head, Everyman only has a very brief respite to alter the 'reckoning'. In order to do so, he begs God for forgiveness, repents his sins and starts scourging himself frantically: 'Now of penance I will wade the water clear / To save me from purgatory, that sharp fire' (618-19). With Good Deeds at his side, Everyman climbs into his grave, dies and eventually ascends to heaven. 'Everyman has thus narrowly escaped one of the worst medieval nightmares, a sudden death,' Greenblatt concludes—and 'this nightmare, of course, is the fate that befalls Hamlet's father.'[47]

C. The Medieval Emphasis on the State of the Soul at The Moment of Death

Greenblatt's interest lies in *Hamlet*'s early modern topicality and more specifically in the extent to which the play can be said to mirror the confessional situation of Shakespeare's family. Echoing John Shakespeare's testament, the Ghost's complaint is

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[44] *Ibid.*, p. 230-31.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 231.

[46] David Bevington (editor), 'Everyman', in *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), ll. 70-71.

supposed to voice a very peculiar kind of anxiety that would have developed at the end of the sixteenth century. Greenblatt talks about a 'fifty-year effect,' which describes

> a time in the wake of the great, charismatic ideological struggle in which the revolutionary generation that made the decisive break with the past is all dying out and the survivors hear only hypocrisy in the sermons and look back with longing at the world they have lost.[48]

Perhaps Shakespeare's father was one of those 'survivors' who looked back at the old pre-reformed world with nostalgia, Greenblatt implies. And 'perhaps, too, Shakespeare's sensitivity to the status of the dead was intensified by the death in 1596 of his son Hamnet […] and still more perhaps by the death of his father, John, in 1601.'[49] As these passages from *Hamlet in Purgatory* illustrate, Greenblatt has his eyes riveted on Shakespeare's historical moment, which provides the epistemological framework for his criticism. In this sense, it is rather striking that all the examples he uses to establish a theological connection between *Hamlet* and Shakespeare's life are from medieval sources and not early modern. His emphasis on the relevance of the state of the soul at the moment of death, in particular, is indebted to medieval theologians like William of Auvergne, a thirteenth-century regent and master of theology from Paris. In his writings, Auvergne justifies the need for purgatory on the grounds that 'those who die suddenly or without warning, for example, "by the sword, suffocation or excess of suffering", those whom death takes unaware before they have had time to complete their penance, must have a place where they do so.'[50] Greenblatt's justification of the theological positions of Hamlet and the Ghost is based on this type of medieval account, which also serves to justify the same beliefs attributed to Shakespeare and his father (since, apparently, Hamlet is William Shakespeare and the Ghost is John Shakespeare).

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, translated from the French by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago:

In that sense, Greenblatt reads the topicality of *Hamlet* with regard to what he sees as an important issue in Shakespeare's time: the state of the soul at the moment of death. Viewed in parallel, both *Hamlet* and (what is supposed to be) John Shakespeare's testament bring the new historicist critic to the conclusion that Shakespeare and his father cared a lot about this question. In addition, the recurrence of this idea in medieval theological tracts leads Greenblatt to posit its relevance in Shakespeare's time. But although the concern with the state of the soul at the moment of death was certainly relevant until the late Middle Ages, it was no longer topical in the sixteenth century, historians have pointed out. In his landmark historical survey, *The Hour of Our Death*, the French medievalist Philippe Ariès examines Western attitudes to death and how they evolved over the last thousand years. Ariès remarks that the preoccupation with the dying man's spiritual account was the result of a propaganda-led set of ideas that emerged during the late Middle Ages and soon died down:

> Moralists, the religious, and mendicant friars exploited the new anxiety for purposes of conversion. A literature of edification, distributed by means of the new printing techniques, enlarged on the pain and delirium of the death agony, presenting the moment of death as a struggle of spiritual powers in which the individual was in a position to gain or lose everything.[51]

However, this extreme approach to dying was short-lived and, by the early sixteenth century, the idea that 'everything is spread out over the whole span of a lifetime and affects every day of that life' was firmly established in England and most continental countries.[52] This new discourse, Ariès convincingly demonstrates, was fostered by influential humanist thinkers like Desiderius Erasmus. More significantly perhaps, the recognition of the relevance of the whole span of a lifetime to salvation was the result of a joint effort by Catholic and Protestant theologians. 'On this point, there is unanimity

[51] Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, translated from the French by Helen Weaver (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 298.

among the Christian elite,' Ariès explains: 'the French Protestant and the Anglican theologian speak like the Roman cardinal.' Thus, from the early sixteenth-century,

> there is a conviction, even among traditionalist and conservative Catholics, for whom the testimony of the medieval monks is still valid, that barring the intervention—which can never be ruled out in advance—of an exceptional act of grace, it is not the moment of death that will give the individual's past life its true worth or determine his fate in the other world. By then it will be too late, or in any case the risk is not worth running. The illumination of the last moment is not going to save from damnation a life completely given over to evil. One cannot count on it.[53]

Voicing a predominant view at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the humanist theologian Jean de Vauzelles observed that 'it is neither reasonable nor just that we should commit so many sins all our lives and then allow only a day or an hour to repent of them.'[54] Thus, humanist and Christian teachers were univocal in their criticism of the previous age's obsession with the disposition of the soul at the moment of death and emphasised the relevance of an individual's entire life to their salvation. From this moment onwards, Ariès points out, 'the reformist elite of the Catholic and Protestant churches, following the example of the humanists, continued to mistrust last-minute repentances extracted by the fear of the dying.'[55]

This historical reality has far-reaching implications with regard to theological readings of *Hamlet* as it severely weakens claims that the play rehearses topical religious concerns. Indeed, and as Hugh Grady notes in *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*, 'Hamlet's and the Ghost's preoccupation with the state of the soul at the moment of death was medieval and anachronistic'; such a recognition inevitably throws a shadow over the notion that Hamlet's family story is directly relevant to

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[53] *Ibid.*, p. 301.

[54] Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Holbein: Pictures of Death and the Reformation at Lyons', *Studies on the Renaissance* 3 (1956), 97-130, p. 115.

Shakespeare's own family story.[56] In this sense, *Hamlet*'s remarkable distantiation from the religious politics of its early modern moment of production brands a huge question mark on Greenblatt's theological interpretation and on historicist 'elucidations' of the play in general. Although it has been consistently referred to as a 'new' kind of historicism, there is nothing new about what Greenblatt does in *Hamlet in Purgatory*. The reading of Hamlet as an encrypted reflection of a topical early modern figure has become a landmark of the criticism of *Hamlet* since the early twentieth century. Critics before Greenblatt tended to focus on the prince's political dimension (rather than theological), often associating it with powerful noblemen like the Earl of Essex. Thus, for John Dover Wilson, Hamlet is nothing but 'a really detailed reflection of the inner Essex'; for 'the more one studies the character of the ill-starred Essex, the more remarkable Shakespeare's portraiture becomes. Everything is there.'[57] Acknowledging similarities with Essex, the Welsh critic Lilian Winstanley makes a case for Hamlet as a replication of King James. At the beginning of *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession* (1921), she announces that her purpose is to 'study the play of *Hamlet* from a somewhat fresh point of view by endeavouring to show its relation or possible relation to contemporary history.'[58] Ironically, what could still be viewed as a 'fresh point of view' in the early twentieth century has now become a complete commonplace.

[56] Hugh Grady, '*Hamlet* as Mourning-play: The Aesthetics of the *Trauerspiel*', *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 174.

[57] John Dover Wilson, *The Essential Shakespeare: A Biographical Adventure* [1932] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 104n.

[58] Lilian Winstanley, *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession: Being an Examination of the Relations of the Play of Hamlet to the Scottish Succession and the Essex Conspiracy* [reprint] (Cambridge: Cambridge

III- 'A LIMITLESS ACCUMULATION OF THE IMPERFECT': IN SEARCH OF *HAMLET*'S OBJECTIVE TRUTH CONTENT

A. HISTORICISING HAMLET *IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: LILIAN WINSTANLEY AND CARL SCHMITT*

Whether it is pre-Christian or contemporary Denmark, Elizabethan England or Renaissance Italy, the question of the 'actual' setting of *Hamlet* has always elicited much debate (see discussion above). For Winstanley, however, it is clear: the historical source of inspiration for Shakespeare's play is obviously sixteenth-century Scotland.

> An Elizabethan audience would almost certainly have thought Denmark a real country, and they would have believed it to be contemporary Scotland. The peculiar combination of circumstances and the peculiar type of manners depicted in Shakespeare's Denmark are, in the highest degree, distinctive and strange; but they can every one be paralleled in the case of sixteenth-century Scotland.[59]

Thus, if 'Shakespeare's Denmark is a place where the king has been murdered and his wife has married the murderer,' Winstanley insists that 'this also happened in sixteenth-century Scotland.'[60] She is here referring to a topical event that directly touches on the personal story of King James: the murder of his father. The official story is generally recounted as follows. In 1565, Mary Stuart married her distant cousin Lord Darnley (Henry Stewart) and gave birth to James the next year. Soon taking up with the sinister Earl of Bothwell, Mary conspired with him to murder Darnley. In 1567, Darnley's body was found strangled and lying next to a naked attendant. Although Bothwell's guilt has hardly ever been questioned, Mary's part in the murder remains unclear. Three months after Darnley's death, the infernal couple married. Within a year of the assassination, James' paternal grandparents, the Countess and Earl of Lennox, had laid the duty of revenge squarely on the young king. In 1567-68, they commissioned a painting, to be realised by the Dutchman Livinius de Vogelaare: known as *The Darnley Memorial*, the

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[59] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

picture offers a thorough visual record of the whole scandalous story.[61] At the background of the painting, a wall plaque directly addresses the incumbent 'King of Scots,' pleading that 'he shut not out of his memory the recent atrocious murder of the King his father, until God should avenge it through him.'[62]

Winstanley was probably one of the first contemporary critics to establish an explicit link between Shakespeare's characterisation of Hamlet and King James' personal story. Drawing on John Hill Burton's *History of Scotland* (1867-70), she identifies troubling parallels between Darnley's murder and that of Hamlet's father:

> Darnley was seized with a sudden and acute illness which broke out cutaneously. Poison was at first naturally suspected. The disease was speedily pronounced to be small-pox; but it was conjectured that it may have been one of those forms of contamination which had then begun to make their silent and mysterious visitation in this country, while the immediate cause by which they were communicated was yet unknown. From what occurred afterwards, it became a current belief that he had been poisoned.

According to the nineteenth-century Scottish historian, another attempt was made at killing Darnley, with gunpowder this time—although it does not appear that he died as a result of the explosion:

> It seems that the intended victim with his page […] attempted to escape and even got over a wall into a garden when they were seized and strangled. They were found without any marks from the explosion but with marks of other violence.[63]

Commenting on Burton Hill's historical account, Winstanley concludes:

> Now here we surely have remarkable correspondences with the Shakespearian murder: we have the body of the victim covered with a 'loathsome tetter' which is ascribed to the malign influence of poison; we have the secret character of the murder itself, and we have the body of the victim found in an 'orchard'.[64]

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[61] Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance 'Hamlet': Issues and Responses in 1600* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 29-37.

[62] Duncan Thomson, *Painting in Scotland 1570-1650* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), p. 18. For a thorough account of Mary Stuart's life, see Antonia Fraser's encyclopaedic biography, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Phoenix, 2009).

[63] John Burton Hill, *The History of Scotland from Agricola's Invasion to the Extinction of the Last Jacobite Insurrection*, quoted in Winstanley, *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*, pp. 51-52.

A scathing exposure of Mary's relation to Darnley and the circumstances leading up to his death, George Buchanan's *Detection* (1571) also features in Winstanley's study of the plot of *Hamlet* seen through the lens of Stuart intrigue. In his examination of Darnley's later life, Buchanan explicitly refers to 'certain black pimples' that 'broke out all over his whole body with so great ache and such pain throughout his limbs, that he lingered out his life with very small hope of escape.'[65] 'It is certainly known that he was poisoned,' Buchanan writes somewhere else; for 'the kind of Disease, strange, unknown to the People, unacquainted with Physicians […] disclosed it'—'black Pimples breaking out all over his body, grievous aches in all his limbs and intolerable stink' were also recognised as 'the Cause of his Deformity.'[66] Winstanley points out that Buchanan's factual description of Darnley's disease

> agree[s] closely with the murder of Hamlet's father, and, what is especially significant, not *one* of these details is to be found in either of the prose versions [i.e. Grammaticus and Belleforest]. In the so-called literary source, the murder is *not* secret, the victim is *not* alone, poison is *not* used, deformity is *not* caused.[67]

In its description, in Shakespeare's play, of Old Hamlet's violent death, the ghost explains that, as the poison entered the king's blood, 'a most instant tetter barked about' 'All [his] smooth body,' 'Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust' (1.5.71-3). Winstanley finds many other parallels between *Hamlet* and Scottish history, which she develops at great length in her book.

In his foreword to the German edition of Winstanley's book (1952), the Nazi German jurist Carl Schmitt makes a rather radical assertion:

> Following the astounding findings outlined in the book by Lilian Winstanley, there is no longer any question that in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* there reappear, down to the finest detail, the concrete situations, events, and people of the

[65] George Buchanan, *Detection*, quoted in Winstanley, *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*, p. 52.

[66] George Buchanan, *Oration* (1572), quoted in Winstanley, *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*, pp. 52-3.

> historical moment contemporary with the life of James I and his mother Mary Stuart.[68]

In total agreement with Winstanley, Schmitt claims that 'the great dramatic work of art that bears the name *Hamlet* is, in the core of its action and the main character, nothing other than the dramatized story of a real king named James, James Stuart, son of Mary Stuart and her husband.'[69] Winstanley's research paved the way for Schmitt's own study of the play, *Hamlet or Hecuba: The Intrusion of the Time into the Play*, first published in 1956. Following in the footsteps of Winstanley, Schmitt argues that *Hamlet* does not merely mirror contemporary events: rather, 'the involvement of Mary Stuart in the murder of James' father and the transformation of the figure of the avenger in view of King James' constitute what he calls 'genuine *intrusions*' of history into the play.[70] For Schmitt, *Hamlet*'s ambiguous presentation of the Queen's involvement in the murder of Hamlet's father represses a powerful historical taboo—an ambiguity that is as deliberate as it is firmly rooted in early-seventeenth-century Stuart politics:

> Out of consideration for James, the son of Mary Stuart, the expected successor to the throne, it was impossible to insinuate the *guilt* of the mother in the murder of the father. On the other hand, the audience for *Hamlet*, as well as all of Protestant England and particularly of course London, was convinced of Mary Stuart's guilt. Out of consideration for this English audience, it was absolutely impossible to insinuate the *innocence* of the mother.[71]

In order to back his theory, Schmitt elaborates a dubious chronology based on the three official texts of *Hamlet*. In the first quarto text, the Queen explicitly denies having any knowledge of the non-accidental character of Hamlet's father's death: 'as I have a soul, I swear by heaven / I never knew of this most horrid murder,' she protests against her

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[68] Carl Schmitt, 'Foreword to the German Edition of Lilian Winstanley's *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*', *Telos* 153 (2010), 'Special Issue on Carl Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba*', 164-77, pp. 164-65.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

[70] Carl Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba: The Intrusion of the Time into the Play*, translated from the German by David Pan and Jennifer Rust (New York: Telos, 2009), p. 25.

son's accusations (11.85-86).[72] Schmitt is eager to point out that these lines do not appear in the second quarto, which is much more ambiguous with regard to the Queen's involvement in the killing of the king. Thus, 'the taboo of the queen is a powerful intrusion [*Einbruch*] of historical reality into Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.'[73]

B. When Historicism Turns to Myth-Making: The Cases of Hamlet or Hecuba *and* Hamlet in Purgatory

In *Hamlet or Hecuba*, Schmitt relies on the double postulate that the first quarto was written before the second quarto and that it was indeed authored by Shakespeare. While these assumptions remain unexamined by the German lawyer, they have been consistently undermined in Shakespeare scholarship—'the majority of twentieth-century scholars have argued that, despite its being printed after Q1, Q2 records a text which pre-dates the text of Q1,' the Arden editors of *Hamlet* point out.[74] Schmitt's questionable chronology reveals the limits of his historical narrative, which is based on the unfounded idea that the playwright deliberately altered the text of 'his' play (from Q1 to Q2) in order to make it more topical. In *Hamlet or Hecuba*, the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603 figures as a key historical event. If the first 'genuine intrusion' concerns 'the taboo of a queen', the second one is explored in view of 'the figure of the avenger'—and specifically 'the distortion of the avenger that leads to the Hamletization of the hero.'[75] In Schmitt's bombastic rhetoric, the 'distortion of the avenger' and the 'Hamletization of the hero' refer to the intrusion of a

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[72] Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (editors), 'The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark: The First Quarto (1603)', *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623* (London: Thomson Learning, 2006). All further references to the first quarto are to this edition and are cited in the text.

[73] Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba*, p. 19.

[74] Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, 'Introduction', *Hamlet*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), p. 81.

'real' historical figure into the aesthetic framework of *Hamlet*—that of King James. Thus, for the Nazi critic, 'aesthetics and politics are not merely linked but become two aspects of a single process of representation,' David Pan notes in his afterword to the recently published English edition of *Hamlet or Hecuba* (2009).[76] In light of this process, Hamlet does not merely mirror King James: he *is* King James. Drawing on various examples from the play (often the same ones used by Winstanley), Schmitt maintains that 'James-Hamlet remains the key figure' in *Hamlet*.[77] In Q1, Laertes begs Claudius to let him go back to France, 'Now that the funeral rites are all performed' (2.16). His reasons are significantly different in Q2, where he explicitly states: 'I came to Denmark / To show my duty in your coronation' (1.2.51-2). For Schmitt, this line is a 'genuine' reference to James' own coronation; as such, it illustrates the notion that 'an objective reality penetrates into the play from the outside.'[78] In his *über*-historical reading of the play, the infamous German lawyer seeks to distantiate himself from 'Shakespeare's seemingly anti-historical arbitrariness,' which he denounces as a typical fault of Romantic criticism.[79] Schmitt's rash historicisation of Shakespeare is problematic on many levels, and especially in view of his significant role in framing the ethnic politics of Adolf Hitler's regime, critics have suggested recently.[80] Richard Wilson, for instance, notes that 'Schmitt's *Hamlet* is the work of a literary poseur who liked to refer his life to the classics' and who 'use[d] Shakespeare to allegorize his own

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[76] David Pan, 'Afterword: Historical Event and Mythic Meaning in Carl Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba*', *Hamlet or Hecuba*, p. 118.

[77] Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba*, p. 25.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[80] Schmitt had a hand in the drafting of Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution. First formulated in 1922,

outlaw condition after World War II.'[81] This idea was originally developed by Victoria Kahn, who addresses Schmitt's historicisation of *Hamlet* as a way for the outcast jurist to rewrite his own past: thus, the Nazi lawyer 'uses the aesthetic power of Shakespeare to allegorize his own situation in World War II as genuinely—classically—tragic,' Kahn proposes.[82] From this perspective, the aestheticisation of *Hamlet* through Stuart politics appears as a stratagem for Schmitt to present his involvement with the Nazis in a more favourable light.

> Schmitt's interpretation of *Hamlet* is a kind of apologia *pro vita sua*, one in which the most modern of early modern tragedies serves as an allegory for Schmitt's own 'tragic' decisions. […] If Hamlet's indecisiveness can be recast as *Hamlet*'s decisiveness […], then perhaps, Schmitt may imply, his own modern tragedy can be read as heroic rather than romantic.[83]

Throughout his essay, Schmitt appears desperate to establish straightforward parallels between *Hamlet* and early modern politics; in applying his decisionistic theories to the play, he challenges the established view of Hamlet as the epitome of indecision. From the lawyer's own historical moment, *Hamlet or Hecuba* may be taken as an extended autobiographical note through which Schmitt's unrepentant involvement with the Nazis attains the tragic status of a classical myth.

Although the following parallel might come across to some as incongruous or even inappropriate, it must be emphasised that the historicist methodology used by Greenblatt in *Hamlet in Purgatory* bears unmistakable similarities to that of Schmitt in *Hamlet or Hecuba*. It should go without saying that pointing out similarities between the two critics does not mean accusing Greenblatt of being a Nazi (this would be nonsensical, considering Greenblatt's Jewish cultural background)—and even less does it mean overlooking Schmitt's obnoxious political affiliations. The most obvious

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[81] Richard Wilson, 'Like the Osprey to the Fish: Shakespeare and the Force of Law', *Law and Art: Justice, Ethics and Aesthetics*, edited by Oren Ben-Dor (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 97 and 99.

[82] Victoria Kahn, 'Hamlet or Hecuba: Carl Schmitt's Decision', *Representations* 83 (2003), 67-96, p. 89.

analogy lies in the way both critics more or less consciously superimpose their own troubled past on their reading of *Hamlet*. In his prologue to *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Greenblatt admits that his study of the play is rooted in his personal family story and, to a certain extent, constitutes an attempt to come to terms with his father's death and Jewish legacy. Schmitt, on the other hand, seems to repress any direct connection with his Nazi involvement—although the connection has been repeatedly suggested by Shakespeare and Schmitt scholars. There is no arguing that the intention that drives Greenblatt's criticism is more honourable (some might say 'ethical') than Schmitt's. One could hardly think of more opposed critical personalities, in fact: Greenblatt's measured, lucid and often inspired literary sensitivity is only matched by the decadence and rashness of Schmitt's obtuse rhetoric. By way of example, the latter's infamous trivialisation of poison gas in one of his political tracts bears witness to an abysmal moral rift between the two critics that few people would sensibly dare to put into question.[84] In light of these significant moral considerations, recognising that there is a shared methodological kernel in both *Hamlet or Hecuba* and *Hamlet in Purgatory* might be seen as courting controversy. But it may also be helpful if we are to start reflecting on our own critical moment, which is the direct result of widely influential historicist readings of major literary texts—*Hamlet in Purgatory* being one of them. Acknowledging what Greenblatt's and Schmitt's methodologies have in common can help us comprehend how historicism has become established as a critical practice *par défaut* in the academic field of early modern literary studies, and more specifically that of Shakespeare studies. Moreover, examining those relatively recent acts of criticism

[84] In *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923), Schmitt notes: 'Economic rationalism is so far removed from Catholic rationalism that it can arouse a specific Catholic anxiety. Modern technology easily becomes the servant of this or that want and need. In modern economy, a completely irrational consumption conforms to a totally rationalized production. A marvellously rational mechanism serves one or another demand, always with the same earnestness and precision, be it for a silk blouse or poison gas or anything whatsoever' (translated from the German and annotated by Gary Ulmen (Westport:

can give us a clearer idea of their impact on how meaning is produced through literary texts in our own moment. This, in turn, can help us recognise the implicit and specific ways in which 'we' are encouraged to approach literary texts and, more generally, works of art. Although this 'we' most obviously concerns the sphere of academia, it also applies to non-students, non-academics as well as non-specialists, as will become obvious shortly.

In their introduction to *Hamlet or Hecuba*, Jennifer Rust and Julia Lupton emphasise the extent to which Schmitt's 'staging of the relationship between literature and history anticipates later developments in literary criticism,' and specifically 'the new historicism.'[85] Each in their own way, *Hamlet or Hecuba* and *Hamlet in Purgatory* rely on a process of myth-making in order to establish a coherent narrative linking *Hamlet* and the historical context in which it was produced. While Schmitt rewrites Hamlet into a decisionist avenger to suit his view of early modern history (and possibly his view of himself as a tragic hero), Greenblatt's leniency towards some important historical facts crucially underwrites his thesis that Shakespeare and his family were Catholic. In its silent appropriation of a work of art in order to justify extreme political positions, Schmitt's decisionistic foreclosure of *Hamlet* presents obvious dangers. On the other hand, Greenblatt's account of the play may appear as a role model of literary criticism. Equally didactic and entertaining, scholarly and popular, historical and literary, *Hamlet in Purgatory* ticks all the boxes—in this sense, its popularity is certainly no accident. However, the overarching status of Greenblatt's study should not make us blind to its shortcomings. Considering how influential it has been over the last decade or so, there is all the more reason to examine the wide claims it makes. One of the most disturbing aspects of *Hamlet in Purgatory* lies in its use of historical

[85] Jennifer Rust and Julia Reinhard Lupton, 'Introduction: Schmitt and Shakespeare', *Hamlet or Hecuba*,

approximation in order to consolidate the author's confessional narrative about Shakespeare and his family. The fact that a work of fiction (along with a dubious 'spiritual testament') figures as a central piece of evidence to determine the religious orientation of an early modern family is problematic. Like Schmitt, Greenblatt indulges in wild speculation about the play's historical object. For the German jurist, the play follows Stuart genealogy to the letter—on a basic level, Gertrude *is* Mary Stuart, Claudius *is* Bothwell and Hamlet *is* King James. For the American new historicist, it is Shakespeare's own family that is allegorised in the play—Hamlet *is* Shakespeare and the ghost *is* the spirit of John Shakespeare.

C. 'Dissonant Unity': Gathering the Fragmented Meanings of HAMLET *through Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory*

Read in parallel, *Hamlet or Hecuba* and *Hamlet in Purgatory* illustrate a general tendency of historicist criticism to foreclose *Hamlet* by assigning a specific, historically-bound, meaning to it. As the present chapter has documented, historicist critics have been particularly keen to impose an ultimate meaning on the character of Hamlet (which is not to say that non-historicist critics have not done the same). In the twentieth century alone, Hamlet has been variously identified as Essex (Dover Wilson, Winstanley), as King James (Winstanley, Schmitt) and as Shakespeare himself (Greenblatt). However, the nagging sensation that this most famous of literary characters 'will never be an integrated person' and that 'he remains a catalogue of qualities which have never been added up' has been around the critical field for a long time now.[86] As early as 1780, the novelist and essayist Henry Mackenzie wrote: 'Of all the characters of *Shakespeare* that of *Hamlet* has been generally thought the most

difficult to be reduced to any fixed or settled principle.'[87] The idea that the criticism is the ultimate repository of the meaning of *Hamlet* (which might or might not be the case) opens up at least two possibilities:

1- *Hamlet* has no comprehensible ultimate meaning.

2- The meaning of *Hamlet* lies in the sum of all the individual theories.

The first statement conjures up a typically postmodern impasse: all the theories about the play are self-cancelling and ultimately only emphasise the absence of an overarching truth that would transcend each individual account. Thus, Lionel Charles Knights notes that 'this play contains within itself widely different levels of experience and insight which, since they cannot be assimilated into a whole, create a total effect of ambiguity.'[88] It has also been suggested that '*Hamlet* is an astonishingly rich play […] but its richness is the result of its incoherence'; and as a result, 'the various points of view are never comprehended from one central synoptic point of view.'[89] These comments illustrate an idea that has been prevalent throughout the late twentieth century: that of *Hamlet* as the epitome of postmodernity. In its cumulation of 'widely different levels of experience and insight' that 'cannot be assimilated into a whole', the play becomes a locus of disconnectedness, an emblem of the poststructuralist notion that meaning is an effect of difference. Ultimately, such a constitutive disjunction pervading the hermeneutic field guarantees that *Hamlet* produces nothing but 'ambiguity' and 'incoherence'.

However, this type of conclusion has been challenged repeatedly, notably by German thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School of criticism. In *Aesthetic Theory*,

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[87] 'Henry Mackenzie, on the Character of Hamlet', *The Critical Heritage: William Shakespeare*, volume 5, edited by Brian Vickers (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), p. 273.

[88] Lionel Charles Knights, 'Prince Hamlet', *Explorations: Essays in Criticism* (1946), reprinted in *Discussions of Hamlet*, edited by Jacob Clavner Levenson (Boston: Heath, 1960), p. 82.

Theodor Adorno writes: 'no message is to be squeezed out of *Hamlet*; this in no way impinges on its truth content.'[90] Far from asserting a unique and timeless meaning, the 'truth content' of a work of art, for Adorno, corresponds to that which must be reinterpreted from generation to generation, in the light of the perpetual transformation of cultural and linguistic assumptions. In his essay '*Hamlet* and the Present', Hugh Grady develops this idea:

> We can never […] abstract a 'timeless' meaning of the text underneath the changing play of historical interpretations, but we can and must posit an objectivity of the text which, however, is not directly and unproblematically available to us, but which reveals itself negatively, in the text's resistance to certain interpretive schemas.[91]

In contrast with most historicist practices (old or new), this type of approach reaffirms the value of multiple interpretations. Thus, it is the text's 'resistance to certain interpretive schemas' that allows us to 'posit' its 'objectivity'. But, as Grady emphasises, the objectivity of the text is not directly available to us: rather, it 'reveals itself negatively'. Ultimately, the truth content emerges through the complex interplay of a multiplicity of critical positions in different time periods and cultures that both contradict and complement one another. From this perspective, looking at a wide array of critical interpretations of *Hamlet* can allow us to comprehend how it resists certain interpretive schemas—and there is a very real possibility that it resists *all* of them.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from this chapter, though, is that the play is particularly resilient to historical foreclosure: this can be inferred from the countless attempts at identifying Hamlet with a specific early modern figure. Piled up together, all the historical elucidations of *Hamlet* help us make out what we might call the text's hermeneutic 'field of resistance'—which might very well be total. However,

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[90] Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated from the German by Robert Hullot Kantor (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 169.

the aim is not to posit an umpteenth explanation of *Hamlet* presenting itself as definitive, as opposed to previous interpretations having 'missed the point'. Instead, we might want to recognise the extent to which the multiplicity of interpretations inherently participates in the aesthetic tableau of a work of art. This is especially relevant to *Hamlet*, in the light of the interpretive ocean which not only surrounds it but in fact constitutes its hermeneutic essence. The overwhelming predominance of interpretation—over, say, authorial intention—in the experiential field of the play guarantees that virtually anything is possible. This idea was theorised by Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928)—a study of a particular form of tragic drama from the seventeenth century, the *Trauerspiel* (which is often translated as 'tragic drama'). This landmark theoretical work defines the *Trauerspiel* with regard to a specific aesthetic technique referred to as 'allegory'. In Benjamin's sense, allegory has wider implications than the literary trope it is traditionally known as: in his own words, allegory constructs a form in which 'any person, any object, any relationship can mean anything else.'[92] This is strikingly relevant to the hermeneutic field of *Hamlet*, where anything can indeed mean anything else (as more than three centuries of more or less arbitrary interpretation clearly testify). In this sense, it does not really come as a surprise that *Hamlet* is acknowledged as the proto-*Trauerspiel* in *The Origin of Tragic Drama*—although Benjamin deliberately focuses on more obscure German plays for the purposes of his study.

However, Benjaminian allegory has more subtle implications that reach beyond sheer arbitrariness. In *The Arcades Project* (a later, unfinished project), Benjamin noted:

> Allegory has to do, precisely in its destructive furor, with dispelling the illusion that proceeds from all 'given order', whether of art or of life: the illusion of

> totality or of organic wholeness which transfigures that order and makes it seem endurable. And this is the progressive tendency of allegory.[93]

At odds with the Romantic idea of organic unity, allegory emphasises the absence of 'given order'; it implies that the aesthetic space of a work of art is filled up through the accumulation of a series of fragments. Fragmentation is the key notion to understanding how allegory works for Benjamin: in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, he observes that 'it is common practice in the literature of the baroque to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal.'[94] In the end, allegory involves both fragmentation and a resistance to totalisation. As Grady remarks in *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*:

> The term refers both to the overall non-organic unity created by this poetic trope as well as the individual units—the 'fragmented allegories'—which are 'amalgamated' into a dissonant unity. An emptied world creative of a profligacy of signification and a rejection of organic unity in favour of a (dis-)unity of accumulated fragments—these are the two negative principles which make up the most original and most enabling aspects of Benjamin's singular theory of the baroque allegory.[95]

Although allegory is characterised by fragmentation and chaos, it also allows a multiplicity of meanings, which become 'amalgamated into a dissonant unity'. Thus, allegory leaves room for 'layered, multiple meanings, meanings which overlay each other, are not identical with each other nor capable of being organically unified with each other, but which do not cancel each other out,' Grady and Cary DiPietro remark.[96] In their own way, the multiple meanings produced by the countless critical interpretations of *Hamlet* obey an allegorical logic: while never organically unified with one another, they are also incapable of cancelling one another out; this is particularly obvious in the attempts at identifying Hamlet with a single historical figure. The reason

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[93] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* edited by Rolf Tiedemann, translated from the German by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999), p. 331.

[94] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 178.

[95] Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*, p. 143.

that no one interpretation of *Hamlet* can prevail is that they are all imperfect—the semantic core which they invoke is irretrievable or perhaps even inexistent. Ultimately, this absence of a positive, directly identifiable truth content is precisely what comes to define the artwork's aesthetics. Taken together, all the interpretations of *Hamlet* acquire an aesthetic value through their very imperfection. In this sense, *Hamlet*'s meaning does not extend beyond an infinite series of imperfect re-presentations—critical, but also textual and theatrical. In spite of their mediating function (like the witches in *Macbeth*, they are 'imperfect speakers') those manifestations, seen as a whole, can be said to convey a perfection of their own (1.3.68). This paradox is alluded to by a character in Haruki Murakami's novel *Kafka on the Shore*. Listening to Franz Schubert's D major piano sonata while driving his car, Oshima recognises that 'a certain type of perfection can only be realised through a limitless accumulation of the imperfect.' As there is no perfect rendition of Schubert's D major, there is no perfect rendition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. But the 'imperfect performances', as Oshima calls them, do not need to be completed: together, they create a dissonant symphony, perfect in its own idiosyncratic way.

CONCLUSION

In one of her diary entries, Susan Sontag noted that 'Benjamin is neither a literary critic nor philosopher but an atheist theologian practicing his hermeneutical skills on culture.'[97] Benjamin's distinct critical stance, referred to by Sontag as that of an 'atheist theologian', works miracles on literature: through his theory of allegory, the fragmented meanings of *Hamlet* ultimately turn out to be meaningful fragments. Viewed together, those isolated fragments form a radically unhomogenisable whole that posits an

[97] Susan Sontag, *As Consciousness is Harnessed to Flesh: Diaries 1964-1980*, edited by David Rieff

aesthetics of division. As suggested throughout the chapter, this fragmentation should not be seen as a mere effect of the criticism. Not a secondary operation, the criticism of *Hamlet* rather seems to define the meaning of the play negatively. The possibility of an overarching, positively-invested meaning is forever deferred through the perpetual semantic reactualisation of *Hamlet* in the moving present of criticism. From a psychoanalytical point of view, '*Hamlet* lacks "organic unity" because it is never complete, because it shares the structures of interminable desiring,' Grady points out.[98] In his seminar on *Hamlet*, Jacques Lacan posits the endless deferral of desire as the intrinsic diegetic framework of the play. This structure is identified through the notion of the 'phallus', first developed by Sigmund Freud. The phallus, as it figures in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical discourses, should not be confused with an anatomical organ—as 'the image of the penis,' the phallus is 'negativity in its place in the specular image,' Lacan points out in his *Écrits*.[99] Thus, the phallus is a symbolic signifier that refers to that which cannot be held: it is 'the signifier of the desire of the Other.'[100] Lacan specifies that subjects are defined through their symbolic function of either *being* or *having* the phallus: 'one may, simply by reference to the function of the phallus, indicate the structures that will govern the relations between the sexes. Let us say that these relations will turn around a "to be" and a "to have".'[101] Men, he goes on to explain, are positioned as men insofar as they are seen to *have* the phallus; and women, not having the phallus, are seen to *be* the phallus—'it is the absence of the penis that turns [them] into the phallus, the object of desire.'[102] And 'it is not by being

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[98] Grady, '*Hamlet* and the Present', p. 159.

[99] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* [1966], translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 353. See in particular the section on 'The Signification of the Phallus' (based on a lecture delivered by Lacan in 1958), pp. 311-22.

[100] *Ibid.*, p. 321.

[101] *Ibid.*, p. 320.

foreclosed to the penis, but by having to be the phallus that the patient is doomed to become a woman.'[103]

In 'Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*', Lacan explores the function of the phallus in Shakespeare's play. At the beginning of the seminar, Ophelia ('that piece of bait') is identified as a desired object—'*The Object Ophelia*.'[104] Significantly, Lacan points out that the name Ophelia encrypts the word 'phallus': 'Ophelia is *O phallus*.'[105] But in his analysis of the play, and as Grady notes, 'Ophelia is only the first term in an extended series of objects of desire, expressing the concept of the phallus.' Thus, Lacan's seminar on *Hamlet*

> traces a chain of such desired objects throughout the play, defining a structure of continual deferment, as Hamlet attempts through a series of ineffectual activities (pretending madness, commissioning a drama, killing the wrong man) to find the missing phallus, the object of desire—which we know is in some sense 'really' embodied in Claudius.[106]

But if the phallus is 'really' embodied in Claudius, as Lacan suggests, it is precisely to the extent that Hamlet does not recognise it as such. Unacknowledged by the central protagonist (and this is the key), 'Claudius's real phallus is always somewhere in the picture,' Lacan observes. If 'the phallus to be struck at is real indeed,' this explains why 'Hamlet always stops' before striking the man who killed his father—as exemplified in the prayer scene, examined earlier in this chapter. Lacan concludes his seminar on *Hamlet* by pointing out that 'one cannot strike the phallus, because the phallus, even the real phallus, is a *ghost*.'[107] This comment reveals the most important feature of the phallus, namely the fact that it cannot be grasped (such ungraspability is precisely what

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[103] *Ibid.*, p. 229.

[104] Jacques Lacan, 'Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*' [1959], translated from the French by James Hulbert, *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977), 11-52, p. 11.

[105] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[106] Grady, '*Hamlet* and the Present', p. 158.

makes it the phallus). The concept of the phallus theorises the constitutive displacement that characterises the subjective dynamics of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan's famous (and equally misunderstood) axiom that 'desire is always the desire of the Other' implies that desire is the expression of a fundamental lack in the subject, which can only enjoy through a figure of 'the Other' (with a capital 'O').[108] The Other stands for the sense that there is no direct, unmediated relation between subjects and *jouissance*—often translated in English as 'enjoyment', for lack of a better term. The idea that enjoyment is by essence mediated, taken care of by a figure of the Other is explored in the next two chapters. As the thesis goes on to demonstrate, the systematic deferral of enjoyment on to another instance, and more importantly the dramatisation of this structure, constitutes the heart and soul of the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama. In the next chapter, the staging of the Other is presented as a major dramatic locus of *Henry V*.

[108] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller,

III

THE MEDIATION OF PRESENCE: MAPPING OUT THE BIG OTHER IN SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The last two chapters explored the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama through antagonistic subjective modes. By considering 'us' (*qua* undifferentiated perceiving mass) as the subjects of *Julius Caesar*, Chapter 2 deployed an essentialistic critical strategy that paved the way for an investigation of the theme of untimeliness within the psychic realm of the play. Chapter 3 suggested that this perceived psychological dimension cannot be located within the play 'in itself' for the reason that the very idea of a play 'in itself' remains ultimately an ungraspable fantasy. Through the example of *Hamlet*, the chapter implied that the subjectivity we invest in literary characters is an effect of interpretation in the perpetually moving present of criticism. In his seminar on the play (addressed at the end of the previous chapter), Jacques Lacan remarked that the meaning of *Hamlet* relies on a structure of endless deferral of desire. Lacan articulates this aesthetically significant non-presence through the notion of the 'phallus'. As pointed out earlier, the phallus is pure negativity in that it represents that which cannot be held—as such, it testifies to Lacan's key axiom that desire is always the desire of the Other.[1]

Closely related to the phallus, Lacan's notion of the 'big Other' provides the central theoretical framework for the next two chapters. First of all, the big Other should not be mistaken for a fixed, human-like entity; rather, it is the symbolic instance that regulates intersubjective relations and therefore constitutes the unwritten rules of every social order. Following the same logic as the phallus, the big Other remains by essence elusive, beyond language, thus testifying to the constitutive displacement that underlies subjectivity: the 'true Others' or 'true subjects,' as Lacan calls them, 'are on the other

[1] For a more thorough examination of the concept of the phallus as Lacan understands it, see the conclusion to the previous chapter, '"Imperfect Performances": Fragmented Meanings and Meaningful

side of the wall of language, there where in principle I never reach them.'[2] With a large focus on *Henry V*, Chapter 4 examines the intersubjective relation that binds the Chorus with the inscrutable audience it attempts to contact throughout the play. The chapter challenges the almost systematic identification in the criticism of the play, on the plane of subjectivity, with this audience. In order to emphasise the phantasmatic core that shapes the audience haunting the Chorus, the chapter treats the latter as the main subject of discourse in *Henry V*. Through a strategic use of linguistic markers of presence, the Chorus attempts to circumscribe its audience in space and time. However, this specific audience—along with the spatio-temporal location that is assigned to it—remains fundamentally unstable. At the same time, the chapter argues, this ghostly audience occupies a crucial position in the symbolic reality that the Chorus navigates: that of the big Other. Ultimately, such an insubstantial construct (precisely insofar as it stands for Lacan's 'true Others' or 'true subjects') appears as the key instance upholding the Chorus's fantasy of historical presence. This idea of a fantasy of historical presence underlying the Chorus's symbolic picture is developed and thoroughly examined in Chapter 4.

In contrast to the subjectivity adopted in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 returns to what might perhaps be viewed as a more traditional subjective mode by considering 'us' (what critics generally refer to as 'the audience') as the subjects of representation. It should be noted that the 'we' that is used in Chapter 5 differs from the all-encompassing 'we' that featured in the chapter on *Julius Caesar*. Instead, it is self-consciously determined by a specific historical bias—that of early twenty-first century technologically advanced societies. Following the chapter on *Henry V*, this shift in

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[2] Jacques Lacan, 'Introduction of the Big Other' (1955), *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955* [1978], edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated from the French by Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988),

subjectivity allows Lacan's big Other to be examined from a different angle. Such a shift, in itself, also illustrates the elusive quality of this instance, which cannot be confined to a single or definitive subjective context—in fact, and because of its ever-shifting nature, the concept of the big Other can only be comprehended through a systematic recasting of the subjective context of interpretation. The displacement of the subjective focus back onto 'us' demonstrates that, from our perspective as viewing subjects, the big Other is the instance that looks at 'us' precisely from the point we are looking at. This scrutinising instance reveals the ghostly presence of a gaze that circumscribes us within the space of representation. In Shakespeare's plays, such a shifting, 'subjectifying' gaze can be located in the Ghost in *Hamlet*, in the witches in *Macbeth* and in the Chorus in *Henry V*. Accordingly, Chapter 5 examines these three instances through the theoretical lens of the big Other.[3] The example of *Henry V* is particularly significant in this context as it shows that the Chorus can be viewed either as the subject of representation or as the big Other, depending on the subjective bias we choose to adopt.

In many ways, Chapter 5 is a response to the conflicting subjectivities explored in previous chapters. While Chapter 2 undermined exclusively historical approaches, Chapter 4 shows the intrinsic limitations of a 'strictly textual' literary criticism. The ultimate aim of this 'double refusal' is to suggest that the established gap between those two radical modes of experience is essentially a 'false alternative,' to use Slavoj Žižek's phrase. In *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997), Žižek writes about what he calls 'the false alternative between "naïve historicist realism" and "discursive idealism".' This artificial split, Žižek notes, is articulated around the notion of fetishism: 'for historicist realists, discursive idealism fetishizes the "prison-house of language", while for discursivists,

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[3] The concept of 'subjectification', coined by Michel Foucault, is addressed in Chapter 4, '"O my

every notion of pre-discursive reality is to be denounced as a "fetish".' Thus, at first glance, 'it may seem that this split simply indicates the opposition between materialism […] and idealism'; but 'on closer inspection, however, these two opposed poles reveal a profound hidden solidarity, a shared conceptual matrix or framework.' What underlies this shared conceptual matrix is the notion of fetishism, invoked by proponents of radical discursivism and radical historicism alike in order to antagonise one another. Eventually, Žižek wonders: 'how are we to conceive of some "immediacy" which would not act as a "reified" fetishistic screen, obfuscating the process which generates it?' Firstly, we have to recognise that 'our access to [what we refer to as] "reality" is always-already "mediated" by the symbolic process'—this recognition lies at the heart of Chapter 5. Secondly, Žižek observes that 'it is crucial to bear in mind the distinction between reality and the Real.' Lacanian psychoanalysis is articulated around three psychic structures: the orders of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The Real is to be understood in direct opposition to what we experience as 'real' (and is in fact invariably mediated)—what we call 'reality' in everyday life corresponds to the Symbolic order. The Real is *impossible* because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the Symbolic order. In this sense, the only way of experiencing the Real is through traumatic gaps in the Symbolic order. Thus, Žižek remarks:

> The Real as 'impossible' is precisely the excess of 'immediacy' which cannot be 'reified' in a fetish, the unfathomable X which, although nowhere present, curves/distorts any space of symbolic representation and condemns it to ultimate failure. If we are to discern the contours of this Real, we cannot avoid the meanderings of the notion of fetishism.[4]

Chapter 5 engages substantially with Žižek's theories, which build on Lacan's insights by connecting them with specific instances of contemporary popular culture. Žižek repeatedly emphasises the key function of the big Other in the process of

enjoyment: what the big Other stands for, in the context of staged entertainment, is the inherently mediated quality of enjoyment. From a theoretical perspective, the chapter investigates the notion that enjoyment is not an intrinsic feature of the subject, that it does not take place on its own. Rather, and as Žižek notes, it is taken charge of by an exterior instance—the big Other is 'the agency that decides instead of us, in our place.'[5] In recent theoretical debates, the core of deferral that underlies the process of enjoyment has been addressed through the notion of 'interpassivity'. Interpassivity specifically deals with how the subject's own self or emotions can be transferred onto another instance. *Henry V* provides a powerful example of interpassivity: through repeated injunctions, the Chorus literally enjoys the play for us—in other words, our own emotions are projected onto the Chorus. In this final chapter, Shakespearean drama figures as a crucial example of interpassivity. *Henry V*, in particular, illustrates the extent to which mass entertainment (which obviously includes theatre) is always and inherently mediated. In this sense, the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama can help us identify and reflect on the politics of extreme mediation that underlies the contemporary entertainment industry. And, conversely, examples drawn from our own present can illustrate the notion of untimely aesthetics, which the thesis has identified as a central feature of Shakespeare's works.

[5] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge

CHAPTER 4 – 'O MY DEMOCRATIC FRIENDS': *HENRY V* AND THE PERFORMANCE OF PRESENCE

> '"I embrace ALL," says Whitman. "I weave all things into myself."'
>
> […]
>
> 'Who is he that demands petty definition? Let him behold me *sitting in a kayak*.'
>
> 'I behold no such thing. I behold a rather fat old man full of a rather senile, self-conscious sensuosity.'
>
> 'DEMOCRACY. EN MASSE. ONE IDENTITY.'
>
> – David Herbert Lawrence, 'Whitman, the American Teacher'[1]

> 'O my democratic friends…'
>
> – Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*[2]

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 addressed the quaint idea that, underlying literary texts, there is a universal demand that we willingly suspend our disbelief so that the world of fiction can become 'real'. As pointed out already, this idea is often acknowledged in Shakespeare's plays themselves—for the magic to operate, 'It is required / You do awake your faith,' Paulina warns her audiences at the end of *The Winter's Tale* (5.3.94-95). For the purposes of the analysis, the chapter deliberately adopted what might be considered a naïve approach by treating the characters of *Julius Caesar* as 'real' human beings (as opposed to the fictional constructs literary characters are generally understood to be in most contemporary criticism). This self-imposed critical bias elicited a recognition that the psychic world of the play is haunted by a core of untimeliness, the main effect of which is to negate presence.

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[1] David Herbert Lawrence, 'Whitman, the American Teacher', *The Americanness of Walt Whitman* (Lexington MA: Daniel Collamore Heath and Company, 1960), p. 91.

[2] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* [1994], translated from the French by George Collins

In *Henry V*, the Chorus asks potential viewers of the play to 'piece out our imperfections with [their] thoughts' (Prologue.23). This is another striking instance, in Shakespearean drama, of a character requiring a hypothetical audience to bridge the gap, through intellectual effort, between (so-called) fiction and (so-called) reality. The critical method adopted in the present chapter contrasts sharply with the one used in the chapter on *Julius Caesar*. The analysis of *Henry V* that is here deployed is characterised by what might be referred to as a 'radical' shift in subjectivity—although such a shift can only be said to be radical in view of the early modern historical bias that saturates the play's interpretive field. Generally relying on a fixed subjective grid, historicist criticism typically identifies with the experimental audience posited by the Chorus. In his widely influential essay on *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, 'Invisible Bullets', Stephen Greenblatt writes:

> Again and again […] we are tantalised by the possibility of an escape from theatricality and hence from the constant pressure of improvisational power, but we are, after all, in the theatre, and our pleasure depends upon the fact that there is no escape, and our applause ratifies the triumph of our confinement.[3]

By identifying with a specific audience ('we') that is presented as confined 'in the theatre', Greenblatt essentially rehearses the Chorus's claims in *Henry V*. Confining its audience 'within the girdle of these walls' (the walls of an imaginary playhouse), the Chorus repeatedly implies that there is no escape from theatricality (Prologue.19). As the chapter sets out to demonstrate, the 'we' used by many critics, along with the phrase 'the audience', can be problematic because it collapses fact and fiction within a fixed, homogeneous spatio-temporal continuum.

Accordingly, one of the key aims here is to challenge the assumption that there can be such a thing as a stable audience. The Chorus is considered as the main subject

[3] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*', in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* [1985], second edition, edited by Jonathan

of the play, as opposed to 'us' *qua* always already identified audience—the subject *par défaut* in the vast majority of the criticism of *Henry V* (and of Shakespeare criticism at large). Being on the side of the Chorus, it is here assumed, can throw a new light on the 'audience' phenomenon that is repeatedly taken for granted in its speeches. Keeping this idea in mind, the chapter pays close attention to the linguistic markers contained within the Chorus's utterances. The main function of these markers, it is suggested, is to conjure up a specific historical narrative: that of a geographically and temporally fixed theatrical performance. While asserting a core of historical presence, the linguistic markers also reveal the elusive nature of the anchoring point posited in the Chorus's narrative. In this sense, *Henry V* can be said to question its own presence; as such, the play provides another instance of the aesthetics of untimeliness that are explored in this thesis as a key feature of Shakespearean drama. Ultimately, the sense of dramatic alienation that can be experienced in the play opens up a theoretical reflection on presence and subjectivity. Viewed in the light of the intersubjective relation that binds the Chorus with its fantasised audience, Jacques Lacan's concept of the big Other illustrates the extent to which literary subjectivity is always, and fundamentally, displaced.

I- CHORUS: THE GREAT PERFORMER OF PRESENCE

A. HISTORICIST HENRY V *AND THE 'STRICTLY TEXTUAL' ALTERNATIVE*

In early March 1599, Queen Elizabeth appointed the Earl of Essex as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Later that month, Essex set off for Ireland with orders to crush the rebellion led by the Earl of Tyrone.[4] Editors generally agree that 1599 was also the year

[4] With unusual precision, English chronicles record Essex's departure from London on 27th March amidst

Shakespeare wrote the draft of *Henry V* that became the first folio text.[5] Underlying the dating of the play is the widely accepted idea that it mirrors topical Elizabethan events.[6] Because of its English historical background, *Henry V* often constitutes a privileged pre-text for the untimely intrusion of Elizabethan politics into the play. Although it does not feature in *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (Shakespeare's main literary source for *Henry V*), 'Ireland […] haunts Shakespeare's play,' where it 'seeps […] at the most unexpected and sometimes unintended moments,' James Shapiro notes in *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*.[7] For Shapiro, Ireland intrudes into the play in the mode of the return of the repressed. In Act III, for instance, the English captain Gower speaks of a soldier who wears 'a beard of the General's cut'—a line that is customarily glossed as an allusion to Essex's distinctive square-cut beard (3.6.71).[8] At the end of the play, the Queen of France greets Henry by calling him 'brother Ireland'—'a revealing textual error,' Gary Taylor remarks in the Oxford edition of the play (5.2.12).[9] Following Taylor, Shapiro argues that 'the mistake is not the nervous Queen's but

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Cornhill, Cheapside, and other high streets, in all which places and in the fields, the people pressed exceedingly to behold him, especially in the highway, for more than four miles' space crying and saying, "God bless your Lordship, God preserve your honour", etc.; and some followed him till the evening, only to behold him' (*The Annals or General Chronicles of England, begun first by Master John Stow, and after him continued and augmented […] until the end of this present year 1614, by Edmund Howes* (1615), cited in Gary Taylor, 'Introduction', *Henry V*, edited by Gary Taylor (New York: Oxford, 1982), p. 5).

[5] Andrew Gurr, 'Introduction', *King Henry V*, second edition, edited by Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-6. Gurr also thinks that the play was staged by the Chamberlain's Men at the Globe theatre in the same year—although this is based solely on intra-textual evidence. Only two references to performances of *Henry V* in Shakespeare's time survive: one of them is the statement, on the title-page of the quarto, that the play 'hath bene sundry times playd' by the Lord Chamberlain's men; the other is an entry in the Revels Account recording one performance at court on 7th January 1605 (for a copy of the quarto title-page, see Gurr, 'Textual Analysis', p. 226).

[6] Taylor, 'Introduction', pp. 4-5.

[7] James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber, 2005), p. 100.

[8] In his footnote to the line, Gurr notes that 'the Essex expedition to Cadiz in 1596 created a fashion for "Cadiz beards", square instead of the usual pointed shape, in imitation of Essex' (*King Henry V*, p. 145n). For a comprehensive account of all the references to Ireland in the play and their alleged topicality, see Ann Kaegi, 'Introduction', *Henry V*, edited by Arthur Raleigh Humphreys [1968], revised by Ann Kaegi (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. xxxi-xxxiii.

[9] Taylor, 'Introduction', p. 7. The First Folio's 'brother Ireland' is amended to 'brother England' from the

Shakespeare's, who slipped when intending to write "brother England" (and whose error modern editors silently correct).'[10] In the light of Elizabethan history, Henry's anachronistic pledge to Katherine in the same scene—'Ireland is thine'—does impart the feeling that the Irish conflict is boiling under the medieval surface of the play (5.2.222). In their essay on 'History and Ideology' in *Henry V*, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield specifically see 'the attempt to conquer France at the end of the play as re-presentation of the attempt to conquer Ireland and the hoped-for unity for Britain.' Thus, for cultural materialists, 'the play is fascinating precisely to the extent that it is implicated in and can be read to disclose both the struggles of its own historical moment and their ideological representation.'[11]

At the beginning of Act V, the Chorus invokes a monumental vision of

> the General of our gracious Empress,
> […] from Ireland coming,
> Bringing rebellion broachèd on his sword.
>
> (5.0.30-2)

This passage is unanimously considered as one of Shakespeare's most topical references to Elizabethan politics. The New Cambridge edition of *Henry V* is based on the premise that it is 'almost certainly a reference to the Earl of Essex's campaign in Ireland'; as such, it features as a central piece of evidence for the dating of the play.[12] Even more striking is the core postulate in the Oxford edition that 'the allusion to the Irish expedition […] is the only explicit, extra-dramatic, incontestable reference to a contemporary event anywhere in the canon.'[13] The intrusion of Essex's Irish campaign

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[10] Shapiro, *1599*, p. 100.

[11] Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, second edition, edited by John Drakakis (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 229. See also Philip Edwards, *Threshold of a Nation: A Study in English and Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 74-86.

[12] Gurr, 'Introduction', p. 1.

in the Chorus's narrative is the characteristic cynosure of most recent editions of *Henry V*. The fact that a single historical episode can provide the hermeneutic framework of entire editorial projects has crucial implications. From a critical point of view, this particular bias testifies to the overarching status of new historicism in Shakespeare studies. As demonstrated in previous chapters, the intrinsic limitation of strictly historical accounts of literary works is history itself: once we step out of their historical point of reference, such accounts inevitably lose their relevance. A good example would be Taylor's introduction to his edition of the play, which opens with the sweeping statement that 'no one bored by war will be interested in *Henry V*.'[14] The widespread but clearly questionable assumption that *Henry V* is fundamentally a 'war play' has been conditioned by a steady process of historical saturation—whose founding act is probably the assignment of the play to the category of the 'Histories' in the first folio's 'Catalogue' section.[15] It is easy to forget that most of the 'war' going on in the play is crammed within the Chorus's speeches and does not extend beyond them. In fact, and as Ann Kaegi points out concisely in her introduction to the Penguin edition, there is hardly any 'war' at all in *Henry V*:

> If we believe we have witnessed the re-enactment of an epic conflict, that is either because the Chorus has conjured up a vivid impression of the clash of armies in our minds or because elaborate battle scenes have been devised for performance. That *Henry V* should be known as Shakespeare's war play when it contains relatively few scenes of combat, and those few are at odds with the stuff of legend and the Chorus's rousing account of an epic struggle, is one of many paradoxes that mark the play's reception.[16]

For most contemporary editors, the Chorus of *Henry V* constitutes a landmark intrusion of Elizabethan history within the literary framework of Shakespearean drama.

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[15] See *The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare (Based on Folios in the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection)*, second edition, prepared by Charlton Hinman, with a new introduction by Peter Blayney (New York and London: Norton, 1996), p. 13.

Presenting the play in such a historically-tinted light can only have a tremendous impact on readers and audiences and how they make sense of the work—the Chorus becomes a transcendental entity that seemingly provides unimpeded access to Shakespeare's historical moment. Considering the historical figure of the Earl of Essex, Andrew Gurr argues that 'the Chorus was written for his time and only for his time' and that it 'relates uniquely to the period when the play was first composed.'[17] Such a narrow historical bias severely limits the potential for meaning of *Henry V*. In order to challenge some of the historicist assumptions that have framed the interpretive field of the play so far, the Chorus's speeches are here approached from a 'strictly textual' perspective (if such a thing really exists). Far from asserting the supremacy of textuality over historicity, such a deliberate, self-imposed critical grid aims at questioning some of the 'facts' that are often taken for granted with regard to the relation between literature and history—in fact, a key implication of the chapter is the recognition that 'strictly textual' approaches to literature are bound by the very same limitations as 'strictly historical' accounts.[18] Literary objects always come to life through the medium of various cultural discourses, which not only shape their literariness but also impose their ideological biases on them.[19] Like many other Shakespeare plays, *Henry V* is mired in a historicist discourse that makes its ultimate meaning contingent on late Elizabethan politics. However, and as this chapter sets out to demonstrate, the linguistic content of the Chorus's utterances manifests an unbridgeable gap that is inherent to theatricality: the inexorable

[17] Gurr, 'Introduction', p. 6. Hamlet himself has been repeatedly identified by critics as a reflection of Essex, as made clear in the previous chapter on *Hamlet*, '"Imperfect Performances": Fragmented Meanings and Meaningful Fragments in *Hamlet*'.

[18] In *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997), Slavoj Žižek refers to the alleged gap between 'naïve historicist realism' and 'discursive idealism' as a 'false alternative' (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 123). For a more detailed discussion of this notion, see the introductory note to this section of the thesis.

[19] Through the example of *Hamlet*, Chapter 3 explored the intrinsic ideological bias through which literature comes into being. A central concern in the present thesis is the sense that literary works only begin to exist through the activity of interpretation—which includes their representation in popular

disjointedness between a so-called original event and its representation. In spite of all its apparent efforts at conjuring up the past, the Chorus compulsively emphasises the failure of historical presence—and, in parallel, the same thing can be said about much historicist criticism of *Henry V*.

B. Mediated Presence and Loss of Origin: Henry V*'s Alienation Effect*

Hamlet's recommendation to the actors in Elsinore to 'Suit the action to the word, the word to the action' voices theatricality's pivotal fantasy: perfect synchrony between word and action (*Hamlet*, 3.2.16-7). But conversely, what the remark implicitly formulates is the disjointedness inherent to all theatrical representation. As a general rule, the imperative mood points to an absence, a gap to be filled; it aims at bringing about something that is supposedly *not here*. Through its very utterance, Hamlet's direction reveals that there is no such thing as absolute simultaneity between word and action: immediacy remains a characteristically elusive concept in the world of representation. However, pesence needs to be invoked by a specific instance so that potential audiences can enter theatre's game of make-believe. Hamlet's remark thus acknowledges a tacit rule of theatricality: the often unexamined idea that presence is always mediated. It is a characteristic feature of Shakespearean drama to draw attention to the processes through which it comes into existence. Theatre's meditation on its asynchronous nature can be described in terms of what Bertolt Brecht called *Verfremdungseffekt*—often translated into English as 'estrangement effect' or 'alienation effect'.[20] Brecht himself recognised the extent to which Shakespeare's is 'a

[20] See John Willett (editor and translator), *Brecht on Theater* (New York: Hill and Wang,

theatre full of alienation effects.'[21] In *Henry V*, the Chorus elicits one of those typically Shakespearean alienation effects by repeatedly directing our attention towards the inside workings of the 'history play'. Its emphatic rhetoric often conveys the opposite message of what it overtly purports to do. Its insistence on presence (i.e. the 'actual', or even factual, presence of what is invoked in its utterances), in particular, indicates the extent to which historical drama (but also literature) is haunted by the absence of the subject it purports to conjure up. As Brian Walsh notes,

> the Chorus troubles dramatic historiography through a devastating exposure of the theater's representational inadequacy. Here and elsewhere the choral voice in *Henry V* crystallizes the tension between the desire to act out the past and the difficulty—even, perhaps, the absurdity—of doing so.[22]

The difficulty or the absurdity of acting out the past in a so-called history play arises from what Walsh calls the 'performative present,' which corresponds to the registration of 'the temporality of the theatrical event' by an instance within the play or from the perspective of a contemporary audience.[23] The term 'contemporary' here should be understood as referring to the moment of performance of the play—a moment that is by essence differential as it is anchored in the unstable *now* of performance (which, of course, includes reading as one of several different possible performative modes). Thus, what ruins the whole project of dramatic historiography is the recognition of the moment of performance as the point of origin from which the past is invoked.

In *Henry V*, the registration of the performative present is effected by the Chorus, whose dramatic function can be described in terms of a systematic undermining of its own project of historical recuperation. Specifically, the failure of presence is epitomised

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[21] Bertolt Brecht, *Messingkauf Dialogues*, translated from the German by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 57-64.

[22] Brian Walsh, '"Unkind Division": The Double Absence of Performing History in *1 Henry VI*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55(2) (2004), 119-47, p. 123.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 120-21. Walsh notably suggests that, in Shakespeare's so-called *history plays*, 'history and

in the endless slippage that takes place within the limits of the play's semiotic chain. Through a compulsive use of linguistic markers of presence, the Chorus calls attention to its own incapacity to conjure up the past unmediated. The intrinsic disjointedness of representation is conveyed through deixis—a linguistic phenomenon whereby the meaning of certain words or phrases in an utterance is dependent on contextual information. Thus, words or phrases are deictic if their semantic meaning is fixed but their denotational meaning varies depending on time and/or place.[24] Deictics do not mean anything on their own; rather, their meaning relies on anterior context. In *Henry V*, the deferral of denotational meaning culminates in the Chorus's utterances. This deferral is crystallised in a particular line at the beginning of Act II, crucial for the purposes of the present chapter: 'There is the playhouse now, there must you sit' (2.0.36). In order to determine the denotational meaning of each individual sign in this line, it is imperative first to locate their point of reference within the textual boundaries of *Henry V*. However, it soon becomes clear that such an operation is impossible because these signs all refer to an absent context: in other words, their point of origin remains untraceable. The phrase 'the playhouse', for instance, points to an extra-textual context that is simply not available. Syntactically, the definite article 'the' has an anaphoric function—closely related to deixis, 'an anaphor is a linguistic entity which indicates a referential tie to some other linguistic entity in the same text.'[25] The Prologue (spoken by the Chorus) contains three phrases that could potentially provide the original referential tie of 'the playhouse': 'this unworthy scaffold,' 'this cock-pit', 'this wooden O' (10; 11; 12). Like the article 'the', the demonstrative article 'this' is anaphoric, which implies further anterior context. However, once we have worked our way from

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[24] John Lyons, 'Deixis, Space and Time', *Semantics*, volume 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 636–724.

[25] Elena Tognini-Bonelli, *Corpus Linguistics at Work* (Amsterdam and Phildelphia PA: John Benjamins,

Act II back to the Prologue, we have reached the textual boundaries of the play and there is no more anterior context to examine. Rather than solving the ontological mystery of 'the playhouse', the three phrases in the Prologue defer it to a *before* that is unavailable. Through its crafty use of anaphora, the Chorus creates an illusion of presence. Indeed, shifters such as 'this' and 'the' typically drift beyond the text's material reality—and there is virtually no measurable limit to their shifting. For the origin that should allow us to anchor their meaning cannot be located.

C. Ghostly Semiosis: The Inexorable Drifting of Meaning Within the Text and Beyond

In linguistics, semiosis describes any process that involves signs, including the production of meaning. A close grammatological examination of the textual content of *Henry V* reveals that the play's semiosis is characterised by a phenomenon of ghostliness—this is notably illustrated in the systematic drifting of the denotational meaning of the play's anaphoric pronouns. The non-congruence between signifier and signified in the play also gestures towards a more general phenomenon of ghostliness haunting literature. Because of the inherent emphasis on the process of representation that underlies theatre, this asynchrony is particularly apparent in a play like *Henry V*. More than a dramatic technique, '*in medias res*' describes the universal fate of anything that undergoes a process of representation. Representation is by essence incomplete because it necessarily falls short of a (supposedly) missing 'original' that can only be imitated or alluded to. Ultimately, what the 're' of representation acknowledges is the secondary function of theatricality—its intrinsic 'farcicality', to put it in Marxian

terms.[26] In Shakespearean theatrics, the structural alienation inherent in representation is integrated within the aesthetic form of the drama; this aestheticisation of untimeliness precisely culminates in metadramatic figures like that of the Chorus of *Henry V*. The first scene of *Hamlet* provides a graphic instance of theatre's capacity to meditate on its own ghostliness. Before anything has 'actually' started (in the linguistic sense, at least), the sense of self-reflexivity culminates in the very first line of the play. 'Who's there?'—the sentinel's question encapsulates the ontological trembling that haunts the semiotics of literature (*Hamlet*, 1.1.1). This much-quoted line encapsulates the reflection on representation and its possibility that is inherent in the experience of *Hamlet*: as such, the line stands for the aestheticisation of the asynchrony of representation in Shakespeare's drama. Syntactically, the deictic adverb 'there' has no referential tie to an earlier linguistic entity; its appearance in the play's very first line makes its drifting even more obvious. A possible (and perfectly sensible) response to the line would be: 'Hang on, who's *where*?'. From the beginning, there is a pervasive sense of confusion regarding identity and location. The first scene of *Hamlet* provides a meta-commentary on the disjointedness of representation by implying that there is always a gap between what is said and what actually happens in a play. This constitutive lack of simultaneity climaxes in a line spoken by Marcellus: 'What, has this thing appeared again tonight?' (1.1.19). By referring to something, or more precisely some *thing*, that has not appeared yet in the play, this line integrates the untimely as part of the dramatic structure of the play. Thus, the invoked 'thing', in its very absence, becomes a fascinating theatrical locus. For Jacques Derrida, Marcellus' line testifies to the sensation that *Hamlet* is a play where 'everything begins in the imminence of a *re*-

[26] Karl Marx's celebrated reference to the perennial repetition of history, 'the first time as tragedy, the second as farce' appears in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* [1852] (Rockville MD: Wildside Press,

apparition, but a reapparition of the spectre as reapparition *for the first time in the play*.'[27] The paradox of a ghost that comes back for the first time illustrates the perpetual slippage that takes place in the semiotic chain of *Hamlet*. Like the Chorus in *Henry V*, *Hamlet*'s ghost is a powerful metadramatic figure that symbolises the destabilisation of presence that underlies the experience of literature.

The first scene (and often the very first line) of a Shakespeare play generally provides a good starting point to investigate the intrinsic disjointedness of theatre. This is certainly relevant in the case of *Henry V*. Preceding the 'official' first scene (1.1), the Chorus's first intervention (Prologue) in the play epitomises the uncanny sense that the beginning is always already haunted. Every subsequent act is spooked in the same manner by a choric speech that breaks the play's formal structure—interestingly, most editions categorise the speeches as '2.*0*', '3.*0*', '4.*0*' and '5.*0*'. Crucially, the first scene of *Henry V* also features the first reference to the mysterious 'playhouse' that haunts the play. It is implied that the audience addressed by the Chorus in the Prologue—'gentles all'—is in the know as to the precise nature of '*this* wooden O' (8). In the particular context of theatrical performance, the 'wooden O' could perhaps be interpreted as a reference to whatever space the play is performed in—in this sense, the performance anchors the performative present. However, a strictly textual analysis of the play has to be more rigorous. As editors have emphasised, Shakespeare may well have been thinking about a specific London theatre when he included the reference to the 'wooden O'—the recently revised Penguin edition formulates the historicist consensus that 'Shakespeare may refer to the existing Curtain Theatre or to the Globe, which was

[27] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994),

under construction while he was writing the play.'[28] However, from a discursive point of view, such a suggestion is problematic because it posits an artificial shortcut between literature and history without solving the mystery of the play's ghostly semiotic chain. A systematic strategy of historicisation of literature can lead us to create facts from mere speculation. The most famous example is probably that of *Macbeth*, whose controversial critical history illustrates the inherent danger of historicising Shakespeare at any cost. It has often been argued that *Macbeth* was written on King James' demand and that it was performed in front of the royal court in 1606 as a way of celebrating his sovereignty.[29] Although there is no evidence for such claims, they are often taken for granted: editorial speculation has led to the creation of artificial gateways between text and historical facts. If the historicisation of literary texts has proven so appealing in recent times, it is perhaps because of the profound sense of cohesion it brings—cohesion between a certain historical period and *its* literature, or between a certain literature and *its* historical period. But can literature and history ever be said to belong to one another or to coincide perfectly?

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[28] Kaegi, p. 136n.

[29] In the late eighteenth century, Edmund Malone suggested that *Macbeth* might have been one of three plays performed at court in 1606 in the presence of King Christian of Denmark (Edmund Kerchever Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, volume 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 173). This hypothesis was revived in 1950 by Henry Neill Paul (*The Royal Play of "Macbeth": When, Why and How It Was Written by Shakespeare* (New York: Octagon, 1971)). The Arden second series edition of the play (first published in 1951) provides a good example of the noxious impact of the 'royal *Macbeth*' theory on Shakespeare studies: the introduction refers to 'the version performed at court in 1606' as if it was an established fact (Kenneth Muir, 'Introduction', *Macbeth*, edited by Kenneth Muir (London: Arden, 1962), p. xiv). Contradicting Paul's mid-century account, the more recent Oxford edition provides a timely reminder of what is known and what is not known about *Macbeth*: 'for his central thesis, that the play was written by James's command for performance at Hampton Court in August 1606, he had no evidence whatsoever' (Nicholas Brooke, 'Introduction', *Macbeth*, edited by Nicholas Brooke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 72). In spite of the recognised lack of evidence, historicist critics still base whole narratives on the assumption that, on the 7th August 1606, 'the King's Men arrived with a play, probably *Macbeth*, designed to display their patron's greatness to his fellow king' (Alvin Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court, 1603-1613*, New Haven and London:

In *Henry V*, the possibility of synchronising history and its representation is questioned by the Chorus itself (despite the fact that its self-appointed job is precisely to convey such synchrony):

> Can this cock-pit hold
> The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?
> (Prologue.11-14)

This passage throws a shadow over the notion that an historical episode such as the fifteenth-century French campaigns of the English king Henry V ('So great an object') can be conjured up as a convincing theatrical event (11). The tone is grand and overblown; but the Chorus fails to conceal a deep-seated anxiety about the claims it makes. In Act IV, for instance, it describes its own representation of history as a 'mock'r[y]'—asking its audience to imagine 'true things by what their mock'ries be' (4.0.53). The Chorus also makes amends for the play's supposedly poor rendition of what should be an epic moment of martial glory and apologises for the inadequate representation of 'the battle,'

> Where O for pity, we shall much disgrace,
> With four or five most vile and ragged foils
> Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous,
> The name of Agincourt.
> (48-52)

Apologising for the 'ridiculous' battlefield confrontations it invokes, the Chorus emphasises the inherent distance between historical events and 'their' theatrical representation. It is rather significant that, with the exception of the 'brawl ridiculous' between Pistol and the Frenchman Le Fer (4.4), the play does not feature a single battlefield confrontation. In order to account for such omissions, the Chorus invokes

> th'excuse
> Of time, of numbers and due course of things
> Which cannot in their huge and proper life

(5.0.3-6)

Once again, the occurrence of the shifter 'here', as the Chorus explains how difficult it is to 'present' historical feats 'in their huge and proper life', is hardly a coincidence: for indeed, they can only be *re*-presented. And such a re-presentation of history can only be achieved from a certain perspective in space and time. In the first folio of *Henry V*, the story is represented through the perspective of the Chorus, who, in spite of its apologetic tone, constantly tries to lure its audience into a fantasy of historical presence—it is worth noting here that there exists a less renowned version of the play, the first quarto, which does *not* feature a Chorus (the parallactic system formed by the first quarto and the first folio of *Henry V* is addressed later on in this chapter). In this sense, the main linguistic tool used by the Chorus to deploy its strategy is performativity.

II- THE FAILURE OF PRESENCE IN *HENRY V* AND BEYOND

A. THE CHORUS'S 'NOW': PROBLEMATISING PRESENCE

The English philosopher of language John Langshaw Austin describes performativity as a linguistic phenomenon whereby 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action.'[30] In *Henry V*, the Chorus's utterances provide a powerful example of performativity—in theory, at least. *In theory* then (that is, from the perspective of the Chorus), those utterances initiate the action by voicing events that are supposed to take place. However, such dream-like performativity is haunted by the self-defeating quality of the Chorus's narrative. The performative sense culminates in the temporal deictic 'now', which features no less than sixteen times over the six brief choruses. The repeated occurrence of this adverb in the Chorus's second intervention—six times in the

[30] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* [1962], second edition, edited by James Opie

space of 42 lines—imparts a seeming sense of immediacy, as the following passage illustrates:

> *Now* all the youth of England are on fire,
> And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies;
> *Now* thrive the armourers, and honour's thought
> Reigns solely in the breast of every man.
> They sell the pasture *now* to buy the horse,
> Following the mirror of all Christian kings
> With wingèd heels, as English Mercuries.
> For *now* sits expectation in the air.
>
> (2.0.1-8)

On the level of narrative, the repetition of the adverb 'now', coupled with an assertive use of the present tense, imparts a strong sense of urgency. The accumulation of markers of presence suggests that everything the Chorus says is happening 'right now', in the performative present. The Chorus relies on the potential of words to instigate actions in order to convey authority over an audience. Thus, in the case of *Henry V*, performativity figures as a linguistic tool, the effect of which is to claim control over the representational process; this narrative strategy culminates at the end of the Chorus's second speech, which takes a very abrupt turn:

> The sum is paid, the traitors are agreed,
> The King is set from London, and the scene
> Is now transported, gentles, to Southampton.
> There is the playhouse now, there must you sit.
>
> (2.0.33-36)

This passage contracts the historical narrative into an absurdly short and factual description; and once again, the repetitive syntax emphasises the ghostly semiosis that pervades the Chorus's utterances. The repetition of the definite article 'the' and of the copula 'to be' creates an effect of immediacy (or 'reality effect'), which becomes critical in the last line of the extract quoted above.[31]

[31] See Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect' (1968), in *The Rustle of Language*, translated from the French

'*There is the playhouse now, there must you sit*'. This particular line, mentioned earlier, cumulates an unusual number of markers of presence—space shifter 'there' (twice), copula 'to be', definite article 'the', temporal shifter 'now' and personal pronoun 'you'. The line is crucial to the ongoing analysis insofar as it reveals the intrinsic limitations of the Chorus's strategy of invocation of presence. Specifically, it illustrates the extent to which the fantasy of proximity underlying the choric syntax is inevitably flawed. First of all, the Chorus's commanding 'now' falls short of being a universal 'now' that applies to all audiences, in all contexts, at all times (as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel writes in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 'the Now that *is*, is another Now than the one pointed to').[32] The fact that potential readers of *Henry V* are not taken into consideration makes the failure of presence all the more powerful in the Chorus's rhetoric. Indeed, the 'gentles' under address are placed in 'the playhouse', and nowhere else: they are playgoers (so has the Chorus decided, at least). It seems timely, at this point in the chapter, to emphasise that the practice that consists in reading Shakespeare's dramatic intentions through his characters—especially in the case of metadramatic instances like the Chorus of *Henry V*—presents inherent dangers. James Bednarz's article, 'Dekker's Response to the Chorus of *Henry V* in 1599', provides a recent example of this widespread tendency: 'In the Prologue and Choruses of *Henry V*, Shakespeare defines his art as a way of magnifying the limited resources of theatre by means of the capacious imaginations of playgoers.'[33] Such a claim is problematic in that it reproduces a 'central methodological error,' in the phrase of proto-cultural materialist Raymond Williams: such an error consists in 'reading dramatic speech as authorial

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[32] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated from the German by Arnold Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 63.

[33] James Bednarz, 'Dekker's Response to the Chorus of *Henry V* in 1599', *Notes and Queries* [online]

confession or assertion.'[34] If the Chorus seems to be addressing playgoers, this address cannot be elucidated on the plane of a specific type of audience (readers or playgoers) that Shakespeare might have had in mind when he wrote the play. The well-worn notion that the dramatist wrote his plays for the stage only and that he had no intention to publish them has been questioned extensively in the last decade. In *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, Lukas Erne argues that Shakespeare was aware that many of his plays were making their way into print as he wrote them:

> When Shakespeare's sonnets were published, the majority of the plays Shakespeare had written up to that date *were* available in print. Consequently, Shakespeare did not only expect that at some point in the future people would 'read-and-re-read' his plays. He could not help knowing that his plays were being read and reread, printed and reprinted, excerpted and anthologized as he was writing more plays. Shakespeare's friends and fellow actors John Heminge and Henry Condell recommended that we 'Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe'.[35]

As Erne points out, reading Shakespeare's plays (along with seeing them performed in theatres) was already a well-established cultural practice in the author's own time. Significant to this chapter's concerns is Erne's claim that the long and short texts of *Henry V* 'represent "literary" and "theatrical" versions whose respective distinctiveness allows us important insights into Shakespeare's theatrical *and* literary art.'[36] While the quarto text might have been a copy of the play as it was performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Erne argues that the folio version of *Henry V* would have been

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[34] Raymond Williams, 'Afterword', in *Political Shakespeare*, p. 281.

[35] Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 25. See also, by the same author, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). In this book, Erne examines 'the publication, constitution, dissemination and reception of Shakespeare's printed plays and poems in his own time' and argues that 'their popularity in the book trade has been greatly underestimated.' Erne notably uses evidence from Shakespeare's publishers and the printed works to show that 'in the final years of the sixteenth century and the early part of the seventeenth century, "Shakespeare" became a name from which money could be made, a book trade commodity in which publishers had significant investments and an author who was bought, read, excerpted and collected on a surprising scale' (backmatter). See also Richard Meek, Jane Richard and Richard Wilson (editors), *Shakespeare's Book: Essays in Reading, Writing and Reception* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

intended for publication only. The idea of the folio of *Henry V* as an exclusively 'literary' object (Erne uses the term 'literary' in opposition to 'theatrical') troubles the standard approach to the Chorus as a figure that is only relevant to the play in performance. This notion also challenges the almost systematic assumption—mainly based on the 'live effect' imparted by the Chorus's addresses—that the folio version of the play was specifically designed for the stage. As such, it undermines Gurr's argument, quoted early on in the chapter, that the Chorus 'relates uniquely to the period when the play was first composed.' According to Erne, the version of the play that was performed in Shakespeare's time is precisely the one that does *not* feature a chorus (the quarto text).[37]

From a theoretical point of view, Erne's approach to the two texts of *Henry V* implies a fascinating parallax view that guarantees that whenever there is a chorus there is no audience—and, conversely, whenever there is an audience there is no chorus. In other words, this parallactic system would imply that there cannot be a chorus *and* an audience within the same spatio-temporal continuum. Following this line of thought, the staging of the first folio in contemporary productions of the play might be seen as an aberration as it contravenes the parallax view that underlies the textuality of *Henry V*. If the first folio must necessarily exclude theatrical audiences, as Erne argues, the Chorus itself seems keenly aware of this cause/effect mechanism. Underlying the bombastic imperative urging a specific audience to be in 'the playhouse' 'now', there is palpable anxiety. 'There must you sit', the Chorus eructates. If the audience in question was indeed securely circumscribed within the playhouse, there should be no need for the Chorus to make such a request. And it knows it. The Chorus's awareness of the

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[37] For a recent reflection on 'the idea of Shakespeare as a literary dramatist who arranges his work for publication', see Johann Gregory's inspired essay, which considers 'the ways in which *Troilus and Cressida* as a stage-play is already literary to begin with' (Johann Gregory, 'The "Author's Drift" in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: A Poetics of Reflection', *Medieval and Early Modern Authorship*,

paradoxical quality of its narrative is epitomised in a single phrase, worth quoting once again: 'There is the playhouse now, there must you sit'. This self-defeating imperative inevitably prompts the following questions: '*Where* is *what*, and *when*? Where must *who* sit *where*?'

B. 'Thought is Free', or Shakespeare's 'Contradictory Approach to Language'

The numerous injunctions throughout *Henry V* betray the Chorus's fundamental uncertainty as to the play's capacity to conjure up presence. In the Prologue, the Chorus asks its audience to 'make imaginary puissance,' begging it to 'Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts' (Prologue.25; 23). Towards the end of the play, it admits that King Henry's epic campaign against France can only be conveyed 'In the quick forge and working-house of thought,' namely in an audience's mind (5.0.23). The dramatic locus of a choric voice that asks its audience to 'work' on their 'imaginary forces' is a recurring Shakespearean motif (Prologue.18). In *The Winter's Tale*, for instance, Time (another chorus) makes a similar demand on its audience:

> imagine me,
> Gentle spectators, that I now may be
> In fair Bohemia.
>
> (4.1.19-21)

Here again, the temporal deictic 'now' aims at conveying immediacy. The signifier 'Bohemia' is also marked by deixis as it refers to anterior context in the play: on reaching land, in the previous scene, Antigonus enquires whether 'our ship hath touched upon / The deserts of Bohemia' (3.3.1-2). In the light of Time's demand in the following scene, this famous Shakespearean *anachorism* (generally defined as a

geographical misplacement, as explained in Chapter 1) takes on an ironic dimension. Time's request to be placed on the shores of Bohemia—a geographical impossibility—only emphasises the gap between representation and its supposedly 'real' point of reference. Eventually, by asking potential audiences to 'imagine me', namely to produce a mental construct, Time questions its own existence. As Sean Gaston suggests, 'the arrival of TIME in *The Winter's Tale* can be taken as a wonderful conceit, an impossible gathering, an amazing act of theatrical bravado.'[38] Such ontological paradox is typical of Shakespeare's dramas, which often stage (and perhaps also call for) meditations on the power of thought. Works like *Henry V* or *The Winter's Tale* specifically challenge the common literary assumption that thought is boundless and that there is nothing that it cannot envision—whether it be medieval warfare or distant, unknown countries. The phrase 'thought is free' (recurring twice in the canon) provides a good example of the ambivalent treatment of imagination as a concept in Shakespearean drama (*Twelfth Night*, 1.3.58; *The Tempest*, 3.2.118). Spoken by characters (as opposed to Shakespeare *qua* author) the phrase contains a powerful metadramatic potential that suggests that the plays' stance towards their own dramatic content is resolutely undecided—neither do they seem to endorse nor refute what the characters say. For Terry Eagleton, such undecidability is the direct result of 'Shakespeare's contradictory approach to language.'[39] Although the plays might value 'a stability of signs' (conveyed through 'settled meanings, shared definitions and regularities of grammar'), Eagleton remarks that 'Shakespeare's flamboyant punning,

[38] Sean Gaston, '*Enter* TIME', *Starting With Derrida: Plato, Aristotle and Hegel* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 61.

[39] The phrase was coined by Jonathan Gil Harris in *Shakespeare and Literary Theory* ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 162), where it is used to summarise Eagleton's discussion of *Macbeth* in

troping and riddling threaten to put into question' this very stability.[40] Critics have emphasised the extent to which Shakespearean drama seems to refuse to assume any ideological responsibility for what it presents or represents. Richard Wilson notably argues that this is evidence of 'Shakespeare's very reluctance to present himself as an author.'[41] Along the same lines, Patrick Cheney notes that Shakespeare's works offer various 'fictions of authorship,' all participating in a general strategy of 'self-concealing authorship.'[42] The idea that a work of art might not reflect the author's personal views is addressed in the introductory words of the Prologue in *Troilus and Cressida* (another Shakespearean chorus), which claims to speak 'not in confidence / Of author's pen or actor's voice' (Prologue.23-24). For Johann Gregory, these lines are to be read in the context of a major theatrical controversy in the early seventeenth century, generally referred to as the 'poets' war'. Thus, the Prologue in *Troilus and Cressida* specifically documents the extent to which 'Shakespeare responds to [Ben] Jonson's construction of an author,' Gregory suggests.[43] In *Shakespeare and the Poets' War*, Bednarz argues that the two playwrights developed their authorial strategies against each other:

> The Poets' War—the most important theatrical controversy of the late Elizabethan stage—commenced when Jonson, the younger playwright, became 'Jonson', the poet, by resisting Shakespeare's influence through the invention of a new critical drama that he called 'comical satire'. The war continued with added momentum when Shakespeare, in response, molded his comedies to accommodate Jonson's satiric perspective while eschewing its self-confident didacticism. And the battle ended only after Shakespeare, having been stung by Jonson's attack on the Lord Chamberlain's Men in *Poetaster*, 'purged' his rival in the guise of Ajax in *Troilus and Cressida*.[44]

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[41] Richard Wilson, '"Our Bending Author": Shakespeare Takes a Bow', *Shakespeare Studies* 36 (2008), 67-79, p. 72.

[42] Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 147 and 14.

[43] Gregory, 'The "Author's Drift" in *Troilus and Cressida*', p. 93.

In his essay on the 'author's drift', Gregory explores the extent to which the two playwrights might be said to have built their authorship through such dramatic rivalry—Shakespeare's Prologue, in particular, could have been a direct allusion to Jonson's construction of his own authorship in the induction to *Poetaster*, which also features an 'armèd Prologue' (Induction.67).[45] In *Troilus and Cressida*, 'the Prologue speaks without confidence of the author's pen, in contrast to Jonson's Prologue who speaks for the author,' Gregory argues. This illustrates the notion that, in Shakespeare's play, 'the author remains elusive—mentioned, only to be hidden.'[46] Gregory's reflection on authorship in *Troilus and Cressida* provides a convincing instance of the idea that Shakespeare's theatre avoids assuming responsibility for what it stages. So when a statement as sweeping as 'thought is free' appears in the dramas, one might want to 'think' twice before labelling it as a personal belief of the author's. One might also want to recognise the extent to which Shakespeare's plays present a multitude of contradictory beliefs (rather than *a* distinct belief or set of beliefs)—'in presenting, so often powerfully, so many incompatible beliefs, Shakespeare was saying something about belief itself,' Williams suggests.[47]

'Thought is free'—rather than making a univocal ideological declaration, the phrase, as it appears in the dramas, essentially rehearses a buzzword in Shakespeare's time. In fact, the phrase can be traced back to King James, whose literary aspirations started early in his life. At the age of fifteen, the young King of Scotland wrote his first poem (simply entitled 'Song' in the royal manuscript copy); the first stanza, reproduced below, opens with the phrase in question:

Song. The first verses that ever the king made

[45] Ben Jonson, *Poetaster*, edited by Tom Cain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

[46] Gregory, 'The "Author's Drift" in *Troilus and Cressida*', pp. 97 and 96.

> Since thought is free, think what thou will
> O troubled hart to ease they paine
> Thought unrevealed can do no evill
> But wordes past out cummes not againe
> Be cairefull aye for to invent
> The waye to get they owen intent…[48]

Through the medium of King James' juvenile poem, the expression 'thought is free' entered everyday language, becoming a linguistic idiosyncrasy of the Jacobean cultural moment. In this sense, it is probably no accident that the phrase appears in a proverbial fashion in *Twelfth Night*—'the customary retort to "Do you think I am a fool?",' the Norton edition points out.[49] Likewise, its occurrence in the middle of a song in *The Tempest* (possibly a reference to King James' own 'Song') emphasises the phrase's quotational status, namely the fact that it is always to be read in inverted commas. When the drunken butler Stefano sings the line, Caliban interrupts him sharply, remarking that 'That's not the tune'—an intervention that could be used to illustrate Eagleton's idea of Shakespeare's 'contradictory attitude' towards language (119). Indeed, within the diegetic realm of the play, not all characters seem willing to accept the essentialist proposition that 'thought is free'—Caliban is particularly eager to voice his disagreement, for obvious reasons.[50] Along the same lines, *Henry V* might be said to call for a meditation on thought as well as its limitations. In fact, the dramatic structure of the play can be viewed as a test case of the limits of thought and representation. Can human thought really encompass the grandiose historical visions invoked by the Chorus? This is precisely what the Chorus itself wonders at the beginning of the play when it muses: 'Can this cock-pit hold / The vasty fields of France?'. Editors generally explain the Chorus's 'cockpit' or 'wooden O' as a metaphor for the physical theatre. In the

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[48] Reproduced in Helena Mennie Shire, *Song, Dance & Poetry of the Court of Scotland Under King James VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 86.

[49] Greenblatt, Cohen, Howard and Maus, *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 1772n.

[50] Greenblatt suggests that *The Tempest* is 'a kind of echo chamber of Shakespearean motifs'

Oxford edition, the 'wooden O' is elucidated as 'the theatre itself' and the New Cambridge edition defines 'cockpit' as a 'ring, arena, a deliberate diminutive'—on the grounds that, in Shakespeare's time, 'pits for cock-fighting were far smaller than amphitheatres such as the Curtain and the Globe.'[51] On a more basic level, the 'cockpit' can also be understood as a reference to the head and its link with the human capacity to think, to envision—it is the very same 'distracted globe' in which 'memory holds a seat' that Hamlet talks about (*Hamlet*, 1.5.96-97). In *Henry V*, the Chorus's apparent glorification of thought and its infinite potential is at once undermined by the language that is used (as when the failure to conjure up the 'original' historical scene of Henry V's victory at Agincourt is acknowledged). The Chorus's rhetoric also reveals uncertainty regarding the play that is repeatedly alluded to, and in particular with respect to its alleged location ('the playhouse') and its temporality ('now')—this play is, in effect, a play within the play. If we briefly shift the focus back to 'ourselves' *qua* audience (a problematic notion in the context of this chapter, though), we might say that such spatio-temporal insecurity alienates 'us' (the ever-changing audience in the unstable, constantly shifting present of performance) from the Chorus's fantasised play, which is bound to be different from the play 'we' (whoever we are) are, in effect, reading or watching (at any time, in any place). But (and this cannot be stressed enough) this type of approach is irrelevant to the critical framework that is adopted here, which focuses on *the Chorus as the main subject of discourse*.

C. 'Within the Girdle of these Walls': An Imaginary Audience in an Imaginary Playhouse

The failure of presence in *Henry V* manifests itself perhaps most crucially in the absence of a specific audience. While the Chorus seems to take it for granted that there are

'gentles' sitting in 'the playhouse', the repeated injunctions to those 'gentles' reveal a potential anxiety about the existence of such an audience. Underlying the Chorus's artificial deference to its addressees is a nagging sensation that there might not be anyone sitting in 'the playhouse' after all—thus, it pleads for their 'humble patience' and begs them to 'Admit me Chorus to this history' (Prologue.32-33). The insistence throughout on the necessity to 'make imaginary puissance' overshadows a crucial ontological problem in the play: the uncertainty about the presence of an audience. In its very attempt at concealing non-presence, the Chorus's compulsive invocation of the now of performance reveals that the audience supposedly watching the play in 'the playhouse' is virtual.

'There is the playhouse now, there must you sit'. More than anything perhaps, this fascinating postmodern line epitomises the ontological crisis that pervades the play. Like a fading echo, the Chorus's 'you' shifts inexorably because it fails to fix a specific audience within the linguistic boundaries of the play. The very idea of *audience* is by essence vague and indeterminate as it refers to an amorphous mass that is constantly moving in space and time. In this sense, the Chorus's attempt at foreclosing a specific audience is doomed from the outset. On the other hand, the Chorus also fails to formulate a universal account that would address all audiences at all times, in all possible representational spaces. Such failure is especially apparent in its exclusion of potential readers of the play from its pleas (and, as we know, many people *did* read Shakespeare's plays in the playwright's time). In order to bypass the obstacles that undermine its invocation of presence, the Chorus uses linguistic force. The modal auxiliary verb 'must' suggests a forceful attempt at containing the imagined audience 'within the girdle of these walls'—those of the mysterious 'playhouse' (Prologue.19). In linguistic terms, this 'must' expresses deontic modality, which deals with necessity in

relation to freedom to act. In the context of *Henry V*, it aims at curbing audience freedom by imposing a duty: 'sit' 'there' 'now'. However, we should keep in mind the fact that this scenario of absolute control remains fundamentally a fantasy, rooted in the Chorus's perverted little mind (and why exactly the Chorus is a pervert will become clear very soon). Ultimately, the main function of the modal verb 'must' is to bridge the ontological gap between the Chorus's fantasy of presence and the distinct elusiveness of the audience under address.

The systematic use of the imperative mood testifies to the Chorus's attempt at confining its audience within a linguistic prison, thereby asserting its monopoly over thought. Towards the end of the Prologue, the Chorus embarks on an epic tirade extolling the power of thought: 'Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them, […] / For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings' (26-28). The imperative 'think', it seems, aims at invading the audience's most intimate space: that of the mind. In *Stages of History*, Phyllis Rackin argues that

> any invocation of the present in a history play tends to create radical dislocations: it invades the time-frame of the audience, and its effect is no less striking than that of a character stepping off the stage to invade the audience's physical space or addressing them directly to invade their psychological space.[52]

By bombarding its audience with imperative injunctions, the Chorus does seem to invade their psychological space. But if '*the* audience', as Rackin calls it, is absent from the outset, how can its invocation create 'radical dislocations' for (supposedly) real human audiences? If the Chorus stepped off the stage during a performance of *Henry V* these days, it might find no one at all in the playhouse—for 'they' (the expected audience in question) might all be busy reading the play at home with a cup of tea at their side.

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[52] Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell

As the repeated injunctions to 'behold' and to 'see' indicate, the Chorus's use of the imperative mood is dominated by the lexical field of vision—the two verbs recur ten and five times respectively over the six short choric episodes. In Act IV for instance, the audience is required to 'sit and see'; the act of looking is thus associated with sitting in the playhouse (4.0.52). More significantly, the pressing demands on potential viewers that they should 'think' are almost systematically expressed through the lexical field of vision, as in Act III: 'Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege' (3.0.25). This pattern is also manifest when the Chorus pleads: 'Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them, […] / For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings.' Before it can actually see the 'siege' or the 'horses', the addressed audience first needs to abide to the Chorus's overarching directive to 'make imaginary puissance'. The fact that this audience's 'thoughts' 'must deck' historical 'kings' suggests that the Chorus's favourite topic (History) can only come to life through a substantial imaginative effort. From the beginning, the Chorus itself makes it clear that a willing suspension of disbelief is the crucial prerequisite to enjoy the play—its audience must 'think' that it can see the visions invoked. Throughout *Henry V*, the Chorus plays around with the different meanings of 'think'; in the following passage, for instance, it is used in the sense of 'suppose' or 'pretend':

> O do but think
> You stand upon the rivage and behold
> A city on th'inconstant billows dancing—
> For so appears this fleet majestical,
> Holding due course to Harfleur.
>
> (3.0.13-17)

These lines provide a good example of the Chorus's systematic association of thought with vision—a strategic pairing that conveys the underlying message that thinking *is* seeing. Here again, if we are to 'behold' the 'fleet majestical,' it is first required that we

the Chorus invites its audience to set aside their ontological misgivings; for the simple act of looking with the mind's eye, it is implied, can conjure up real happenings. By enticing its audience to collapse vision and imagination, the Chorus develops what might be called a strategy of visualisation.

D. 'Play With Your Fancies': Chorus as Historical Pervert

Hamlet's confidence to his friend Horatio that he can see his father in his 'mind's eye' prompts Horatio's own confidence that he has seen the ghost of Hamlet's father. In its uncanny anticipation of Horatio's revelation, Hamlet's vision is properly visionary—it posits a direct correlation between thinking and being.

> HAMLET My father—methinks I see my father.
> HORATIO Where, my lord?
> HAMLET In my mind's eye, Horatio.
>
> (*Hamlet*, 1.2.183-85)

However, the performative power of Hamlet's uncanny vision is at once undermined by Horatio's report of having encountered 'A figure like your father'—'My lord, I think I saw him yesternight' (1.2.199; 188). The 'portentous figure' described by Horatio provides a poor rendition of Hamlet's mental image of his real father (1.1.109). Following his friend's revelation, Hamlet is determined to 'watch tonight' for the figure to appear again and 'assume my noble father's person' (1.3.244-45). His formulation sets a sharp contrast between a 'noble father' and his ghostly reflection. Significantly, Gertrude uses the same expression to refer to her dead husband in the previous scene: 'Do not for ever with thy vailèd lids / Seek for thy noble father in the dust' (1.2.70-71). The 'guilty thing' from Horatio's account manifestly clashes with the royal family's dignified memories of the dead king (1.1.129). What is shared in all accounts, though, is a characteristic uncertainty: both Hamlet and Horatio 'think' they see (or have seen) the

dead king (or something *like* the dead king). Unlike the Chorus's authoritarian 'think' in *Henry V*, this 'think' implies a fundamental misgiving. 'Me*think*s I see my father', Hamlet ventures (in other words, 'it almost feels like I can see my father in my mind's eye—but I am not sure'). 'I *think* I saw him yesternight,' Horatio confides tentatively (in other words, 'I might have seen your father last night—but now I am starting to doubt it'). Why not simply: 'I saw him yesternight'? This baffled conversation illustrates the intrinsic disjointedness between so-called 'real' or original events and their afterthoughts. More generally, the exchange also dramatises the fundamental core of absence that haunts representation.

In *Henry V*, the main function of the Chorus is precisely to emphasise the paradox of representation. Its audience is asked to 'suppose' that the invoked visions are real and that they can indeed be seen—for they *are* faithful representations of an original historical reality, the Chorus maintains, almost perfunctorily ('Suppose that you have seen / The well-appointed king at Dover Pier,' 'Suppose th'ambassador from the French comes back' (3.0.3-4; 28)). The Chorus's addresses become more assertive when it enjoins its audience to 'behold' the English army landing in France—'For so appears this fleet majestical,' it insists (16). The formal order to 'Grapple your minds to sternage of this navy' literally attaches this audience's thoughts to the physical structure of the English fleet when it reaches the French shore in Harfleur (18). Such a clumsy ocularcentric strategy relies on the sensation that theatricality provides an unmediated connection between being and seeing. But this implied correlation remains fundamentally uncertain, as the play itself illustrates.

The Chorus's third intervention ends on the grandiose appeal to its audience to 'eke out our performance with your mind' (3.0.35). On the surface, the invitation evokes an all-inclusive and democratic theatrical process; however, this idealised vision

is belied by the Chorus's immutably set narrative as well as its uncompromising rhetoric. Underneath the formal varnish of dramatic politeness ('pardon,' 'Oh, pardon,' 'admit me…', *etc*.), the Chorus remains in total control of the performance—'*our* performance,' as it calls it (1.0.8; 15; 32). Its advocacy of a democratic mode of representation is supported by a clever use of the personal pronoun 'our', which supposedly refers to the Chorus *as well as* its audience. Relying on the notion that *Henry V* is primarily (if not exclusively) relevant to Shakespeare's time, many historicist critics would argue that this 'we' is that of Shakespeare's company (the Lord Chamberlain's Men), directly addressing their spectators at the Globe theatre or at the Curtain theatre. Beside being reductive, this narrow Elizabethan framework is also irrelevant to the approach adopted in this chapter, which treats the Chorus as the central linguistic subject of the play. From this perspective, the Chorus's 'we' can only refer to itself and itself alone—it is the regal 'we'. '*Our* performance' is to be read in opposition with '*your* mind' (i.e. the Chorus's performance versus the audience's mind). While sustaining an illusion of histrionic democracy, the expression 'eke out' also gestures towards the Chorus's dystopian representational plot. From the Old English *ēacian*, 'eke out' means to increase or to supplement: thus, the audience is asked to complement a 'performance' that is already fixed from the beginning and devised by a control-obsessed Chorus. However, the Chorus is aware that the intended performativity of its utterances can only be made effective through the inclusion of an exterior gaze. In the absence of such a validating gaze, the 'performance' is nothing but an insubstantial pageant. The Anglo-Norman French root *parfourmer* means alteration, suggesting the transformative function of performance. Profoundly aware of the mind-altering function of performance, the Chorus aims at affecting the emotional makeup of its audience. From a psychoanalytical perspective, the Chorus of *Henry V* is the archetypical pervert. As

Slavoj Žižek points out, 'the pervert does not pursue his activity for his own pleasure, but for the enjoyment of the Other—he finds enjoyment precisely in this instrumentalisation, in working for the enjoyment of the Other.'[53] However, the displacement of enjoyment onto another instance is not a mere attribute of the pervert; rather, it is a defining characteristic of desire that can be observed on an everyday basis. As an example, Žižek mentions 'the deep satisfaction a subject (a parent, for example) can derive from the awareness that his or her beloved daughter or son is really enjoying something; a loving parent can literally enjoy through the Other's enjoyment.'[54] Throughout the play, the Chorus is working for the enjoyment of an audience: the repeated appeals to that audience reveal the need for the Chorus to ensure that the process of enjoyment is taking place. In its sadomasochistic fantasy, the audience-object figures as the essential hinge of the process of enjoyment. As Žižek notes:

> When the sadomasochistic pervert stages the scene in which he participates he 'remains in control' at all times, maintains a distance, gives directions like a stage director, but his enjoyment is none the less much more intense than that of immediate passionate immersion.[55]

In other words, the Chorus's display of passionate immersion into its historical subject is only a façade: its own enjoyment depends on its capacity to remain in control of the little scenario which entails the deferral of enjoyment to an exterior instance. History (whether it is medieval, Elizabethan or contemporary) is a mere cover for this scenario: ultimately, audience enjoyment remains the fundamental locus of the Chorus's fantasy—and the fact that the audience in question only exists in the Chorus's mind

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[53] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1992), p. 109. Through the medium of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Žižek explains that perversion is defined by opposition to neurotic or psychotic obsessions. Thus, 'both the pervert and the obsessional are caught in frenetic activity in service of the big Other; the difference is, however, that the aim of the obsessional's activity is to *prevent* the big Other from enjoying […], whereas the pervert works precisely *to ensure* that the big Other's "will to enjoyment" will be satisfied' (p. 179n).

[54] Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 147.

reinforces the pathological character of its fantasy. In the end, such a malleable and docile audience (precisely because it does not exist) allows the Chorus to act out its fantasy of absolute control unimpeded.

III- Mapping Out the Big Other: Who is Being Interpellated?

A. 'A Largess Universal, Like the Sun': The Chorus's Cult of Personality

It is perhaps worth noting once again that the critical strategy deployed in this chapter is defined by a deliberate subjective bias which entails that the Chorus figures as the subject of a linguistic investigation. By presenting the Chorus (rather than the construct known as 'the audience') as the main subject of discourse, such an approach aims at questioning common assumptions about subjectivity—not only in *Henry V* but also in Shakespeare's plays, in literature and in 'life' at large (but whether what is called 'life' can be said to be 'larger' than 'literature' remains fundamentally undecidable). This bias does not allow the choric speeches to be viewed as mere interludes punctuating what may be considered as the 'real' play (i.e. 'everything else', 'the rest', *etc.*). The lack of popularity of the chorus-less version of the play (first quarto) testifies to the fundamental function of those speeches within the experiential framework of *Henry V*: they provide a crucial perspective to apprehend the play. Generally speaking, the Chorus stands for the sense that there can be no history without historical perspective—this is especially relevant in the case of a play that thematises history self-reflexively. The Chorus brings a crucial sense of ideological cohesion to the narrative; it evidently considers itself to be on a mission to bring order to a meaningless and chaotic world. However, inconsistencies have often been noted between the Chorus's speeches and what might be viewed as 'the rest' of the play—thus highlighting the infinite potential for self-subversion of *Henry V* (a direct effect of deconstruction as that which always

already happens everywhere).[56] As implied earlier, the Chorus seems eager to fashion itself as an interactive platform fostering democratic exchange with its audience. But ultimately, this gay interactivity conceals a more sinister fantasy of absolute control through which the Chorus fashions itself as the universal voice of History. In this sense, the choric speeches can be said to foster a real cult of personality. As an anonymous contributor puts it on *Wikipedia*, 'a cult of personality arises when an individual uses mass media, propaganda, or other methods, to create an idealized, heroic, and, at times god-like public image, often through unquestioning flattery and praise.'[57]

The Chorus's self-worshipping cult of personality transpires through its descriptions of King Henry. In the following example, the historical king figures as a mere puppet, giving the Chorus a pretext to congratulate itself on its alleged omniscience: 'A largess universal, like the sun, / His liberal eye doth give to everyone' (4.0.43-44). In the Chorus's overblown rhetoric, Henry is characterised as an all-encompassing eye that not only sees everything but is also the source of everything. Here, the Chorus is playing with the different semantic layers of the adjective 'liberal'. The line can be read as praising the king's fair, generous and noble character (thus rehearsing a common popular perception of the historical Henry V). On another level, 'liberal' conveys a sense of indiscretion, of intrusion even—Henry's all-seeing 'eye' is said to be large 'like the sun'. This particular aspect of his sovereignty is illustrated in the next scene, which builds up to the magnificently elided battle of Agincourt. The

[56] For Jacques Derrida, deconstruction essentially refers to 'what happens' or what 'is the case' ('Some Statements and Truisms About Neo-Logismss, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms', translated from the French by Anne Tomiche, in *The State of 'Theory': History, Art and Critical Discourse*, edited by David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 63-95, p. 85).

[57] Wikipedia contributors, 'Cult of personality', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia,* http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cult_of_personality&oldid=522333631 (accessed 13 November 2012). The term was made famous by Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev in his so-called 'Secret Speech' from 1956. See *The Internet Modern History Sourcebook*, 'Nikita S. Khrushchev: The Secret Speech—On the Cult of Personality, 1956', http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1956khrushchev-

night before the battle, the king wanders around the English camp in disguise, hidden underneath a cloak of anonymity in order to spy on his soldiers with complete impunity (4.1.24.1). In this scene, Henry's disturbing eavesdropping gives a rather sinister twist to the sovereign's sun-sized and liberal eye. By presenting its narrative as all-inclusive, the Chorus subtly reassigns onto itself the 'liberal' and 'universal' attributes it ascribes to Henry. Editors have often pointed out the extent to which this implied universality is challenged by inner discrepancies within the play. Gurr, for instance, remarks that 'the events of each act belie the claims made by the Chorus that introduces it'—in fact, 'one of the most peculiar features of [its] appearances is how frequently and consistently [it] whips up enthusiasm for [its] *mis*representation of what follows.'[58] This sensation is based on what is generally perceived as a lack of consistency between the Chorus's announcements and what 'actually' happens in 'the play'. It should be noted now that a crucial ontological problem arises when it comes to addressing what supposedly constitutes the 'real' dramatic root of 'the play' *Henry V*. Is it accurate to say that the Chorus's claims are belied by the other scenes in the play, or are those 'other' scenes untrue to the Chorus's original account? Opening with a Prologue (spoken by the Chorus), the first folio version of *Henry V* seems to silently nominate the Chorus as the genuine, steady and reliable informational instance within the play. But this suggestion is consistently undermined by the fact that the quarto version of the play does not feature a chorus. What, then, constitutes the original semantic core of *Henry V*? Although fundamental, this question cannot be considered extensively here, mainly for the reason that it would require the sustained attention of an entire essay. For our purposes, suffice it to say that the play's semantics is haunted by a generic

ungroundedness, which participates in the more general crisis of presence that pervades *Henry V*.

B. Subjectification and Interpellation: Henry V *via Foucault and Althusser*

By implying that the perspective it provides is that of a ‘liberal eye’ that provides ‘to everyone’ ‘a largess universal, like the sun’, the Chorus endows its audience with a false sense of empowerment—the demands to ‘make imaginary puissance’ and to ‘eke out our performance with your mind’ seemingly open up a strong sense of possibility for potential viewers. The Chorus here toys with the fashionable notion of theatrical interactivity, whereby an audience is allegedly given a degree of command over the ‘performance’. However, what it actually does throughout is deploy a strategy of performative subjection by staging a show of *dēmokratía*. At odds with the free agency supposedly granted to the viewers of the play, the Chorus’s historical account severely limits the potential for free thought: after all, the audience under address is required to ‘Gently […] hear’ and ‘be kind’ (Prologue.34; 3.0.34). The Chorus’s subjection of its audience is to be understood quite literally: from anonymous individuals, they are turned into subjects. Michel Foucault coined the term *subjectivation*, translated into English as ‘subjectification’, to refer to one of ‘three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects.’[59]

[59] The first mode of objectification spelt out by Foucault encompasses ‘the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences; for example the objectivizing of the speaking subject in *grammaire générale*, philology and linguistics.’ Secondly, Foucault talks about what he calls ‘dividing practices,’ which describe how ‘the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him.’ Finally, Foucault explains how he has sought, in his later work, to study ‘the way a human being turns himself into a subject’—the most basic definition of subjectification. A study of subjectification through the domain of sexuality, for instance, would examine ‘how men [i.e. human beings] have learned to recognize themselves as subjects of “sexuality”.’ See Michel Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, *Critical Inquiry* 8(4) (1982), 777-95, pp. 777-78. The essay originally appeared as an afterword to *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* by Hubert Lederer Dreyfus and

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.[60]

As Foucault points out, the term 'subject' can be read in two different ways: one can be subjected to the control of an external instance or subjected to one's own identity. Although they might seem contradictory at first glance, these two definitions in fact represent two sides of the same coin. This double-edged effect of subjectivity is illustrated in the power dynamics of *Henry V*, where the Chorus's control over its audience is conveyed through a specific, ready-made identity—which includes a radical definition of this audience's location in space and time. In theory, subjectification becomes effective when 'the individual recognizes him or herself (an object of discourse) as the *subject* of discourse.'[61]

For Louis Althusser, the process of self-recognition of the individual as the subject of discourse is a direct effect of ideology. In his influential essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1970), the French philosopher claims that '*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject.'[62] In Althusser's Marxist theory of the state, ideology is imposed on the individual through 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs)—'a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions.' The main categories of ISAs mentioned in the

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[60] Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', p. 781.

[61] Kevin Durrheim, 'Peace Talk and Violence: An Analysis of the Power of "Peace"', in *Culture, Power & Difference: Discourse Analysis in South Africa*, edited by Ann Levett, Amanda Kottler, Erica Burman and Ian Parker (London and Atlantic Highlands NJ: Zed Books, 1997), pp. 35-36.

[62] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', *On Ideology* (London and New York:

essay are the following: 'the religious ISA,' 'the educational ISA,' 'the family ISA,' 'the legal ISA,' 'the political ISA,' 'the trade-union ISA,' 'the communications ISA' and 'the cultural ISA.'[63] Althusser emphasises the extent to which 'the Ideological State Apparatuses *function "by ideology"*'—as opposed to the 'Repressive State Apparatus,' which 'functions "by violence"' (and includes 'the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts [and] the Prisons').[64] One of the key strategies of the ISAs, Althusser explains, is to 'subject individuals to the political State ideology,' namely '"democratic" ideology.' The communications apparatus ('press, radio and television, etc.') and the cultural apparatus ('Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.'), in particular, hammer democratic ideology by 'cramming every "citizen" with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc, by means of the press, the radio and television.'[65] Seen through the lens of Althusser's theory of the state, the Chorus of *Henry V* could be categorised within the communication and cultural apparatuses. Such a categorisation helps us recognise the extent to which the Chorus enforces pseudo-democratic ideology by interpellating its audience—'the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing,' Althusser remarks.[66] Althusser's famous example of interpellation is that of the policeman calling out to the individual in the street: 'Hey, you there!' The automatic recognition that we are the ones being hailed—as opposed to anyone else—is precisely what ensures that we become subjects. As soon as we hear the policeman's call, we immediately assume (that is, even before we turn around) that it is addressed to us. For Althusser, this process of ideological identification conditions the shift from individual to subject

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[63] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[64] *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17 and 19.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

within a given social order: interpellation connects individuals (*s*ubjects with a lowercase ‘s’) to the state (*S*ubject with a capital ‘S’). In *Henry V*, the Chorus stands for the transhistorical voice of ideology that transforms individuals into interpellated subjects. From undifferentiated individuals, the Chorus’s audience is instantly turned into a socially-defined category (‘you’, ‘gentles’, *etc.*) through a cleverly orchestrated performance. The example of *Henry V* illustrates Althusser’s theory that the ‘*mise en scène* of interpellation’ participates in ‘the very structure of all ideology.’[67]

C. HENRY V*, OR THE AESTHETICISATION OF DIFFÉRANCE*

Act V of the play opens with a warning: ‘Vouchsafe to those that have not read the story / That I may prompt them’ (5.0.1-2). Here again, the Chorus interpellates its audience through a specific directive—*Hey, you there! Read the story*. As editors point out almost unanimously, ‘the story’ in question could be a reference to Raphael Holinshed’s chronicles (Shakespeare’s main historical source for *Henry V*).[68] On the level of ‘what-is-said-in-the-play’, the Chorus assumes that its audience knows about a *certain* story. However, the referential tie of that ‘story’ is as uncertain as the presence of an audience and the location that is assigned to it. Therefore, identifying ‘the story’ exclusively with Holinshed’s historical chronicles and ‘the playhouse’ exclusively with a specific theatre in Elizabethan London severely limits *Henry V*’s potential for meaning. Every interpretive act relies on a specific notion of presence in space and time—a different one *every time* (which emphasises the temporalisation that defines all critical processes). The structural *différance* that haunts both literature and literary criticism guarantees that there can be no such thing as a fixed entity called ‘the audience’. Instead, there can only

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[68] Gurr’s footnote to the lines in the New Cambridge edition of the play reads: ‘Presumably in Holinshed,

be a multitude of audiences: every time it is invoked, the concept of audience can only refer to a heterogeneous spatio-temporal phenomenon, characterised by an intrinsic self-alienation. Following that logic, 'audience' (as a phenomenon that includes readers and playgoers alike) will always be at odds with the instance which the Chorus interpellates in the play ('you', 'gentles', *etc*.). Accordingly, the systematic historicisation of 'the playhouse', 'the story' or the 'gentles' in *Henry V* advocates a mode of criticism that silently bridges the gap between text and context (a gap that is fundamentally unbridgeable). Identifying the ontological point of origin of *Henry V* through the intra-diegetic reference to 'the story' attaches the play to a set historical narrative; this is especially problematic in view of the historically saturated field of Shakespeare studies. But as its inner contradictions testify, *Henry V* remains fundamentally open to interpretation. Besides, and this is a central concern in the present thesis, the discrepancy between signifier and signified, cleverly staged in *Henry V*, participates in the aesthetics of the drama—rather than undermining it, as it has so often been claimed.[69] If the play remains open to a multitude of contradictory and alternative discourses, as it certainly does, it is precisely because historical alienation constitutes one of its most powerful loci.[70] Whatever historical perspective we choose to adopt (medieval, Elizabethan, twenty-first century or any other perspective) can never fully coincide with the play's genuine 'inner moment', which is always *alien* by essence and can only be seen in negative—namely through what it is *not*. *Henry V* characteristically refuses to be elucidated through Shakespeare's historical moment or even through that of the historical king Henry V; more importantly perhaps, it never fully subscribes to a

[69] For a detailed overview of the (overwhelmingly unfavourable) view of anachronism in Shakespeare criticism since the seventeenth century, see Chapter 1 of this thesis, '"Violator of Chronology": *Shakespeare's Anachronisms* in Con-texts'.

[70] This phenomenon is also a characteristic feature of *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, as demonstrated in

set present, which necessarily includes 'our' own present (that of the critic speaking at a given time). Like many other plays by Shakespeare, *Henry V* resists ontological foreclosure; and this resistance is emphasised by the Chorus. The untimely aesthetics of Shakespeare's drama can be explained in terms of the registration of this resistance within the play—and, in the case of *Henry V*, the Chorus embodies the main registering instance, through the 'performative present'. Within the critical grid of this thesis, the main function of the Chorus is to question the metaphysics of presence perpetuated by much literary criticism. For its self-alienating rhetoric troubles the positive aestheticisation that underlies many critical modes, including historicist ones.

D. Chorus as Interpellated Subject—Locating Lacan's Big Other (or Not)

Althusser's theory of the state provides a useful framework to comprehend the Chorus's superficial strategy of objectification of its audience. From an Althusserian perspective, the Chorus stands for the sense that

> ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*.[71]

It seems important to make it clear now that this theory is primarily relevant to an audience-based approach to *Henry V*. In the present analysis, however, the dynamics of subjectivity have been deliberately displaced: from the beginning, we have made the somewhat unusual decision to look at the world of *Henry V* (which crucially includes 'the world' at large) from the perspective of the Chorus. Althusser's theory of the ideologically-generated subject provides us with a key 'transitional' tool (but not an end in itself, as will become clear very soon) to understand the extent to which the displacement of presence constitutes an intrinsic effect of Shakespeare's drama.

Althusser's proposition that 'an individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born' posits the becoming-subject of individuals as systematic and retroactive. As such, it sums up rather well the Chorus's perspective towards the audience it envisions. By way of an example, Althusser mentions 'the ideological ritual that surrounds the expectation of a "birth", that "happy event"'—indeed, 'everyone knows how much and in what way an unborn child is expected.' The Chorus's strategy of interpellation dramatises the ideological ritual underlying the expectation of an audience (child-like) in the play. But this expectation extends beyond the traditional boundaries of 'the play'; it is perpetuated through the assumption (hardly ever questioned by critics) that there *is* indeed an audience that is present where and when the Chorus invokes it. In *Henry V*, the Chorus might be said to stand for what Althusser calls the 'ideological constraint and pre-appointment' of a '"pathological" […] structure' with regards to its audience.[72] However, the reading of Althusser deployed in this chapter *must* necessarily take into account the elusive quality of the audience addressed by the Chorus. Throughout the play, the audience under address is indeed like a child to be born, a 'happy event' that is yet to come. But, and this is probably the most important factor to keep in mind, this happy event cannot ever be said to have arrived; in fact, it might *never* arrive. Althusser's theory of ideology is only relevant here if we adapt it to the displaced subjectivity that has been developed so far—in other words, the fact that the subject is not on the side of 'the audience' but on the side of the Chorus needs to be integrated to the theoretical analysis of the play. If the real subject of *Henry V* is the Chorus, as it has been implied so far, this can only mean that it is the one being ideologically constrained through its idea of an audience. This fantasised audience constitutes the overarching ideological instance through which the Chorus is always already subjectified.

As noted earlier, the Chorus is a pervert—its creation of a false sense of possibility in an audience that does not even exist, in particular, testifies to its perversity. Thus, in *Henry V*, the idea of a phantom audience that allegedly knows about a mysterious story constitutes the hard kernel of the Chorus's fantasy. Žižek notes that 'fantasy is the primordial form of *narrative*, which serves to occult some original deadlock'; in other words, 'the narrative silently presupposes as already given what it purports to reproduce.'[73] What is silently presupposed as already given in the Chorus's narrative is History itself; thus, the pseudo-authentic historical account of Henry V's life constitutes the original deadlock that accounts for the interpellation strategy that is developed throughout the play. But if there is no real audience, then who is being interpellated? The answer, of course, is: *the Chorus itself*. For the Chorus, the main function of audience delimitation is to ensure that enjoyment of the performance takes place. However, such a fantasy can only be fulfilled through the assurance that an audience is enjoying the play, which is an unmistakable sign that the Chorus is a pervert. As pointed out earlier, the core mechanism of perversity lies in the deferral of enjoyment onto another instance—and in the case of *Henry V*, this instance is located within the virtual space of a fantasised audience. Lacanian psychoanalysis offers some extremely relevant tools to theorise the intersubjective relation that binds the Chorus to its audience-construct. Lacan's notion of the 'big Other', in particular, is very helpful to examine the subjective dynamics of the play. The concept appears very early on in Lacanian psychoanalysis, in a seminar called 'Introduction of the Big Other' (1955). During this particular seminar, Lacan suggested that 'we [as subjects of language] in fact address A_1, A_2,' namely 'those we do not know, true Others, true subjects.' And what distinguishes those 'true Others' or 'true subjects' is that

> they are on the other side of the wall of language, there where in principle I never reach them. Fundamentally, it is them I'm aiming at every time I utter true speech, but always attain *a'*, *a''*, through reflection. I always aim at true subjects, and I have to be content with shadows. The subject is separated from the Others, the true ones, by the wall of language.[74]

A traditional, audience-based approach to *Henry V* might locate the big Other on the side of the Chorus—this would imply that 'we' identify with the audience which the Chorus has in mind, which, once again, is *not* the case in this chapter. On its own, this type of identification would merely scratch the surface of the big Other and only illustrate what Žižek calls 'the common perception' of Lacan's concept—in this over-simplified common perception, 'it is as if we, subjects of language, talk and interact like puppets, our speech and gestures dictated by some nameless all-pervasive agency.'[75] However, there is more to the big Other (and *Henry V*) than a straightforward dystopian scheme: the perceiving subject, in particular, does not have to be on the side of an audience. On a theoretical level, it might be tempting indeed to view the Chorus as an all-pervasive agency, a big Other *qua* 'Big Brother'; such an approach, however, would only illustrate a superficial aspect of Lacan's complex notion.[76] As Žižek points out, the big Other is an elusive instance that operates at the Symbolic level—in Lacanian terminology, the order of the 'Symbolic' designates the everyday reality of the subject, namely what is *experienced* as real in a given subjective field.

> The symbolic order, society's unwritten constitution, is the second nature of every speaking being: it is here, directing and controlling my acts; it is the sea I

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[74] Jacques Lacan, 'Introduction of the Big Other', *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955* [1978], edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated from the French by Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 235-47, p. 244.

[75] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006), p. 8.

[76] This type of approach is precisely the one adopted in the next chapter in order to explore the notion of interpassivity in view of Shakespearean drama. From a Lacanian point of view, there is nothing wrong with considering 'us' as the subjects of language, as long as we acknowledge the fundamentally shifting nature of subjectivity—from a pseudo-objective perspective, the subject is everywhere and nowhere at the

> swim in, yet it remains ultimately impenetrable—I can never put it in front of me and grasp it.[77]

In the present analysis, the big Other is essentially on the side of *that thing* (cold and slimy—almost otherworldly) often referred to as 'the audience', which constitutes the impenetrable Symbolic reality that the Chorus strives to fix in time and space. From this perspective, Lacan's suggestion (quoted above) that 'I always aim at true subjects, and I have to be content with shadows' fully applies to the Chorus. The intersubjective dynamics of the play, as explored in this chapter, illustrate the ever-shifting quality of the concept of the big Other.

> In spite of all its grounding power, the big Other is fragile, insubstantial, properly *virtual*, in the sense that its status is that of a subjective presupposition. It exists only in so far as subjects *act as if it exists*. Its status is similar to that of an ideological cause like Communism or Nation: it is the substance of the individuals who recognize themselves in it, the ground of their whole existence, the point of reference that provides the ultimate horizon of meaning, something for which these individuals are ready to give their lives, yet the only thing that really exists are these individuals and their activity, so this substance is actual only in so far as individuals believe in it and act accordingly.[78]

The idea of the big Other as a 'subjective presupposition' maps out the function of the audience imagined by the Chorus in *Henry V*: it is essentially a 'substance' that only exists to the extent that the subject (the Chorus) acts as if it exists. Eventually, the presence of a virtual audience in the Chorus's experiential field is precisely what allows the process of enjoyment to take place.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in this chapter, the Chorus relies on the construction of a virtual audience for the deployment of its dramatic strategy within the wider dramatic frame of the play *Henry V*. In psychoanalytical terms, the systematic deferral of enjoyment on to

[77] *Ibid.*

another instance (the fantasised audience) makes the Chorus the archetypical pervert. In this sense, the intersubjective mechanism of *Henry V* provides a graphic illustration of the big Other *qua* negatively-invested, impenetrable Symbolic entity. Lacan's concept—and especially Žižek's interpretation of it—becomes central in the next chapter, which carries on exploring the displaced subjective dynamics of Shakespearean drama through the notion of interpassivity. In order to explore further the intrinsic untimeliness that underlies the experience of literature, the focus is shifted onto 'us' as perceiving subjects of representation. 'We', as the subjective instance defined by a specific interpretive present, can also be viewed as the subjects of literature—and the Chorus itself, as well as other metadramatic Shakespearean figures, can be said to occupy the Symbolic space of the big Other.[79] Such radical reversibility suggests that the 'meaning' of literature has nothing to do with an immutable core of truth that needs to be retrieved; rather, meaning is plural as it is perpetually recreated through every act of interpretation.[80] This perpetual, maddening and unstoppable phenomenon of semantic reactualisation is possibly the most crucial and defining feature of the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama.

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[79] It might be worth emphasising once again that the 'we' that is used in the next chapter differs from the all-encompassing 'we' that featured in the chapter on *Julius Caesar*. Unlike that of Chapter 2, the 'we' of Chapter 5 is self-consciously determined by a specific historical bias—that of early twenty-first century technologically advanced societies.

[80] The previous chapter on *Hamlet* provided an extensive reflection on the notion that literature and its

CHAPTER 5 – 'I AM IN THE PICTURE': THE DISPLACEMENT OF SUBJECTIVITY AND THE AESTHETICISATION OF THE BIG OTHER IN SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

> Here the example of Shakespeare is magnificent. Who demonstrates better that texts fully conditioned by their history, loaded with history, and on historical themes, offer themselves so well for reading in historical contexts very distant from their time and place of origin, not only in the European twentieth century, but also in lending themselves to Japanese or Chinese transpositions?
>
> – Jacques Derrida, 'This Strange Institution Called Literature'[1]

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter identified the elusive audience of *Henry V* as the big Other of Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, it is essential to keep in mind that the one defining feature of the big Other is its fundamental unfixedness. In other words, the big Other is that which makes complete presence impossible—this is the main reason why this psychoanalytical concept is so crucial in the present thesis. In order to emphasise the volatile quality of the big Other, the present chapter deliberately shifts its perspective by referring to a mode of experience that clashes with that of the previous chapter (this is a deliberate and productive clash, though). While subjectivity was previously located on the side of the Chorus, potential viewers of the dramas are here considered as the subjects of representation.

Central to the chapter's argument is the sense that our perspective as viewing subjects is inherently displaced by a ghostly gaze that lurks on the sidelines of representation. 'The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am in the picture,' Lacan

[1] Jacques Derrida, '"This Strange Institution Called Literature": An Interview with Jacques Derrida', translated from the French by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, in *Acts of Literature*, edited by

remarked in his seminar, 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*' (1964).[2] This aphorism posits a core of alienation within subjectivity: as such, it constitutes the main theoretical axiom of the chapter. In Shakespearean drama, both the ghost in *Hamlet* and the witches in *Macbeth* can be said to testify to the fundamental displacement that haunts subjectivity. From the viewpoint of potential audiences, the Chorus in *Henry V* occupies a similar function in that it circumscribes viewers within an enclosed representational space (while giving them an illusion of freedom). In this sense, the Chorus can be said to crystallise the deferral of presence that underlies representation. As the key mediating instance in the play, the Chorus stands for the Lacanian big Other—for Lacan, the main function of the theatrical chorus is to take over the process of enjoyment, to enjoy the play instead of us.

While Lacan's own comments on the role of the theatrical chorus are discussed in the chapter, the reflection focuses on Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of the concept of the big Other—defined by the latter as 'the agency that decides instead of us, in our place.'[3] Žižek reads the big Other in view of the notion of interpassivity, brought to the fore in the late 1990s.[4] Interpassivity describes how, in a given representational context,

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[2] My own translation. Sheridan's English translation of the seminar contains a serious mistake; it reads: 'the picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am *not* in the picture' (Jacques Lacan, 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*', in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* [1973], edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 96). This is a problematic reversal of Lacan's original aphorism: 'le tableau, certes, est dans mon œil. Mais moi, je suis dans le tableau' (*Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (éditions du Seuil, 1973), p. 111). Anne Marsh suggests that 'this translation has influenced the way in which Lacan has been read in the English speaking world. To be "not in the picture" means that the subject has no agency. It is similar to the way in which Foucault has been read through secondary adaptations as a determinist. Neither Lacan nor Foucault are determinist theorists but their work in translation has often been read as such. For Lacan the gaze and desire are entwined and entangled so as to produce a complex web of looking and being looked at' ('Psychoanalysis: The Gaze and the Photo-graph', *The Darkroom: Photography and the Theatre of Desire* (Victoria: Macmillan, 2003), p. 47).

[3] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1991), p. 77.

[4] 'Interpassivity' as the act of projecting one's own self or emotions onto exterior objects was first used by the Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller. Žižek traces Pfaller's first use of the term to a 1996 symposium in Linz (Austria), *Die Dinge lachen an unsere Stelle* (*The Plague of Fantasies* [1997], second edition (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 144n). See also Robert Pfaller, *Die Illusionen der anderen:*

the object deprives us (*qua* subjects) of our emotional content and takes over the process of enjoyment for us. Making extensive use of Žižek's theory of interpassivity, the chapter explores the idea of the displacement of subjectivity in view of Shakespearean drama. The Chorus of *Henry V*, in particular, illustrates the principle of mediation that underlies our subjective experience of reality. In this sense, the plays can be seen as anticipating certain aspects of our own social formation. Viewed through the notion of untimely aesthetics (as developed in previous chapters), *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Henry V* stage—as well as participate in the elaboration of—the core of mediation that underlies all forms of staged entertainment. Within the larger framework of the thesis, the chapter provides a practical demonstration of the notion that the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama is always constructed in the present. In other words, this aesthetics is the direct effect of the intrusion of the viewer's eye into the literary picture.

I- Uncanny Perspectives: Shakespeare's Lacanian Optics

A. 'Looking Awry': Žižek and Richard II

In the preface to *Looking Awry* (1991), Žižek announces that Shakespeare is to be 'read strictly as [a] kitsch author.'[5] This 'kitsch Shakespeare' turns out to be a key platform in his examination of Lacanian psychoanalysis. A few pages into the book, Žižek asserts that '*Richard II* proves beyond any doubt that Shakespeare had read Lacan.'[6] He then goes on to look at his favourite passage in the play. After King Richard's departure for Ireland, the distraught Queen shares her grief with one of Richard's followers.

[5] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. vii.

[6] *Ibid.*, 9. Žižek's remark echoes Daniel Mesguich's own assertion, in 1977, that 'Shakespeare had obviously read Lacan' ('The Book to Come is a Theater', *SubStance* 6/7(18/19) (1977), 113-19, p. 118). For an account of the pairing of Shakespearean drama and Lacanian psychoanalysis in recent criticism, see Jonathan Gil Harris, *Shakespeare and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.

Unexpectedly, Bushy's attempt at comforting the Queen develops into an elaborate speech on perspective:

> Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
> Which shows like grief itself but is not so.
> For sorrow's eye, glazèd with blinding tears,
> Divides one thing entire to many objects—
> Like perspectives, which, rightly gazed upon,
> Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry,
> Distinguish form. So your sweet majesty,
> Looking awry upon your lord's departure,
> Find shapes of grief more than himself to wail,
> Which, looked on as it is, is naught but shadows
> Of what it is not.
>
> (2.2.14-24)

This speech lays the very foundation for Žižek's interpretive method, which relies on the sense that a shift in the viewer's position can make a familiar concept radically unfamiliar. 'Looking awry,' to use Shakespeare's original phrase, implies that we shift our perspective in order to 'distinguish form', that is to produce meaning.[7] In *Looking Awry* (named after *Richard II*), Žižek deliberately skews his critical position in order to provide a fresh outlook on Lacanian theory: 'this way of "looking awry" at Lacan makes it possible to discern features that usually escape a "straightforward" academic look,' he suggests.[8]

[7] For a detailed reading of this speech and how it can be said to inform Žižek's ideology critique, see Étienne Poulard, 'Shakespeare's Politics of Invisibility: Power and Ideology in *The Tempest*', *International Journal of Žižek Studies* [online] 4(1) (2010), available at http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/225/327.

B. The 'Pre-Existence of a Gaze' in Hamlet*: The Core of Alienation Underlying Subjectivity*

Repeatedly emphasised in recent scholarship, the uncanny affinity between Lacanian psychoanalysis and Shakespearean drama also stands the test of other works.[9] *Hamlet*, for instance, toys insistently with the notion of a sideways gaze that decentres subjectivity. This idea climaxes in the elaborate optics of the play within the play in Act III. While King Claudius is watching '*The Mousetrap*,' a bigger play is taking place: a play that is about Hamlet watching Claudius watch another play—'I'll observe his looks,' the prince had announced previously (3.2.217; 2.2.573). But Hamlet himself is under the constant scrutiny of invisible eyes posted everywhere. Although his original plan is to observe the king's looks, he is himself branded 'Th'observed of all observers' by Ophelia (3.1.153). And the prince is indeed being looked at from everywhere—by Claudius' secret agents, by an inscrutable ghost, but also by audiences potentially watching or reading *Hamlet*. From a Lacanian perspective, the interest of the play within the play lies in its staging of an endlessly shifting gaze: the subject's conviction of being in control of its field of vision is systematically undermined by the presence of a supplementary gaze lurking in the margins. While Claudius' central position as an observer is decentred by Hamlet's 'special observance,' the prince's own vantage point in the theatre in Elsinore is destabilised by a multitude of invisible eyes coming from all sides (3.2.17). The notion that the gaze manifests itself from a point that is always already elsewhere is a typical Lacanian locus: 'in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture,' Lacan remarked in his famous seminar on

[9] On this topic, see notably *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* by Philip Armstrong (London: Routledge, 2001) and *After Oedipus: Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* by Julia Reinhard Lupton and Kenneth

the gaze.[10] Thus, Hamlet's seemingly privileged position as a looking subject in the theatre renders him oblivious to the fact that he is also part of the picture. This primordial scopic estrangement also mirrors our own precarious position as viewers (readers and playgoers alike) of *Hamlet*. As the play illustrates, theatrical representation fundamentally destabilises how we see ourselves in relation to the world. Although we might like to think of ourselves as comfortably uninvolved observers, we (like Claudius) sooner or later realise that we too are in the spotlight: 'we are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world.'[11] Lacan develops this locus in his seminar on *Hamlet*, 'a tragedy of desire that establishes the subject in dependence on the signifier.' Thus, 'Hamlet is constantly suspended in the time of the Other,' and 'whatever [he] may do, he will do it only at the hour of the Other.'[12]

The play within the play in *Hamlet* can be read as a metadramatic comment on the precarious situation of the viewer, not only in the theatre, but in the world at large. The presence of an ever-shifting gaze circumscribing the subject makes vision a fundamentally alienating experience. What destabilises subjectivity, according to Lacan, is 'the pre-existence of a gaze,' which testifies to the sensation that 'I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.'[13] In *Hamlet*, the pre-existence of a gaze is epitomised in the figure of the Ghost, which always already precedes the subject in the scopic field. The ghost's decentring function is dramatised at the beginning of the play when one of the sentinels posted on the battlements inquires: 'What, has this thing appeared again?' (1.1.19). As mentioned in the previous chapter,

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[10] Jacques Lacan, 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*', p. 106. Martin Jay specifically locates Lacan's optics within the larger context of an 'antiocularcentric discourse' in twentieth-century French philosophy and psychoanalysis (*Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 16).

[11] Lacan, 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*', p. 75.

[12] Jacques Lacan, 'Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*', edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated from the French by James Hulbert, *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977), 11-52, pp. 17 and 18.

what fascinated Derrida about this particular line in the play is that the *thing* in question has not 'appeared' yet—it is literally the first reference to the Ghost in the play. Thus, the first scene of *Hamlet* confronts us in effect with a *thing* that 'comes back, so to speak, for the first time,' Derrida points out in *Specters of Marx*.[14] The fact that the Ghost's first apparition is itself haunted establishes the pre-existence of a gaze in the play. The Ghost stands for the asymmetrical dialectic between the subject's eye and the objectifying gaze to which it is subjected—after all, Lacan defined the experience of '*seeing*' as that to 'which I am subjected in an original way.'[15] In this sense, it can be said that *Hamlet* maps out a visual regime where seeing is intrinsically obscene because it involves a radical form of exhibitionism. The Ghost symbolises an omniscient gaze that comes from all sides; and although it 'fixe[s] [its] eyes upon [us] […] Most constantly,' such a gaze cannot be allocated a point of origin because, from the beginning (and before—*especially* before), it comes from elsewhere (1.3.232-3). Derrida's thought-provoking analysis of the play suggests that the Ghost, *qua* pure gaze, is at once all-seeing and unseen (presence *and* absence):

> This Thing meanwhile looks at us and sees us not see it even when it is there. A spectral asymmetry interrupts here all specularity. It de-synchronizes, it recalls us to anachrony. We will call this the *visor effect*: we do not see who looks at us.[16]

Powerfully dramatised in *Hamlet*, the de-synchronising function of the gaze is a recurring Shakespearean locus. The spooky sense that we do not see who looks at us, in spite of being looked at from all sides, runs like a guiding thread in Shakespeare's

[14] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* [1993], translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

[15] Lacan, 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*', p. 72.

Jacobean dramas—from the dark paranoia of *Measure for Measure* to the bleak panopticism of *The Tempest*.[17]

C. 'Enter Three Witches': A Gaze Lurking in the Margins of Theatricality

In *Macbeth*, the witches occupy the same *οὐτόπος* ("non-space") as the Ghost in *Hamlet*: they epitomise the pre-existence of a gaze that lurks in the margins of theatricality.[18] Their de-synchronising function transpires in the first scene of the play, as the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé pointed out in 'La fausse entrée des sorcières dans *Macbeth*' (1897). In the essay, Mallarmé suggests that the witches' supposed entrance—'*Enter*

[17] There is consistent debate around the issue of whether Lacan's discourse on optics is compatible with other French theories of vision, and notably Michel Foucault's reflections on panopticism. Thus, Anne Marsh notes that 'critics have often […] tended to read Jacques Lacan through the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and combined these two interpretations of the gaze to support a Foucauldian panoptic analysis. It is therefore necessary to re-examine Lacan's thesis on the gaze in order to undermine this panoptic determinism and to recuperate a subject who is always part of the picture, especially as it is being made. In Lacan's thesis, the subject becomes a kind of virus infecting the picture' (*The Darkroom*, p. 42). Martin Jay traces this ongoing panopticisation of Lacan to an essay by Jacques-Alain Miller—Lacan's son-in-law and the editor of the French journal of psychoanalysis *Ornicar?* (*Downcast Eyes*, pp. 381-84). First published in 1975 as 'Le despotisme de l'utile: la machine panoptique de Jeremy Bentham', the essay examines Bentham's 1791 treatise on a model prison. Considering the concept of the panopticon, Miller suggests that 'this configuration sets up a brutal dissymmetry of visibility. The enclosed space lacks depth; it is spread out and open to a single, solitary central eye. It is bathed in light. Nothing and no one can be hidden inside it—except the gaze itself, the invisible omnivoyeur. Surveillance confiscates the gaze for its own profit, appropriates it, and submits the inmate to it' ('Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic Device', *October* 41 (Summer, 1987), p. 4). But, as Jay notes, 'Miller was not the first to criticize the coercive implications of Bentham's panoptic dream. […] Nor was his critique the most influential, that honor going to Michel Foucault's more extensive discussion in *Discipline and Punish*'—also published in 1975 (p. 383). While 'Jacques-Alain Miller was the first psychoanalyst to see the panoptic model as the architectural embodiment of Lacan's theory of the eye and the gaze,' Marsh argues that 'Miller really offers a psycho-social reading, much like Foucault's. There is no direct reference to Lacan and the question of the subject's desire, which is fundamental to psychoanalysis, is not addressed.' By contrast, 'the field of vision explored by Lacan is full of traps, it is a labyrinth rather than a panopticon' (*The Darkroom*, pp. 42 and 46). However, Jay points out (in relation to both Miller and Louis Althusser) that 'the psychological analysis of vision in Lacan could easily be absorbed into a social and political critique in which *voir* was linked with both *savoir* and *pouvoir*' (p. 383). And indeed, 'Lacanian and Foucauldian positions have been confounded by an unstable theoretical marriage,' Marsh observes. 'The geometric scheme, embodied by the panopticon, is about *space* and does not adequately explain the function of the eye, let alone the gaze which is active within the relationship between the eye and light, enmeshed within a complex corporeal and psychological space.' In contrast with Foucauldian optics, 'Lacan's concept of the subject as blind spot, a stain within representation, allows for a more complex and less homogenous interpretation and understanding of visual representation,' Marsh claims (*The Darkroom*, pp. 42, 46 and 48). In his seminar on 'The Line and the Light' (1964), Lacan remarks: 'if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called the stain, the spot' (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, p. 97).

[18] Terry Eagleton makes a similar point when he argues that 'the witches figure as the "unconscious" of

three WITCHES'—is not really an entrance (1.1.0). Instead, they seem to be already present before the performance starts: it is 'as if the curtain has simply risen a minute too soon, betraying fateful goings-on.'[19] In this sense, the untimely rising of the curtain (*lever de rideau*) lets us peek at something that should have remained hidden: the extra-dramatic presence of a gaze that stares back at us from the gaping darkness of the stage.[20] Rehearsing Mallarmé's insight, Jean-Michel Rabaté notes that 'the curtain that separates us from the mystery has been raised too early, forcing us to peep through a darkness that was not meant for us.'[21] In the theatre, the curtain embodies (although it is also supposed to hide it) the 'darkness that was not meant for us', which corresponds to the inscrutable moment that precedes representation. But in *Macbeth*, the curtain is by definition *always* lifted too early, letting us 'peep through the blanket of the dark' (1.5.51). Instead of entering the page/stage, the witches become visible, suddenly and intermittently, in the epileptic blink of lightning strokes—'*Thunder and lightning*'

[19] '*Ouverture sur un chef-d'œuvre : comme, en le chef-d'œuvre, le* rideau *s'est* simplement *levé, une minute,* trop tôt*, trahissant des menées fatidiques*' (Stéphane Mallarmé, "La fausse entrée des sorcières dans *Macbeth*", *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, 1945), p. 348). Translated from the French by Barbara Johnson and cited in Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* [1987] (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 123-24.

[20] By staging a scene that lets us see what should not be seen, the witches reveal their close affinity with the category of the uncanny, as identified by Sigmund Freud. In his famous essay from 1919, Freud declared, rather surprisingly, that 'the ghostly apparitions in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *Julius Caesar* may be dark and terrifying, but at bottom they are no more uncanny than, say, the serene world of Homer's gods.' This is all the more puzzling when we know that, in the same essay, Freud considers the uncanny as that which 'was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open' (*The Uncanny*, edited by Hugh Haughton and translated from the German by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 156 and 132). It seems difficult to agree with Freud's somewhat whimsical suggestion that the ghostly apparitions in Shakespeare have nothing to do with the uncanny—on the other hand, this remark can be viewed as a practical instance of the uncanny. It is worth noting that the witches are referred to as 'weird sisters' in *Macbeth* (it is their official name in the *dramatis personæ* list) and that the word 'strange' recurs sixteen times in the play. Thus, '"strange" would perhaps be Shakespeare's word for "uncanny", unheimlich,' Nicholas Royle suggests ('The Poet: *Julius Caesar* and the Democracy to Come', *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 4). See also Nicholas Royle's monograph, *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), which contains many interesting considerations on literature and the category of the uncanny.

[21] Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Given: 1° Art, 2° Crime: Modernity, Murder and Mass Culture* (Brighton: Sussex

(1.1.0).[22] Following Mallarmé, Marjorie Garber remarks that 'the witches do not *enter*, are not described as entering the scene in the ordinary way of actors—instead they *appear*: *extra-scéniquement*, uncannily present.'[23] What the witches stand for in the first scene of *Macbeth* is a presence that precedes all presence, an 'extra-scénique' gaze that transcends the spatio-temporal boundaries of the stage and decentres the subject's fantasised ontological centre. This oblique gaze does not only address the characters in the play; it also circumscribes potential audiences: 'the spectator of the play *Macbeth*, and Macbeth himself as spectator of the witches' play, are both thereby subjected to a gaze, *photographed* as components within the spectacle,' Philip Armstrong observes.[24] Thus, the peripheral gaze of the witches imparts the sense that we are not only spectators of the play: crucially, we are also part of the performance. From the beginning, even *before* the play starts, we are unwittingly '*photographed* as components within the spectacle'. When we go to the theatre, we obey a scopic drive that makes us want to 'look at things' compulsively: we watch the world as spectacle.[25] However, the originary split between the subject's eye and the object's gaze posited by Lacan guarantees that we are fundamentally looked at in the spectacle of the world. Rephrasing this foundational axiom of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Žižek writes: 'when I

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[22] 'A lightning flash is composed of a series of strokes with an average of about four. The length and duration of each lightning stroke vary, but typically average about 30 microseconds (the average peak power per stroke is about 10^{12} watts)' (Hugh Christian and Melanie Cook, "A Lightning Primer: Characteristics of a Storm", *Lightning & Atmospheric Electricity Research at the GHCC* (NASA), http://thunder.nsstc.nasa.gov/primer/primer2.html (accessed 31 August 2011)).

[23] Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers*, p. 123.

[24] Philip Armstrong, "Guilty Creatures: The Visual Regime of Shakespeare's Later Tragedies" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wales, College of Cardiff, 1995), p. 245. See also Armstrong's monograph, *Shakespeare's Visual Regime: Tragedy, Psychoanalysis and the Gaze* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

[25] Although Freud had suggested oral, anal and genital drives, Lacan added the scopic drive to the main categories of drive: 'it is not, after all, for nothing that analysis is not carried out face to face. The split between eye and gaze will enable us, you will see, to add the scopic drive to the list of the drives' (Lacan,

look at an object, the object is always already gazing at me, and from a point at which I cannot see it.'[26]

The dramatic status of the witches in *Macbeth* is strikingly unclear: although they are characters in the play (they are listed in the *dramatis personæ*), they also function as a metadramatic commentary, in the manner of a chorus. Such hybridity is apparent in the first scene, where they figure not so much as characters but rather as narrators introducing the play in a few words.

FIRST WITCH	When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
SECOND WITCH	When the hurly-burly's done, When the battle's lost and won.
THIRD WITCH	That will be ere the set of the sun.
FIRST WITCH	Where the place?
SECOND WITCH	Upon the heath.
THIRD WITCH	There to meet with Macbeth

(1.1.1-7)

The whole plot of *Macbeth* is here summarised in the space of seven lines: recalling those two-minute comic adaptations by the Reduced Shakespeare Company, the first scene of the play is a bit of a narratorial joke, anticipating subsequent subversions of the play.[27] The reference to the main protagonist—'There to meet with Macbeth'—announces the fateful encounter that is to take place later in the same act. Like a chorus, the witches speak catachronically (their utterances appear in a different order from that of the narrative which unfolds for audiences): in this way, they give us glimpses of the action to come. But are they merely anticipating the action in a descriptive mode or are they actually instigating the play performatively? The strong performative dimension of the witches' utterances suggests that they hold a form of authorial agency. Such performativity is encapsulated in the third witch's impatient injunction, 'Anon'

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[26] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 109.

[27] *The Reduced Shakespeare Company: The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* (2000) is available on DVD. Their two-minute rendition of *Macbeth* can be viewed at

(meaning 'right now' or 'at once' in Shakespeare's English), the aim of which, it seems, is to conjure up immediate dramatic presence (8). So, does the witches' famous aphorism, 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair,' crystallise the play's reversal of established values or is it a generative statement (performative) that engenders the play *de facto* (10)? There is no readymade answer to this question: *Macbeth* famously keeps the mystery intact regarding the origin and agency of its witches, whose dramatic intervention is, in their own words, 'a deed without a name' (4.1.65). While the witches are part of *Macbeth* as we may read it or watch it, their position in the scopic field is constantly shifting, which conveys an uncanny effect of presence as absence (just like the Ghost in *Hamlet*). The primordial ontological shift that the witches embody is precisely what makes *Macbeth* so relevant to contemporary reflections on subjectivity. Their role as metadramatic commentary originates in the empty dramatic space (*οὐτόπος*) from which they speak. In a Žižekian sense, what the witches symbolise is the necessary perspective, the 'awry' view that allows the observer to 'distinguish form'. Readers and viewers of *Macbeth* often wonder what the witches actually 'do' in the play. On the level of dramatic enjoyment, at least, it is clear: they tell us *how to enjoy* the play. Like the chorus of Greek tragedy, the witches are the managers of enjoyment.

II- INTERPASSIVITY: ON THE DISPLACEMENT OF SUBJECTIVITY IN SHAKESPEARE AND IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

A. THE INTERPASSIVE CHORUS OF HENRY V

In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan comments on the role of the classical chorus in the theatrical economy of enjoyment:

> When you go to the theatre in the evening, you are preoccupied by the affairs of the day, by the pen that you lost, by the check that you will have to sign the next day. You shouldn't give yourselves too much credit. Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of

> have to worry; even if you don't feel anything, the Chorus will feel in your stead.[28]

As Lacan points out, the theatrical chorus displaces subjectivity by taking charge of the audience's emotions. Not only are we told what to feel but *it* feels for us; we are 'felt for', so to speak. Nowhere in Shakespeare's plays is this idea better illustrated than in *Henry V*, whose coercive chorus epitomises the Lacanian big Other (as Žižek remarks, 'the "big Other" designates precisely the agency that decides instead of us, in our place'). One of the most fascinating aspects of *Henry V*—explored in the previous chapter—lies in the Chorus's strategy of objectification of (what it sees as) its audience. Let us pretend for a while that we are in the position of the imaginary audience under address. At all times, the Chorus's dizzying melodramatic logorrhoea ensures that the emotional commentary is done for us: all we are required to do, it seems, is to watch the Chorus enjoy the play in our own place. In Act IV, for instance, it insists on the need for us to 'sit patiently and inly ruminate,' to 'sit and see'—meanwhile, the emotional content is taken charge of (4.0.24; 52). Each choric intervention is an occasion to bombard us with repetitive orders apparently aimed at depriving us of our free will. While the Chorus revels in the bombastic grandeur of its historical narrative, we are constantly asked to 'suppose' or 'imagine' that we actively participate in the dramatic deployment.[29] The numerous appeals to the spectators create a powerful sense of interactivity; we are given a central role in the dramatic process. However, and as Žižek explains, the situation in which the object carries out the emotional commentary for 'me' is the exact opposite of interactivity:

> The other side of this interactivity is interpassivity. The obverse of interacting with the object (instead of just passively following the show) is the situation in

[28] Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 310.

[29] For specific examples, see previous chapter—'"O My Democratic Friends": *Henry V* and the

> which the object itself takes from me, deprives me of, my own passivity, so that it is the object itself that enjoys the show instead of me, relieving me of the duty to enjoy myself.[30]

In *Henry V*, the deprivation of the viewer's passivity is enacted by the Chorus taking over the process of enjoyment. In this sense, the Chorus appears as the ultimate symbol of interpassivity. Thus, when the Chorus enjoys for me, '*I am passive through the Other*.'[31]

B. THREE INSTANCES OF INTERPASSIVITY IN CONTEMPORARY MASS ENTERTAINMENT

The most disturbing aspect of interpassivity lies in the way the object can experience emotions in my place: 'it is as if some figure of the other—in this case, the Chorus—can take over from us and experience for us our innermost and most spontaneous feelings and attitudes, inclusive of crying and laughing,' Žižek writes.[32] In *Henry V*, the Chorus exults, manifestly intoxicated by its own narrative: 'now sits expectation in the air' (2.0.8). As the feeling of anticipation is experienced for us by 'some figure of the other', we are deprived of our emotional content. The main effect of being 'felt for' in this way is that the status of the audience *qua* positively invested subject is cancelled. In Lacanian terminology, the matheme $ refers to the inherently barred or split status of the subject, which is constituted through a lack.[33] Thus,

> the very fact that I can be deprived of even my innermost psychic ('mental') content, that the big Other (or fetish) can laugh for me, and so on, is what makes me $, the barred subject, the pure void with no positive substantial content.[34]

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[30] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006), p. 24.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 26.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 22.

[33] See Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre IV, La relation d'objet* (Paris : Seuil, 1998). No English translation available at this point.

A modern equivalent of the theatrical chorus would be canned laughter—artificial audience laughter inserted into TV programmes. Canned laughter was first devised by the American sound engineer Charles Rolland Douglass in the 1950s, when the need to simulate live audiences became pressing, due to the ever-increasing costs of live TV sitcoms.[35] The 'Laff Box', as it was then dubbed, was a huge tape machine which stood 'more than two feet tall, operated like an organ, with a keyboard to select the style, sex and age of the laugh as well as a foot pedal to time the length of the reaction.'[36] On a purely mechanical level, canned laughter emulates the 'genuine' (or rather expected) emotional response of an audience. However, its most far-reaching effect is that it ultimately supplants the so-called genuine emotion it purports to stage. In this sense, it is not sufficient to say that canned laughter imitates human feelings; rather, it literally takes the place of them. For Žižek, the process of emotional substitution that canned laughter activates epitomises the interpassive process.

> When I come home in the evening too exhausted to engage in meaningful activity, I just tune in to a TV sitcom; even if I do not laugh, but simply stare at the screen, tired after a hard day's work, I nonetheless feel relieved after the show. It is as if the TV were literally laughing in my place, instead of me.[37]

Canned laughter empties me of my emotional content: it enjoys for me when I am too tired to think or engage with whatever I am watching (which is no longer relevant). As such, it highlights a central function of mass entertainment, which is to relieve me of the duty to enjoy myself.[38]

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[35] Miss Cellania, 'Artificially Sweetened: The Story of Canned Laughter' (22 August 2012), *Neatorama*, http://www.neatorama.com/2012/08/22/Artificially-Sweetened-The-Story-of-Canned-Laughter/ (accessed 24 December 2012).

[36] Adam Bernstein, 'Charles Douglass, 93; Gave TV Its Laugh Track', *The Washington Post* (24 April 2003), http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A27715-2003Apr23¬Found=true (accessed 06 September 2011).

[37] Slavoj Žižek, 'Will You Laugh for Me, Please?' (18 July 2003), *In These Times*, http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/88 (accessed 06 September 2011).

[38] In a paper called 'The Enjoying Machine', Mladen Dolar offers 'a glance into the prehistory of

Another TV-related example of interpassivity is the practice that consists in recording films (or other programmes) and storing them for future viewing—'for which, of course, there is almost never time,' Žižek points out:

> Although I do not actually watch the films, the very awareness that the films I love are stored in my video library gives me a profound satisfaction, and occasionally enables me to simply relax and indulge in the exquisite art of *far niente*—as if the VCR is in a way *watching them for me, in my place*.[39]

Video recording is a significant modern instance that illustrates the extent to which mass entertainment relies on a big Other figure enjoying in my place. Thus, when the video player is watching the films for me, I can afford to do nothing: I can truly relax. *At last*, I can watch TV in peace because I know that the 'important stuff' is taken care of by the Other—here again, I am being 'felt for'. Far from being an empowering activity, watching TV fundamentally implies that *I am being watched*. The ultimate example for the idea that enjoyment relies, at heart, on the displacement of subjectivity is pornography, which functions more and more in an interpassive way, Žižek explains. Thus,

> X-rated films are no longer primarily the means to excite the user for his (or her) solitary masturbatory activity—just staring at the screen where 'the action takes place' is sufficient, it is enough for me to observe how others enjoy in the place of me.[40]

In effect, pornography magnifies the core principle of alienation that underlies the whole experience of watching television. If pornography is so unnerving, it is precisely because it takes us too close to this principle by bringing to the surface the kernel of obscenity that sustains mass entertainment.[41]

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http://www.scribd.com/doc/59669927/amber-08-Art-and-Technology-Festiva (accessed 18 January 2012), pp. 136-47.

[39] Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, 24.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] This kind of close-up effect can be found elsewhere in popular culture—and most notably in David Lynch's films, when the camera typically zooms in on an apparently insignificant detail and suddenly

C. 'A PARALYSED OBJECT-GAZE': THE OBJECTIFICATION OF THE VIEWER

Ultimately, what pornography helps us realise is the extent to which mediated entertainment in all its forms is inherently pornographic. The intrinsic obscenity of the modern industry of large-scale entertainment can be read in the very geography of Elizabethan London. In Shakespeare's time, playhouses were typically relegated to the outskirts of the city, along with brothels. This significant geographical determination asserts theatricality's elective affinity with pornography—from the Greek *pornē*, literally meaning 'prostitution'. The prostitutive nature of theatre is dramatised in *Henry V*, with a promiscuous Chorus that flirts with its audience relentlessly:

> the scene
> Is now transported, gentles, to Southampton.
> There is the playhouse now, there must you sit,
> And thence to France shall we convey you safe
> And bring you back, charming the narrow seas
> To give you gentle pass, for if we may
> We'll not offend one stomach with our play.
>
> (2.0.34-40)

Throughout *Henry V*, the Chorus refers to its audience as 'gentles'—which, in Shakespeare's time, was synonymous with 'well-born', 'honourable' or 'noble'. However, this systematic gentrification is only a preliminary stage in the lewd flirtatious strategy of the Chorus, which then offers to take its spectators to France, 'charming the narrow seas' to give them 'gentle pass'. The proclaimed destination gives us a clue as to how the proposition should be read: the French word *passe*, a euphemism for sexual gratification, is generally used in the expression *maison de passe* (literally 'brothel')—

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white fences, waving firemen and well-groomed kids crossing the street. The scene's dream-like quality culminates in the figure of a middle-aged man watering his garden. However, the harmonious feeling soon disintegrates when the man suddenly suffers a stroke and collapses. The camera then zooms in on the grass, revealing a multitude of cockroaches crawling about. In the next scene, the main protagonist Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) finds a severed ear in a field; a close up reveals it to be infested with ants. For Žižek's analysis of *Blue Velvet*, see 'David Lynch, or, the Feminine Depression', in *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 113-29. For an extensive discussion of *Blue Velvet* in view of Žižek's theories, see Todd McGowan, 'Fantasizing the Father in *Blue Velvet*', *The Impossible David Lynch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007),

this is where the English expression 'to make a pass' comes from. So the Chorus's figurative pledge to 'give […] gentle pass' to its audience is also a straightforward proposition to pleasure them in a sexual way—as well as a very convincing demonstration that from being 'felt for' to being 'felt up' there is a very fine line. We are in the presence of a sexually aggressive Chorus that flirts with us, chats us up, comes on to us. *Il nous drague!* (as the French would say). The expression is very appropriate here as it nails down two essential features of the Chorus's naughty flirtation with its fantasised audience: while coming on to us in an overtly sexual way, it also 'drags' us quite literally—a double function that recalls that of the prostitute, who has to be promiscuous and engaging in order to attract customers. Thus, in *Henry V*, the Chorus drags its audience to a performance by making explicit promises of sexual gratification. Such a perverted little dramatic strategy illustrates the extent to which theatre is the pornographic institution *par excellence*.

Ultimately, pornography crystallises the extent to which staged entertainment relies on the viewer being assigned the status of an object.

> Contrary to the commonplace according to which, in pornography, the other (the person shown on the screen) is degraded to an object of our voyeuristic pleasure, we must stress that it is the spectator himself who effectively occupies the position of the object. The real subjects are the actors on the screen trying to rouse us sexually, while we, the spectators, are reduced to a paralyzed object-gaze.[42]

Žižek's insight prompts the sense that pornography is nothing but a metonymy for mass entertainment at large. What pornography does, in effect, is magnify the obscene dynamics of enjoyment underlying theatre, television or cinema. In other words, it makes apparent something that is already *there* in the visual arts.[43] Likewise, the anti-ocularcentric play within the play of *Hamlet* and the Chorus *dragueur* of *Henry V* both

[42] Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 110.

[43] [illegible]

testify to theatre's capacity to reflect on its own alienating function in relation to the viewer's eye. The idea that vision is at heart an alienating experience for the subject is staged in one of the most memorable episodes of Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation from Anthony Burgess' novel, *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). Psychopathic delinquent Alex DeLarge is the leader of a small band of thugs whose main occupation is to indulge in 'ultra-violence'. After murdering a woman in her house, Alex is captured by the police and sentenced to fourteen years in prison. Two years into his sentence, he is offered an alternative procedure: the Ludovico technique—an experimental aversion therapy which aims at rehabilitating criminals within two weeks. The 'therapy' consists in forcing the subject to watch violent images for protracted periods of time while under the effect of nausea-inducing drugs; the use of iron specula guarantees that the victim's eyes remain open at all times. It is probably not a coincidence that the scene bears striking similarities with the play within the play in *Hamlet*. Does not Alex's 'paralysed object-gaze' in the experimental scientific cinema exactly match Hamlet's position as 'the observed of all observers' in the theatre in Elsinore? In both situations, the subject is staged as deprived of its privileged viewing position. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the possibility of such a vantage-point is undermined by the doctors' ubiquitous gaze, coming from all sides and circumscribing their patient. The dehumanising effect of this medical gaze, all-seeing but unseen, is implied by the spectral presence of the doctors at the back of the cinema: merged in the blinding halo of the projector's light, they are hardly discernible, except for their ghost-like white coats. Ultimately, such an analogy demonstrates how Shakespearean drama and modern mass entertainment can be read in view of one another. While the plays can be used in order to look at certain aspects of our own social formation, contemporary artworks can also provide interesting entry points into Shakespeare—these are two key presentist modes of investigation.

Eventually, such methods can be said to illustrate as well as make use of what has been identified, throughout the thesis, as the untimely aesthetics of Shakespearean drama.

CONCLUSION – BEYOND RESISTANCE: POST-CRITICAL SURRENDER

The final chapter of this thesis has aimed to demonstrate how some key metadramatic Shakespearean characters can be said to register as well as participate in a radical displacement of the viewer's subjectivity (assuming there *is* indeed a viewer in the playhouse, this time). Thus, the ghost in *Hamlet*, the witches in *Macbeth* and the Chorus in *Henry V* can illustrate how—from the beginning, and even *before*—subjectivity is haunted by an elusive instance that objectifies the viewing subject. *Henry V*'s Chorus, in particular, constitutes a powerful instance of the politics of interpassivity that conditions our experience not only of theatre but of all forms of staged entertainment—as discussed in the chapter, the Chorus (through its very function in the mediation of subjectivity) anticipates some defining features of the modern entertainment industry such as canned laughter and pornography. Other significant examples of interpassivity, not examined in the chapter, include televised football matches and adverts—in those instances, the intervention of a pervasive commenting voice reminds us that the emotional commentary provided by the TV set is essentially an updated version of the classical chorus that not only urges us to enjoy but literally enjoys for us. For Žižek, though, the 'exact counterpart of the Chorus in antique tragedy' remains canned laughter:

> After some supposedly funny or witty remark, you can hear the laughter and the applause included in the soundtrack of the show itself. Here we have the exact counterpart of the Chorus in antique tragedy; it's here that we have to look for 'living Antiquity'. That is to say, why this laughter? The first possible answer—that it serves to remind us when to laugh—is interesting enough because it implies the paradox that laughter is a matter of duty and not of some spontaneous feeling. But this answer isn't sufficient, because usually we don't laugh. The only correct answer would then be that the other—embodied in the TV set—is relieving us even of our duty to laugh, i.e., is laughing instead of us. So, even if, tired from the hard day's stupid work, we did nothing all evening

> but gaze drowsily into the TV screen, we can say afterwards that objectively, through the medium of the other, we had a really good time.[1]

As Žižek points out, canned laughter always seems to intervene at the wrong time. This implies that there is a strange untimeliness that guarantees that, whenever the TV set is laughing, we are not laughing. Along the same lines, it could be said that whenever the Chorus is commenting on (what is supposed to be the 'real') *Henry V*, we (as viewing subjects) are experiencing mediation to a very intense degree. This is a striking example of how Shakespearean drama can be experienced in view of an aesthetics of untimeliness. For, ultimately, the Chorus emphasises the deferral of presence that is embedded in all linguistic processes.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida notes that 'language *adds itself* to presence and supplants it, defers it within the indestructible desire to rejoin it.'[2] By providing a comment on a pseudo-authentic and supposedly unmediated historical scene, the Chorus of *Henry V* can be said to rely on, promote as well as participate in the elaboration of a metaphysics of presence. Its utterances add themselves to the imagined presence of that scene; and so, to use Derrida's phrase, they defer presence within the indestructible desire to rejoin it. The notion that language defers presence by adding itself to it is epitomised in the practice of literary criticism—another key example of interpassivity. In *The Subject of Tragedy* (1985), Catherine Belsey suggests that 'literary criticism is […] a choric elegy for lost presence.'[3] Belsey's analogy is significant to our purposes here in that it reminds us that the Chorus of *Henry V* is essentially a proto-literary critic. In the manner of a theatrical chorus, literary criticism tells us *how to enjoy* by providing

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[1] Slavoj Žižek, 'The Lacanian Real: *Television*', *Symptom 9* (2008), *lacan dot com*, http://www.lacan.com/symptom/?p=38#_ftn1 (accessed 09 September 2011).

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [1967], translated from the French by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 280.

[3] Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London:

a supplementary comment on literature. While all criticism inherently testifies to a loss of presence, what often distinguishes postmodern criticism is its self-reflexive acknowledgement, and in some cases, celebration of such loss. Francis Barker's *The Tremulous Private Body*, already addressed in the introduction to this thesis, provides a good example of a Shakespeare criticism that self-consciously fashions itself as postmodern. The following passage, in particular, is worth quoting again. Writing about Shakespeare's most famous play, Barker argues that '*Hamlet* is nothing but the prince's evasion of a series of positions offered him':

> The point is not to supply this absence, but to aggravate its historical significance. […] Rather than a gap to be filled, Hamlet's mystery is a void to be celebrated, therefore, against the individualist illusion of man as free and full of meaning; a fable which it is still ours to undo today.[4]

As pointed out earlier, Barker's rejection of the 'individualist illusion of man as free and full of meaning' illustrates the politics of resistance through which a number of cultural materialists have sought to distinguish themselves from new historicism. What is purposefully resisted here is presence itself—a 'fable which it is still ours to undo today', in Barker's own words. As a specific example, this occurrence should not obfuscate the fact that all literary criticism, whether postmodernist or not, eschews presence, precisely because of the 'fables' it seeks to 'undo'. Barker's assertion that 'Hamlet's mystery is a void to be celebrated' calls for a recognition of non-presence as a valid critical category; such thematisation of the impossibility of presence, it is suggested, can constitute a literary politics of its own.

But, ultimately, resistance to presence reaches beyond the superficial realm of the thematic: as the thesis has demonstrated in various ways, *différance* is inscribed within the linguistic processes through which the criticism is formed. And whether this

[4] Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*, quoted in Richard Wilson, 'Historicising New Historicism', *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, edited by Richard Dutton and

objective process is acknowledged (or even celebrated) is ultimately irrelevant. For criticism intrinsically resists—and, in that respect, *what* it actually resists does not particularly matter. The main concern throughout this thesis has been to emphasise how Shakespearean drama can be said to aestheticise the intrinsically differential quality of literature. With this aim in mind, the chapter on *Julius Caesar* has suggested that the untimeliness that haunts literary works can be experienced within the diegetic framework of a play. Following this reflection, the chapter on *Hamlet* has demonstrated that *différance* is in fact always already at work in all the subjective responses (not only critical, strictly speaking) to a work of art. This ultimately implies that literature has no 'in-itself', no inalienable core of presence. With a large focus on *Henry V*, the last two chapters of the thesis have demonstrated how such *différance* is the effect of a maddening mediation of presence at work not only 'in' literature (and 'its' alleged historical moment) but essentially everywhere else (and from a multitude of historical moments). Eventually, the notion of interpassivity has allowed us to examine the implications of this mediation for the viewing subject *in the present*. Read in the light of interpassivity, Shakespeare's plays can help us comprehend how meaning and subjectivity are systematically displaced in all forms of staged entertainment—on the other hand, we should remember that the plays themselves crucially participate in this generalised deferral of presence.

If our modern lives are regimented by mediative processes, as they are, interpassivity does not necessarily have to be a disempowering mechanism. In *The Plague of Fantasies*, Žižek insists on the coexistence of two seemingly contradictory aspects of the interpassive subject: while the big Other deprives us of our individual capacity to enjoy, it also takes over the mechanical, repetitive and alienating functions

inherent to the process of enjoyment.[5] Far from being antagonistic, these two aspects of interpassivity in fact complement each other. In many ways, this uncanny reversibility challenges the typical postmodern impasse of the disarticulated subject. Žižek repeatedly insists on the liberating potential contained within the interpassive process:

> By surrendering my innermost content, including my dreams and anxieties, to the Other, a space opens up in which I am free to breathe: when the Other laughs for me, I am free to take a rest; when the Other is sacrificed instead of me, I am free to go on living with the awareness that I did atone for my guilt; and so on.[6]

Thus, for Žižek, staged entertainment can be used as a medium to experience the relieving potential of the big Other. Thus, when the TV set is laughing for me I am relieved of the burden to enjoy. Likewise, when the literary critic (or the Chorus) is telling me what a work is actually about or how I am supposed to enjoy it, I am relieved of the burden to enjoy. However, this recognition only provides a very superficial (and rather dubious) type of relief, as it essentially implies our complicity in being brainwashed. The only way of experiencing interpassivity as a genuinely liberating experience is to deliberately shut off those voices. This can be done, for instance, by turning the TV off. In place of the ubiquitous injunction telling me what and how to enjoy, there is suddenly silence and the possibility for healthy introspection.

It would be hard to deny that we live in a world of extreme mediation. Accordingly, it might appear important, to some of us at least, to find effective ways of bypassing the complex interpretive layering that conditions our experience of reality—this is all the more relevant to academic practices within the humanities, where the degree of mental layering often takes alarming proportions. Towards the end of his life, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger discussed the concept of *Gelassenheit*—

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[5] Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 147.

often translated as ‘releasement’. While Žižek dismisses Heidegger’s use of the concept as a mere politics of resignation or withdrawal, David Couzens Hoy suggests that

> *Gelassenheit* should not be interpreted as ‘withdrawal’ so much as ‘letting be’. ‘Withdrawal’ is still too voluntaristic, as if we could really escape our social and historical situation. ‘Letting be’ means not trying to control everything, but it is not simply an inner attitude. ‘Letting be’ is something that has to be practiced over and over, and is thus still in active relation to the affairs of the world.[7]

In the context of criticism, letting be may imply relinquishing our identification with specific intellectual positions. In a society that values action, control and resistance, it is easy to overlook the intrinsic value of surrender. Perhaps an adequate response to the fashionable politics of resistance would be a non-strategic and total surrender of our mental content. But if all criticism generates resistance, as suggested earlier, where can we find a space for genuine surrender within the realm of academia? Maybe the answer lies beyond the ‘choric elegy’ of criticism (and so beyond the academic institution itself). For, as the Daoist sage Zhuangzi pointed out,

> The purpose of words is to convey ideas.
> When the ideas are grasped, the words are forgotten.
> Where can I find a man who has forgotten words?
> He is the one I would like to talk to.[8]

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[7] David Couzens Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 176. *Gelassenheit*, Žižek argues, is an attitude of ‘withdrawing from engagement, from “public” circulation, silently laying the ground for the possible arrival of gods’ (Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 284). Žižek is here referring to Heidegger’s infamous statement that ‘only a god can save us’ (Martin Heidegger, ‘Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten’, *Der Spiegel* 30 (1976), 193-219). For a first-hand account of *Gelassenheit*, see Martin Heidegger, ‘Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking’, in *Discourse on Thinking*, translated from the German by John Anderson and Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1996).

[8] Thomas Merton, ‘Means and Ends’, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2004),

> But nature does not change. Only we change. All our theories are just words and our words are not so different from the songs of the birds and the cries of the animals—except we make the mistake of thinking that our words contain the truth. But look! The first stars are out. Come. You must be hungry. This philosophizing is very tiring. I think we should stick to farming! Let us go and eat![1]

[1] Jonathan Reggio, *One Day the Shadow Passed* (London: Hay House, 2012), p. 186.

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